

SPECIAL SCHOOLS REFORM



Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

Department Student Services

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Foreword

The education system in Malta has for many years given special focus to students with a disability. Educational programmes have developed so as to ensure that each and every student attending a school is provided with opportunities and challenges that stimulate the development of their potential.

In 1974, **The Education Act** made specific reference to the education of students of compulsory school age “with some mental, emotional or physical handicap”. It stipulated that these students should be registered and should attend a special school as the Minister of Education may direct. The past 35 years have seen major advancement in this area of education. Students with Individual Educational Needs (IEN) have been supported in five special schools, namely Guardian Angel School, Dun Manual Attard School, San Miguel School and Helen Keller School in Malta and Sannat Special Unit in Gozo.

In 1995 an Inclusion policy was introduced in mainstream state schools. This saw an increase in students with IEN attending mainstream schools with their peers and with the support of a facilitator (Learning Support Assistant - LSA). A consequence of this was a decrease in the number of students attending special schools. This brought about various debates and arguments on the role and use of special schools.

In 2005 the **Inclusive and Special Education Review** appraised the situation in special schools and in line with the **Salamanca Statement** (1994) recommended that these schools should be restructured and developed into Resource Centres.

The reform being proposed in this document is our response to the recommendations made by the **Inclusive and Special Education Review** (2005). This reform suggests a shift from the present scenario. For example, Students who attend a special school remain in the same school right through their school life, they will now due to the reform, be able to experience the different phases of school life as their peers do in mainstream education.

The reform also aims at providing quality education for all students with IEN, whether they attend Resource Centres or mainstream schools. The resources provided at the centres together with the expertise of the personnel working in these centres, will be made available to offer the necessary support to students, parents, school administrators, teachers and LSAs working with students with IEN and who attend mainstream schools.

This reform proposal is yet another important loop in the chain of reforms leading to an improved quality education for all children. The emphasis is to create a further level playing field between mainstream schools and Resource Centres by having the same transition structures, by putting particular emphasis on curricular development and implementation, as well as, better quality services for students.

It is in this way that the Directorate for Educational Services can ensure that each and every student is provided with an opportunity for learning that opens up a future of possibilities.

Micheline Sciberras

Director General

Directorate for Educational Services



1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and the foundation for a more just society. Inclusive Education offers the means by which education for All can be achieved. For a number of years, the Ministry of Education has been carrying out an inclusive education programme to ensure equitable access for all and to welcome diversity amongst all learners.

1.1 Legislation and Documents

Inclusive Education is an evolving concept and the reform that is being proposed to transform special schools into resource centres is but the next step in a series of decisions taken and commitments made both at national and international levels. These decisions and commitments are to be found in the following documents:

- i. Salamanca Statement (1994)
- ii. Creating Inclusive Schools (2002)
- iii. For All Children to Succeed (2005)
- iv. Inclusive and Special Education Review (2005)
- v. Education Act (as amended in 2006)

i. The **Salamanca Statement** (1994) of which Malta is a signatory, amongst other things outlines the changing role of special schools. Such schools are seen as a:

“Valuable resource for the development of inclusive schools... Special schools can also serve as training and resource centres for staff in regular schools...special schools or units within inclusive schools may continue to provide the most suitable education for the relatively small number of children with disabilities who cannot be adequately served in regular classrooms or schools.” (p.12)

ii. The document **Creating Inclusive Schools** – Guidelines for the Implementation of the National Curriculum Policy on Inclusive Education (2002) suggests that:

“The existing special schools can form a valuable and integral part of the inclusive system by assuming a more supportive role. They should therefore be developed into centres of human and material resources, where professional advice could be sought.”(p.7)

iii. **For All Children to Succeed** (2005) highlights how special schools will be incorporated within a school network.

“These schools will be expected to offer a two-fold service. The first will be to offer quality education provision to students with a disability...The second function of the school will be to offer select services to students with a disability but who are in the mainstream. In this way, the special schools as we know them today will develop into resource centres as well as service providers” (p.60)

iv. **The Inclusive and Special Education Review** (2005) indicates that:

“...the existing set up of special schools...should be reconstructed to develop ...into resource centres.” (p. 75)

v. **The Education Act** (as amended in 2006) states in Article 45 that:

“It shall be the duty of the State to provide resource centres, whose specialised role will include provision for children with Individual Educational Needs who would benefit more from being in such centres than in mainstream schools, for such time as may be appropriate depending on their needs.”

