

Background material for ECNAIS seminar in Prague, 23-25/11/2017
prepared by selected ECNAIS member states (Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Finland, the Netherlands, Portugal,
Greece)

Theme: Inclusion in education

Greece

1. Background of the educational system – main facts which affect specific form and structure of the education system, local accessibility of education, structure of the founders of schools etc.

Greece has a population of 11.8 million, linguistically homogeneous, speaking Modern Greek. Minorities, mostly muslim, comprise less than 5%. The prevailing religion is Greek Orthodox Christian. Most Greeks are believers but not fanatically so. They see religion as part of their tradition. The country is in a deep economic crisis and unemployment rate stands at 23%. The share of GDP expenditure in education stands at around 4%, which is one of the lowest figures in the EU.

The education system is highly centralised. The ministry of Education controls almost everything, from the curriculum to the placement of the teachers.

Education is compulsory from the age of 5 (soon to become 4) to the age of 15.

5-6 Kindergarten

6-12 Primary school

12-15 Junior Highschool (Gymnasio)

15-18 Senior Highschool (Lykeio) is not compulsory but almost 90% of students complete it.

93-94% of the students attend public schools, with only 6-7% attending private schools.

2. Definition of the legal term “pupil with special educational needs” – do you have a legal definition? Which one? Does it include also gifted

There is legislative provision for pupils with special needs and the term covers broadly kids with mobility issues (disabled) as well as kids who are dyslexic, suffer from Asperger syndrom, ADD or ADHD, have low IQ etc.

There is no legislative provision for gifted or charismatic kids.

Under the legislative provision, kids with special needs, depending on the gravity of their issues are dealt with in “Special Schools” or in normal schools, initially in special classes or with the help of a second teacher in the normal classroom.

Private schools are obliged to accept such students, without any financial support from the State.

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| <i>and extremely gifted pupils?</i> | Private Special Schools are not allowed under the law. |
| 3. Basic principles and rules on which the education of pupils with special educational needs is built in your country – right to education, rights in education, structure and conditions of “support measures” provided to pupils with special educational needs, aspect of “best interests” of the pupil etc. | <p>Under the Greek Constitution the State is obliged to provide free education for all.</p> <p>All kids residing in Greece, irrespective of their nationality, sex, religion, ethnic origin or special education needs are entitled to have access to education and to schools.</p> <p>All private school buildings are by law obliged to satisfy the access criteria for disabled people, ramps, elevators, special WC etc. Most public-school buildings however, fail to satisfy such criteria.</p> <p>Specialised teachers and specialised teaching materials are provided for students with special needs to public schools. However, these are not available to all public schools and as a result, students with special needs may have to attend a public school quite afar from their residence. Transportation for such students although as stipulated by law must be provided by the State is not always available and certainly not from the beginning of the school year to its end.</p> <p>According to the law, students with special needs (e.g. dyslexic), provided they are so certified, can opt to be examined orally and thus avoid written tests, throughout their schooling. Also, students who score very low in Whisk test, are entitled to be evaluated by their schools leniently, in order to be able to complete compulsory education.</p> |
| 4. Special schools – their existence, target groups, conditions for admission, founders; if special schools do not exist - a description of the education system for pupils with the most severe forms of handicaps | <p>As mentioned earlier special public schools exist for those students with the most severe forms of handicaps, physical or mental, catering for all school ages.</p> <p>No such private schools are allowed under the law.</p> |
| 5. Financing of the system of education of pupils with special educational needs - how the system takes financially into consideration a pupil with special educational needs and his demands, both in a mainstream school and in | <p>Students with special needs are financially covered by the State in public schools. However due to the economic crisis and the austerity measures adopted, the budget for such students has also suffered cuts and as a result, many of them face reduced number of therapies.</p> |

