

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR PUPILS WITH DISABILITIES

Public thematic report

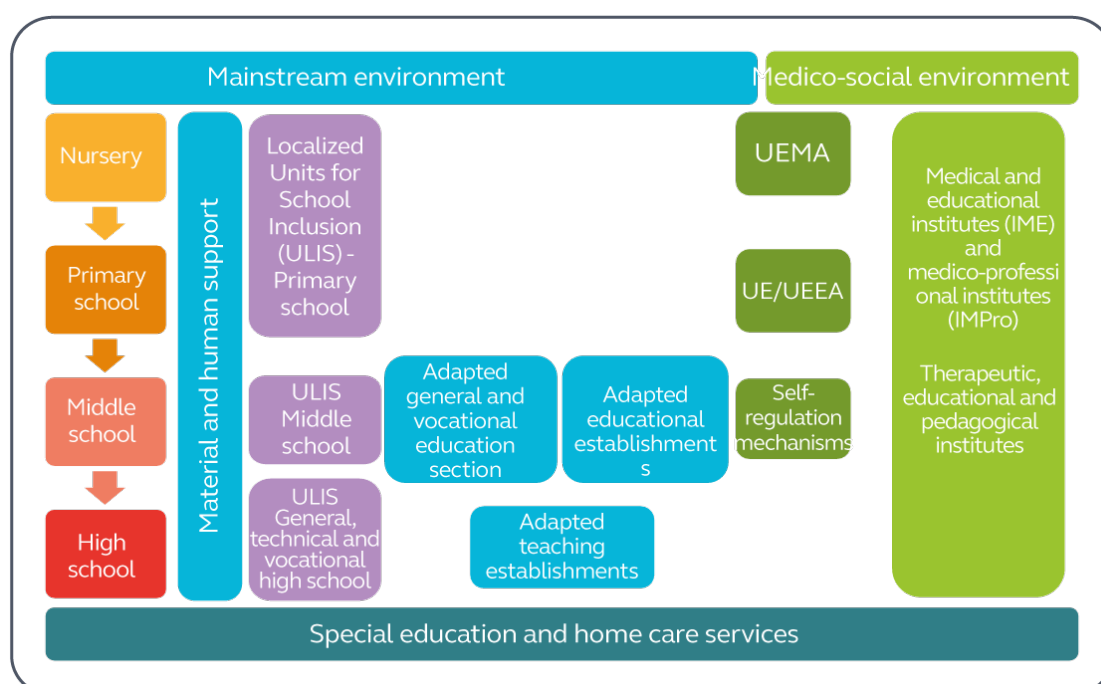
Public policy evaluation

September 2024

Summary report

Inclusive education is a principle that aims to ensure quality schooling for all pupils, from nursery school to high school, by taking into account their individual characteristics and special educational needs. Since the law of 11 February 2005 on equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship for people with disabilities, the enrolment of pupils with disabilities in mainstream education - i.e. in a school, middle school or high school - has been a principle of law in France.

The different types of schooling available



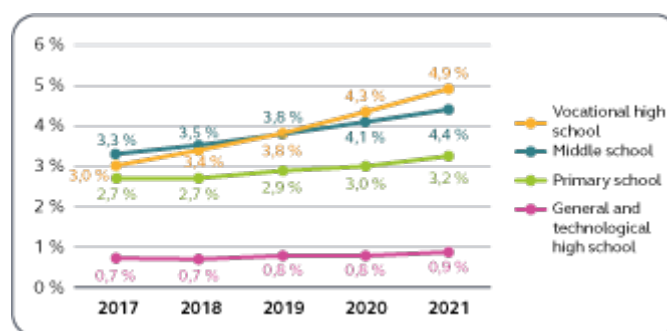
Source: Court of Accounts

UEMA: Nursery autism teaching unit

UE: Teaching unit – UEEA: Elementary autism teaching units

Nevertheless, the pathways followed by pupils and their families are not without their complexities: information on solutions and pathways, smooth transitions between mainstream and medico-social environments, educational guidance or vocational integration, not to mention the issue of pupil well-being. Since this law came into force, the number of pupils with disabilities in schools has tripled: 155,361 pupils at the start of the 2006 school year and 436,085 in 2022.