Based on recommendations and commitments mentioned, the aim to transform special schools to resource centres is:

- a. to provide quality education, with better access to the National Curriculum to all students;
- b. to offer specialised services to students in mainstream schools;
- c. to offer services, support and training to staff in an inclusive mainstream setting;
- d. to act as catalysts in the introduction of innovative approaches to the education of students with Individual Educational Needs.

1.2 Background Information

Since 1989, the Ministry of Education has been carrying out an intensive programme for the promotion of inclusive education. Since then, significant landmark achievements have been made.

The results of this paradigm shift can, amongst other things, be seen through:

- a. the right of parents to decide which school their child attends;
- b. a substantial reduction in the number of students with Individual Educational Needs attending special schools;
- c. an increase in the number of students with Individual Educational Needs attending mainstream schools.

To support the above, a number of initiatives were undertaken and amongst which one can mention the following:

1. The setting up of a Statementing Moderating Panel and Appeals Board which are composed of professionals from different fields. Together with parents/guardians and/or student/parent advocates and other professionals carry out, in depth evaluations of issues raised by written assessments relating to the individual needs of those students who are referred to the panel.
2. The provision of various support services to facilitate access according to the statement of needs, which include:
 - i. peripatetic teachers for hearing impaired and visually impaired;
 - ii. early intervention teachers;
 - iii. learning support assistants (LSAs) to support students in mainstream schools;
 - iv. psycho-social services;
 - v. autistic spectrum support team;
 - vi. access to communication and technology unit;
 - vii. sign language interpreters;
 - viii. the setting up of the Student Services Department which also saw the introduction of new posts such as service managers with specific tasks for inclusive and special education, inclusion co-ordinators (INCOs) to work in collaboration with schools and other related professionals to work within the psycho-social services sector.
3. The introduction and implementation of Individual Educational Plan (IEP) for students with a statement of needs.

4. The setting up of various courses at diploma and certificate levels specifically for learning support assistants.
5. The organisation of various in-service courses and seminars for the school senior management teams, teachers and learning support assistants.
6. The publication of syllabus supplements to guide teachers and learning support assistants so as to ensure curricular access to all students.
7. The publication of a number of policy documents and legislative amendments to the Education Act, all aimed at making schools more inclusive.

1.3 Student Placement

Students attending special schools

As previously stated all these initiatives have resulted in a considerable reduction in the number of students attending special schools. The ages of the students attending these schools span between the ages of 4 and 22 years. However it has to be pointed out that the number of new entrants into these schools at primary level has diminished considerably as most students with individual needs are attending mainstream schools. There are 16 students between 4 years and 10 years of age attending in all four special schools.

The number of entrants increases at secondary level. In all there are 78 students who are in the 11 to 15 year old cohort.

The majority of students (100) fall within the post secondary cohort that is 16years and over.

Students attending mainstream schools

Since there was a decrease in students, between the ages of 4 and 16 years, attending special schools, a corresponding increase of those attending mainstream schools was registered. Data collected in October 2008 shows that the number of students with a statement attending mainstream state schools stood at 1,588. This does not imply that all of these students would have attended special schools had there not been an Inclusion Policy in place.

The Education Act (2007) states that:

“A minor shall be deemed to have special needs when that minor has special difficulties of a physical, sensory, intellectual or psychological nature.”

By and large one may say that students with a statement of needs experience difficulties that can be classified under the following seven broad categories:

- a. Intellectual disability
- b. Specific learning difficulties
- c. Emotional and behavioural difficulties
- d. Communication difficulties
- e. Sensory difficulties
- f. Physical disability
- g. Multiple disabilities

Some students with a statement of needs who attend mainstream schools may require services that can and are being offered in special schools. Such services include the use of the hydrotherapy pool, multi sensory rooms and specialized software and equipment such as communication aids that are provided by the special schools.