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| <i>a special school</i> | |
| 6. The legal role of parents in educating their children with special educational needs - How is the parent's right to choose a child's educational path implemented? What are possible solutions in case of conflict of parental and professional opinion in a concrete situation? | <p>All students in Greece are by law obliged to complete compulsory schooling. The parents of a student who fails to enrol in a school during the compulsory education years, face criminal proceedings.</p> <p>Parents do not have the right to choose a public school. Their kid must attend the public school designated by the education authorities. Parents can only choose a private school. However as "special" private schools are not allowed, A student suffering from severe handicaps may only attend the special public school designated by the education authorities. The parents have no option.</p> <p>Also, as is the case for students without special needs, parents of students with special needs attending public schools, have no say in the education their children receive. They are obliged to accept the education, the curriculum etc as these are formulated by the ministry of education and the education authorities.</p> |
| 7. Role of non-public schools in education of pupils with special educational needs | <p>All non-public schools in Greece are legally considered as private schools. Private schools are obliged to have buildings providing access to handicapped students and are also obliged to enrol such students. However, they are not entitled to any financial assistance by the State.</p> <p>Special Private schools are not allowed.</p> |
| 8. Current issues and discussions you are facing in this area in your country | <p>The divide between students with special needs attending normal public schools and those with severe handicaps, who must attend special public schools, is not clear and this often leads to disputes. Also the divide between students with special needs who attend public schools and require the presence of a second teacher in the classroom and those that do not is not very distinct and this also leads to dispute.</p> |
| 9. Topics and themes you suggest to discuss at a Ecnais Seminar in Prague, November 2017 | <p>The role of school autonomy in dealing with the issues facing students with special needs.</p> <p>The parental right of school choice and its specific role in the case of students with special needs.</p> |
| 10. Contact person for further information | <p>Georgios Linardatos Hellenic Association of Independent Schools. e-mail: gl@ssal.gr</p> |

Comments of preparatory team and answers on supplementary questions

1. The absence of the right of parental choice of concrete public school (both normal and “special”) the child will be attended:

This aspect is quite unusual in comparison of ARTICLE 2 of the Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights („*Right to education: No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.*“).

We appreciate further information about the process of determining the school to be attended by a child by the school authorities (the definition of compulsory school districts by residence, the possibility of appeal against such a decision, the risk of creating a school "ghettos"), the process of identifying a concrete school for a child with special educational needs - whether a normal school, a special class at a normal school or a special school, the necessary professional expressions, the assessment of the child's best interest etc.

In Greece, a parent cannot choose a public school. His child must attend the specific public school designated by the Ministry to serve his area of residence. The same stands true for special schools and for kids with special needs. A parent cannot appeal such a decision. The decision of whether a child with special needs will attend a normal school with parallel support or a normal school with special classes or a special school is taken by a State Psycho-Diagnostic Centre. Their decision is final. The location of the designated Special school and its distance from the child’s residence varies from nearby to quite far away. Sometimes children have to travel by bus an hour and a half to reach their schools. Transportation is provided by the State, but funds are not always available in time and once they are available a public tender must be proclaimed in order to choose the transportation company. All this takes time and usually means that transportation is not always available at the beginning of the school year but months later.

2. Unclear rules regarding the organizational way of educating children with special educational needs - a regular school with support measures, a special class, a special school:

It is also clear from the background material that not every regular school is really prepared (both materially and personally) educate pupils with special educational needs (various types). Is there any standard (material or personal) all public schools must fulfil or it depends on schools themselves (or Ministry of education as a central authority), which school will be prepared for educating concrete type of handicapped children (besides “healthy” ones).

It depends on when the public school was built. Older schools do not have the necessary facilities and materials, newer schools usually have them but they are not always well maintained and often are not functional. A couple of years ago my school acted as sponsor to a special public school to re-equip them with necessary equipment.

3. Position of private schools in educating of pupils with special educational needs

Private special schools are not allowed. Regular private schools are obliged to admit all children with special educational needs. Greek private schools are very demanding in terms of pupil’s performance. Pupils with what special educational needs are actually educated in private schools (whether dominantly pupils with physical disabilities, but with normal intellect or whether they also educate pupils with serious behavioural and learning disorders, autism, mental constraints etc.)?

Private schools tend to pupils with physical disabilities as well as behavioural or learning disorders, albeit they try to avoid severe cases.