Proportion of pupils with disabilities by level (%)



Source: Court of Accounts based on DGESCO data for public and private education

In quantitative terms, therefore, the success is undeniable. However, the Court has taken stock of the many difficulties that arise at the level of primary and secondary schools, by seeking to answer the following four evaluation questions:

Has the school system been transformed to meet the objective of inclusive education for pupils with disabilities?

Does the national policy on inclusive education make it possible to cover all the needs of pupils effectively and equitably?

Does the national policy on inclusive education enable pupils with disabilities and other pupils to succeed at school and achieve social and professional integration?

Can the French inclusive education system be considered efficient and effective?

While the answer to the first question is generally positive, this is not the case for the second. The third and fourth questions call for a more reserved response. The Court has reached a conclusion based on the following four strategic areas.

Improving the management, monitoring and evaluation of public policy

Despite the transformations it has brought about in the organisation of the school system, the policy for the education of pupils with disabilities has weaknesses in its implementation, as it depends on the coexistence of two sectors that do not coordinate and interact in a satisfactory manner: the education sector and the medico-social sector. Firstly, despite the agreements between the regional health agencies and the education authorities, difficulties remain in ensuring that pupils with disabilities are able to continue their education while taking account of their medico-social needs. Secondly, the departmental centres for persons with disabilities recommend placement in medico-social establishments, which are not always successful due to a lack of places or the choice of families. In such situations, schools and educational establishments, as a result of the obligation incumbent on the Ministry of Education to provide schooling, are required to take in pupils with disorders that educational staff feel incapable of dealing with.

Furthermore, the policy of educating pupils with disabilities suffers from a widespread lack of data to enable it to be evaluated on a documented basis. For example, there is a lack of comprehensive data on these pupils and no consolidated funding available to support them. To date, only the amount falling within the budgetary remit of the Ministry of Education is known (€3.7 billion in 2022), which includes remuneration of teaching and support staff as well as educational expenditure. It does not include the funding provided by local authorities on a compulsory or optional basis, which relates to the adaptation of primary schools, middle schools, and high schools, school transport for pupils with disabilities, digital equipment and extracurricular activities, depending on their respective areas of competence. The lack of

studies analysing how schooling for pupils with disabilities benefits them in terms of success at school and, more broadly, in education, and the impossibility of identifying the most effective and efficient pathways or mechanisms, should also be noted. As a result, it is scarcely possible to comment on the performance of the French model of inclusive education for pupils with disabilities, and even less so to compare it with those of other countries.

Improving the use of accessibility and accommodation tools

Two tools are used by schools to meet the needs of pupils with disabilities: accessibility and accommodation.

Accessibility means giving all young people access to expertise. This principle includes the right of a young person with a disability to enrol in the school closest to his or her home, the possibility of having physical access to adapted facilities and premises, and the implementation of measures designed to facilitate learning by means of adapted teaching methods and teaching aids.

The law makes local authorities responsible for the physical accessibility of school buildings and sports and cultural facilities, i.e. municipalities for schools, departments for middle schools and regions for high schools. The departments are also responsible for school transport for pupils with disabilities. The Court's assessment reveals a frequent lack of planning which, based on a shared assessment between the national education authorities and local authorities, would make it possible to identify the outstanding requirements in terms of building accessibility, as well as the need to fit out school areas with furniture adapted to pupils with disabilities.

For their part, teachers often feel unable to diversify their teaching activities due to a number of factors: too many pupils per class, which they feel limits the scope for individualised teaching, the lack of suitable teaching aids and the fact that it generally takes too long to obtain the necessary equipment.

Accommodation refers to the right of a person with a disability to benefit from any individual measure likely to guarantee equal rights and equal opportunities. Applied to inclusive education, and depending on the nature of the disability, this principle is reflected in the provision of individualised or shared support and in adjustments to pupil assessment tests and examinations.

The Court's assessment revealed a massive reliance on human support, as evidenced by the growing recruitment of support staff for pupils with disabilities. In terms of numbers, these staff are now the second most important job in national education (78,816 full-time equivalent staff in 2023), after teachers. There is an urgent need to review the current situation, which is characterised by a preponderant reliance on support to the detriment of accessibility measures, which are still insufficiently developed.