Since there was a decrease in students, between the ages of 4 and 16 years, attending special schools, a corresponding increase of those attending mainstream schools was registered.



2. The Special Schools

Although students with Individual Educational Needs are generally included within the mainstream education system rather than in special schools, a number of special schools still function and are presently catering for a cohort that goes beyond the school compulsory age of 16 years.

These schools cater for students who would benefit more from being in such schools. It is estimated that 0.36% of the total student population attends special schools. The Special Education Section within the Student Services Department supports special schools to provide educational and professional services to students attending these schools. The following is a description of the four Special Schools.

2.1 San Miguel School

The school population for 2008/09 at San Miguel stands at 44 full time students between the ages of 4 and 22 years. This school caters for the majority of students of primary school age who attend special schools. Students who attend San Miguel School have profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD). In addition, this school also offers services to a number of students who attend mainstream schools. There may be other students who attend mainstream schools who would benefit from services provided at this school.

2.2 Helen Keller School

Helen Keller School was set up to cater for students with visual and hearing impairment. Due to the Inclusion Policy that has been practiced along these past years such students are attending mainstream schools. Students who have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) as well as multi-sensory impairment still attend this school. The school population for scholastic year 2008/09 stands at 20 students.

...each of the four schools is today catering for students of age groups spanning from primary to secondary to post secondary age cohorts and also across Attainment Level 1 to Level Descriptor 1.

This means that presently San Miguel and Helen Keller Schools are both supporting students with profound and multiple learning difficulties at primary, secondary and post secondary levels.

2.3 Guardian Angel School

The school population at Guardian Angel for scholastic year 2008/09 stands at 83. The age cohort for this school is between 9 and 22 years of age. Students attending this school have complex communication needs and/or intellectual impairment. Some others have multiple disabilities.

2.4 Dun Manwel Attard School

The school population at Dun Manwel Attard School for scholastic year 2008/09 stands at 51. Students attending Dun Manuel Attard School have complex communication needs and/or intellectual impairment.

This means that students attending Guardian Angel and Dun Manwel Attard Schools have the same needs and are predominantly of the same age cohort.

2.5 Attainment Levels of students in Special Schools

Students who attend Special Schools have attainment levels which are below the level descriptor 1 of the National Curriculum Framework. The Attainment Level Descriptors, published in the syllabus supplements in November 2007, provide levels of attainment for students who have Individual Educational Needs and who are still working towards the Level

1 of the National Curriculum Framework. This set of 8 attainment levels (Attainment Level 1 to Attainment Level 8) precede the eight Level Descriptors of the National Curriculum Framework and are best considered as one continuum of attainment.

Assessment of students is based on the PACE 2. This is an assessment tool for students with Individual Educational Needs developed by EQUALS¹ to establish levels of attainment for each student in Literacy, Numeracy, Science, Personal and Social Development and their corresponding strands. These assessments are monitored by the University of Durham.

Assessment Results indicate that, students who have profound and multiple learning difficulties and severe multiple disabilities attain mostly between Attainment Level 1 and Attainment Level 4 (A1 – A4). On the other hand students who have complex communication difficulties and/or intellectual impairment have a much more varied attainment level which ranges across the whole spectrum of attainment. This also varies amongst the different subjects assessed.

From the above information one realises that each of the four schools is today catering for students of age groups spanning from primary to secondary to post secondary age cohorts and also across Attainment Level 1 to Level Descriptor 1.

This structure is presenting a number of shortcomings that need to be addressed:

- a. Special schools have to cater for different levels of educational experiences that is from primary, to secondary, to young adult education which puts a strain on specialization in the different phases of the curriculum;
- b. Current resources are being replicated. All four schools have to invest in resources that are appropriate for primary level, secondary level and young adult level;
- c. Schools are failing to provide the experience of different phases in a student's life that is transition from primary to secondary and from secondary to young adult education. Students are staying on in the same schools right through their educational experience;
- d. There are insufficient opportunities for students, teachers and other support staff to liaise with mainstream schools in order to share good practices and experiences;
- e. At present special schools are retaining students who are beyond the age of 19 years who should be attending Day Centres. In fact there are 48 students (25% of all students in special schools) over the age of 19 who still attend special schools.


¹ EQUALS is a non profit organisation providing curricular guidelines and resources to students who attain below the level descriptor 1 of the UK National Curriculum.

2.6 Educational and Human Resources

Amongst the four special schools, resources or services available include:

- hydrotherapy pool
- hydrotherapy baths
- multi sensory rooms
- opti-music
- specialised software and hardware
- communication aides
- gyms
- ICT room
- specialised seating system for students with physical disabilities
- nursing service
- physiotherapy equipment
- speech and language clinics
- sensory integration aids
- standing frames
- showering chairs
- gait trainers, hoists and slings for lifting and handling
- classrooms with adjoining toileting facilities
- transport facilities and tail lift vans

All members of the support staff in the four special schools have undergone some form of special training.



Teaching staff at the four special schools are all qualified teachers and some of them even have additional qualifications.

All four schools have a Head of School, teachers and other support staff. Teaching staff at the four special schools are all qualified teachers and some of them even have additional qualifications.

All members of the support staff in the four special schools have undergone some form of special training. Most of the kindergarten assistants and the supply learning support assistants in special schools completed a ten week course in *Supporting Students with Individual Educational Needs* organised by the Student Services Department. Others have a Diploma in Facilitating Inclusive Education.

Special Schools have other personnel who complement the work done at the schools. These include nurses, nursing aides and assistant care workers. Other staff members include clerks, cleaners, handymen, watchmen, gardeners and drivers.

San Miguel School and Helen Keller School are also provided with physiotherapy sessions by qualified physiotherapists by virtue of an agreement with the Parliamentary Secretariat for Health. All four schools are also provided with speech and language therapy by virtue of the same agreement.



3. The Proposal

3.1 The Education Resource Centres

The Student Services Department is proposing to re-organise the four special schools to set up a:

- **Primary Education Resource Centre** – in lieu of San Miguel School;
- **Secondary Education Resource Centre** – in lieu of Guardian Angel School;
- **Secondary/Young Adult Education Resource Centre** – in lieu of Helen Keller School;
- **Young Adult Education Resource Centre** – in lieu of Dun Manwel Attard School.

Each centre will be incorporated within a College and its operations will be serviced by the College structure. However, it will be the role of the Primary and Secondary Resource Education Centres to offer their specialised services to students in mainstream schools in all Colleges.

In turn the Young Adult Education Resource Centre will collaborate with other young adult educational institutions. This will ensure that these centres will not be segregated from mainstream educational institutions.

Networking amongst the four centres, as well as with all mainstream schools and other institutions and agencies will be enhanced as it is deemed of utmost importance to the students.

3.2 Method of Referrals

There should be a formal referral for students to start attending in any one of these Education Resource Centres.

It is being recommended that a team of professionals (henceforth the Team), is set up in order to evaluate the referrals and advise parents which educational institution is best suited for the particular student with a statement of needs. This applies to:

- referrals for students to attend Education Resource Centres from mainstream schools;
- referrals for students who are attending an Education Resource Centre and are being referred to attend mainstream schools;
- referrals for students to move from one Education Resource Centre to another if this goes against the natural progression as stated in this policy;
- Referrals for students for direct admission at pre school age.

3.3 Rationale

The rationale behind this reform is that:

- Every student should receive quality education whether they are in mainstream schools or education resource centres and irrespective of the levels they are able to attain;
- Every student should have access to an education that responds to the right to have access to the National Curriculum Framework;
- Every student should have access to an education that responds to their individual educational, vocational, social and moral needs;
- Students with Individual Educational Needs who are in mainstream schools can make use of resources in Education Resources Centres if they so require. Thus a continuous and inclusive set of services can be provided according to the needs of all students;
- Students will have the opportunity to experience the different phases in a student's life that is from primary to secondary, from secondary to young adulthood, and eventually to further education, employment or day centres whichever is best suited for the student;
- Teachers and support staff with specialist knowledge will be able to support and collaborate with their colleagues in mainstream schools;
- Good practices, innovative approaches to teaching, methods of teaching and teaching aids appropriate for students with Individual Educational Needs are developed and disseminated amongst all stake holders both in resource centres and mainstream schools.

Every student should receive quality education whether they are in mainstream schools or education resource centres and irrespective of the levels they are able to attain.

3.4 Primary Education Resource Centre (in lieu of San Miguel School)

The Primary Education Resource Centre should be accessible to students with a statement of needs and their placement at this centre is recommended by the Team.

It will cater for students between the ages of 3 and 11 years. In the case of students with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), the age limit is extended by two years. At age 13, these students will move to the Secondary/Young Adult Education Resource Centre. This will facilitate transition for such students as only one move is made.

The Primary Education Resource Centre will also provide services to students with a statement of needs who attend mainstream schools but at the same time require specialised services that are only found in resource centres.

Progression from the Primary Education Resource Centre to any other educational institution has to be based on a detailed individual transition plan and that such a move is according to natural progression or is recommended by the Team.

The role of the Primary Education Resource Centre is to:

- Provide quality education responding to the individual needs of the students so that all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential;
- Ensure access to the National Curriculum Framework building on the strengths and the individual needs of the students;
- Stimulate students to enjoy their lessons and develop a healthy sense of curiosity of the world around them;
- Set suitable learning challenges to all students thus ensuring equal opportunities for all to succeed;
- Offer a supportive setting through which students develop physical, cognitive, communication, emotional and behavioural skills in order to maximise their knowledge and understanding;
- Provide specialised educational services and programmes such as hydrotherapy pool, opti-music and multi-sensory room;
- Provide students with opportunities to start to make informed choices with the support of others;
- Provide services to students with a statement of needs who attend mainstream schools and other Education Resource Centres;
- Collaborate with mainstream schools in order to share good practices and to disseminate information;
- Collaborate with parents/guardians in the best interest of the student;
- Strike partnerships with voluntary organisations to ensure a seamless holistic approach in the provision of services to students.

3.5 Secondary Education Resource Centre (in lieu of Guardian Angel School)

The Secondary Education Resource Centre should be accessible to students with a statement of needs and their placement at this centre is as recommended by the Team. It will cater for students between the ages of 11 and 16 years.

The Secondary Education Resource Centre will also provide services to students with a statement of needs who attend mainstream schools but at the same time require specialised services that are only found in resource centres.

Progression from the Secondary Education Resource Centre to any other educational institution has to be based on a detailed individual transition plan and that such a move is according to natural progression or is recommended by the Team.

The role of the Secondary Education Resource Centre will be the same as the Primary Education Resource centre and will also:

- Set suitable learning challenges to all students ensuring a wider access to a range of subjects and experiences usually associated with secondary education;
- Offer a supportive setting through which students continue to develop physical, cognitive, communication, emotional and behavioural skills in order to maximise their knowledge and understanding;
- Provide specialised educational services and programmes such as behaviour management programmes;
- Support students with a statement of needs who attend mainstream schools and other Resource Centres;
- Collaborate with other Educational Institutions and voluntary organisations for progression to further education and vocational training;
- Work with parents/guardians in the best interest of the student;

3.6 Secondary/Young Adult Education Resource Centre (in lieu of Helen Keller School)

Entry into the Secondary/Young Adult Education Resource Centre should be accessible to students with profound and multiple learning difficulties who followed their educational experience in the primary education resource centre or in mainstream schools after having

been recommended by the Team. It will cater for students aged between 13 – 22 years of age, who demonstrate constant dependence on others and who will eventually need lifelong support.

Progressing from this Education Resource Centre to the Day Centre will be based on a detailed Individual Transition Plan as agreed upon with all stakeholders.

The Secondary/Young Adult Education Resource Centre should aim to:

- Improve the quality of life and build on the strengths and interests of individual students;
- Provide quality education responding to the individual needs of the students so that All students have the opportunity to reach their full potential;
- Ensure access to the National Curriculum Framework, building on the students' skills, knowledge and understanding;
- Stimulate students to engage in lessons and become active participants in the learning process with adequate support;
- Set suitable learning challenges to all students ensuring a wider access to a range of subjects;
- Offer a supportive setting through which students continue to develop physical, cognitive, communication, emotional and behavioural skills in order to maximise their knowledge and understanding;
- Provide specialised educational services and programmes such as multi-sensory room, hydrotherapy bath;
- Provide real life experiences to support students and to facilitate their adolescent transition to adulthood;
- Empower students to make informed choices with the support of others;
- Work with parents/guardians in the best interest of the student.

The Secondary/Young Adult Education Resource Centre should provide quality education responding to the individual needs of the students so that All students have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

3.7 Young Adult Education Resource Centre (in lieu of Dun Manwel Attard School)

Entry into the Young Adult Education Centre should be accessible to students with a statement of needs who followed their compulsory educational experience in an education resource centre or in mainstream schools and who would be approved by the Team. The Young Adult Education Centre should continue to build on the experiences and achievements already gained by students at primary and secondary levels whether in mainstream or in Education Resource centres. It should also serve as a bridge and as a centre for transition, where necessary, so that students can move on to further educational institutions or vocational training.

The Young Adult Education Centre should aim to:

- Improve the quality of life and build on the strengths and interests of individual students;
- Offer a supportive setting through which students develop interpersonal and intrapersonal skills as well as social communication skills in order to maximise on their independence to become active members of society;
- Empower students to take responsibility for their own lives, make informed choices and take decisions either independently or by working with others;
- Provide real life experiences to support students and to facilitate their adolescent transition to adulthood;
- Develop curricular modules that address the vocational training aspect of education and which facilitate transition to further education, employment or Day Centres, whichever is in the best interest of the student;
- Work in collaboration with parents/guardians;
- Work in collaboration with other educational institutions such as MCAST and ITS, and other agencies such as ETC in order to enhance and further facilitate the students' transition to employment.

The Young Adult Education Centre should also serve as a bridge and as a centre for transition, where necessary, so that students can move on to further educational institutions or vocational training.

3.8 The Move

Presently there are 198 students with an age span between 4 years and 22 years. Due to the envisaged re-organisation some students will have to move from their present special school to a different resource centre.

It is of the utmost importance that every student who has to move from one centre to another has to have a detailed transition plan in place, after it would have been discussed with the student (where possible), parents, senior management teams, teachers, learning support assistants, other support workers and other professionals as deemed necessary.

Every consideration is being taken so that students will not have to change centres within two years from the first move. It would not be in the best interest of the students if this happens. Movement of students according to their age should be flexible for the first two years of implementation of this reform.²

This applies not only for movements between one resource centre and another but also any other movements from resource centres to Day Centres.

In recent years the age limit for students to remain in Special Schools has been raised from 19 years to 21/22 years before they move on to Day Centres. It is being recommended that until such a move is made, these students remain in the same educational institution that they currently attend. This applies even if the establishment takes on the role of a Primary Education Resource Centre. It would not be in the best interest of these students if they have to move more than once in a short span of time.

Students in all four schools who are 23 years of age or will be 23 years of age during the scholastic year will move to a Day Centre.

² E.g. Students at Helen Keller School who are 11/12 years of age and who are presenting with PMLD should start attending the Primary Education Resource Centre (PERC) as the reform envisages that students with PMLD should remain at the PERC till age 13. These students will then have to move again at age 13 to start attending the Secondary/Young Adult Education Centre. This would mean that the students would have to move twice from one centre to another in a span of two years from the first move. It would not be in the best interest of the students if such a move is made.



4. The Proposed Management Structure and Implementation Issues

The Director Student Services has overall responsibility for all four centres. There is a Service Manager and an Education Officer to oversee the implementation of the reform and the continuous progress of the four centres. All four centres will have a Head of Centre.

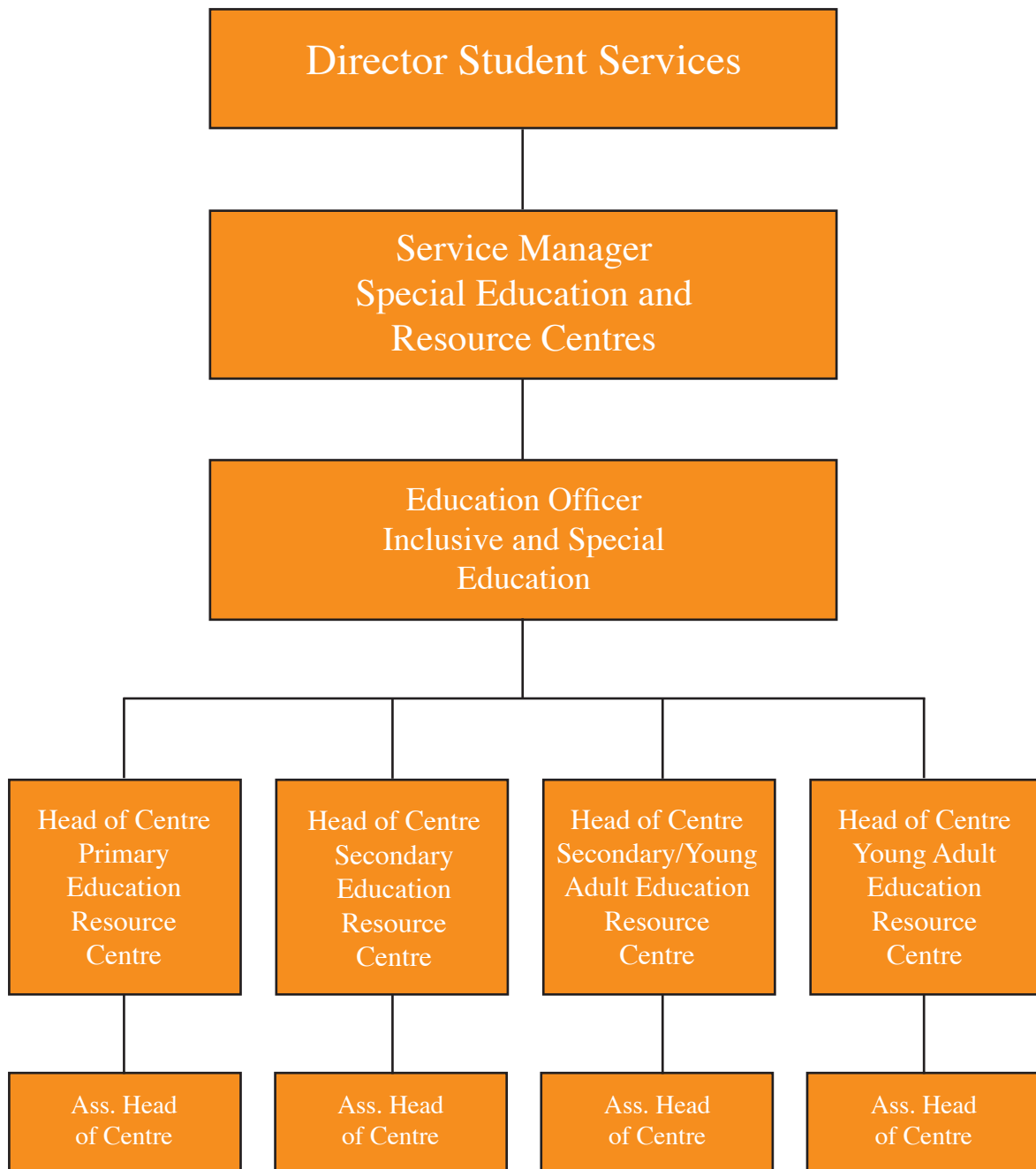
4.1 The Management Structure

Heads of the Primary and Secondary Resource Centres would be responsible for their own establishment. However they are to collaborate and offer support and services to students with a statement of needs who are attending mainstream schools. Heads of the other two centres will also be responsible for their own establishments. However, they are to collaborate with other adult educational institutions and agencies for possible transition of students into further vocational training, employment or Day Centres.

Each Head of Resource Centres will be supported by an Assistant Head, whose primary task would be to ensure implementation of the curriculum and to maintain standards. The Assistant Head will also coordinate with Inclusive Co-ordinators and/or Assistant Heads in Charge of Inclusion in primary and secondary schools so as to ensure that students with a statement of needs are given the services they require from these centres.

Heads of Centres are to collaborate and offer support and services to students with a statement of needs who are attending mainstream schools.

Diagram 1 presents the proposed management structure.



4.2 Human Resources

Due to the re-organisation of the four special schools, it is to be noted that two of the centres would decrease the number of students whereas two other centres would increase their student population.

All teaching and support staff should be composed of qualified personnel who have the appropriate professional training to work in the different Centres.

Staff working at these Centres should be able to:

1. perform their full duties according to the needs of the students;
2. make use of all resources available at the centre according to the Individual Educational Plan of each student;
3. accompany students to other establishments in order to be given a service or follow a programme as specified in the Individual Educational Plan.

Assistant Heads will be posted at each of the Education Resource Centres and the Young Adult Education Resource Centre as already agreed upon in the Government and the Malta Union of Teachers Agreement of July 2007.

Other new posts that have to be considered are that of a youth worker in order to support students at the Young Adult Education Resource Centre and resource workers for all centres in order to ensure that students are given the appropriate opportunities according to their needs as they move from childhood to adolescence into adulthood.

With regards to physiotherapy and speech and language therapy, Special Schools are being serviced through visiting professionals from the Health Division.

The Secondary/Young Adult Education Resource Centre and the Young Adult Education Centre will need the services of care workers and assistant care workers to support students.

All teaching and support staff should be composed of qualified personnel who have the appropriate professional training to work in the different Centres.

4.3 Further requirements

The Student Services Department together with the Foundation for Tomorrow Schools are to draw up a detailed schedule of works that will enhance the four Resource Centres to make them compatible with the needs that arise from the reform being proposed. Such works may include embellishment works, accessibility to wheelchair users etc.

4.4 Consultation Process

As part of the reform, there will be extensive consultations and information meetings with all stakeholders. It is recommended that consultations and information meetings are held with amongst others:

- Directors of Education and College Principals
- Heads of the four special schools
- Students attending special schools (where possible)
- Parents/Guardians and relatives of students attending special schools
- All staff at the four special schools
- All Trade Unions involved with the sector
- Officials representing the Ministry for Social Policy
- Officials representing the Parliamentary Secretariat for Health
- Opposition Representative
- Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni b'Dizabilta`
- Commissioner for Children
- Federation of Maltese Organisations Persons with Disability.
- Any other persons who show an interest in this reform

4.5 Time frame for Implementation

It is planned that this reform will start to be implemented during 2009 and 2010.

The consultation period will be given the greatest importance within the time frame as it is of the greatest importance that all stakeholders own this reform.

More than one action may be going on within each planned time frame.

5. Conclusion

On the basis of the changes being proposed, this reform aims at:

- Providing quality education for all;
- Raising standards of education and subsequent levels of achievement;
- Provide opportunities and a wider range of experiences for all students to learn and to achieve;
- Being consonant with other reforms that are being considered at present mainly **Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Malta** (2008) and **National Policy and Strategy for the attainment of Core Competences in Primary Education** (2009);
- Providing a support structure for Schools, teachers and support staff in mainstream education;
- Providing a flexible structure which is based on sound inclusive educational principles that will operate effectively and in accordance with statements;
- Re-enforcing commitments and recommendations that have been made these last years in the realm of Inclusive Education.

This reform proposal offers the opportunity to focus on the challenges that inclusion and special education pose. It also helps to take stock of the present situation and to look forward with renewed vigour on what the next steps should be.

Undoubtedly, considerable work has been done and much has been achieved in these past years in this sector. The reform to transform Special Schools into Resource Centres is part of this process which is in constant evolution that never ends, since the targets and objectives of quality education are always changing. We look forward to implement this reform, as we believe that this is the next step forward that needs to be made to continue to ensure quality education for all, especially for students with individual educational needs attending resource centres or mainstream schools.

We acknowledge that this reform will present us with a number of challenges. We are ready to face them, especially if all stakeholders offer their commitment. This reform needs the involvement of all in order for it to be a success. It is hoped that the necessary support from all will be harnessed so that, what up to today, is only a written proposal, will translate itself into a tangible positive experience for all students with individual educational needs.

Let us work together to refine this reform proposal and let us work together, **even harder**, to make it happen.

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