Improving the management of human resources dedicated to inclusive education

Those involved in the inclusive education of pupils with disabilities often feel ill at ease in their daily work. Teachers and support staff for pupils with disabilities feel that they are not sufficiently equipped or prepared, either in terms of initial or in-service training, to deal with situations which, in their view, sometimes go beyond their competences and their means of action. They would like to benefit from the advice and support of specialists, particularly from the medico-social and medical sectors, and would like to see more cross-disciplinary training designed to overcome the barriers between the different professions involved. They also feel that specialist teachers should be given greater recognition.

In addition, support staff for pupils with disabilities lack guidelines for clarifying their role vis-à-vis teachers and, more generally, for enhancing their recognition within the educational community: in addition to major recruitment problems and dissatisfaction among these staff with their working conditions, the use of individualised or pooled support is not governed by a set of guidelines that would guarantee the appropriateness of either approach. Similarly, the fact that the services of support staff for pupils with disabilities are dispersed between several schools shows the limits of the localised inclusive support centres that are the subject of frequent criticism.

Simplifying the pathway for pupils and their families

For pupils with disabilities who require medico-social support to complement their mainstream schooling, the current system suffers from compartmentalisation, even though the development of externalised units (medico-social units located in schools) presents a promising opportunity. It would appear essential to review the objectives and implementation methods for the schooling of pupils with disabilities, by establishing them within a more coherent framework between the educational and medico-social sectors, both of which should be considered as taking part in an inclusive educational approach taken as a whole.

In addition to the lack of coherence between the educational and medico-social sectors, there are a number of obstacles affecting the progress of pupils with disabilities within the school system. The families we met during our evaluation were almost unanimous in describing their children's schooling as an 'obstacle course'. For example, they are required to make repeated requests to the departmental centres for the disabled, even though their children's disability remains unchanged over the years.

In addition, until the *livret de parcours inclusif* (inclusive pathway booklet) becomes widely available, there is a lack of dialogue and monitoring tools to facilitate the pathway for pupils with disabilities throughout their school career. The same applies at the end of their schooling, when they go on to higher education and enter the world of work. At present, many pupils with disabilities suffer from a lack of continuity, leading to feelings of unease and uncertainty about their future.

School guidance procedures therefore need to be improved to provide better solutions for pupils with disabilities. The over-representation of these pupils in vocational high schools compared to other types of establishments should be investigated. The guidance of pupils with disabilities seems to be a major issue in terms of improving their subsequent progression into the world of work. Indeed, even if the trend is downwards over the years, the unemployment rate of people with disabilities on the labour market is still almost twice that of other workers (12 % compared with 7 % in 2022), which shows both the limitations of the French training system in giving all young people the same opportunities in terms of career development, and the obstacles that remain, particularly for apprenticeships.

Conclusion of the evaluation

The following table presents the response to each of the four evaluation questions. It summarises the main arguments on which the Court's assessment is based.

Summary of response to evaluation questions

Evaluation question	Short answer
Has the school system been transformed to meet the objective of inclusive education for pupils with disabilities?	<p>A positive response is warranted overall. The principle of inclusion has undeniably changed the organisation of the French school system, both in terms of institutional management and the professional practices of staff. However, these changes vary from one region to another and, in many cases, are incomplete or unfinished. Numerous weaknesses remain, first and foremost the discrepancy between the multitude of existing systems and resources and the perception of stakeholders.</p>
Does the national policy on inclusive education make it possible to cover all the needs of pupils with disabilities effectively and equitably?	<p>The overall response is negative.</p> <p>While much progress has been made in defining the needs of pupils with disabilities, the implementation of the recommendations made by the departmental centres for persons with disabilities is, from a quantitative point of view, inadequate. It is more difficult to assess the qualitative aspects (teaching facilities, building layout, transport or pupil care during lunch breaks). There are also regional differences in access to rights.</p>
Does the national policy on inclusive education enable pupils with disabilities and other pupils to succeed at school and achieve social and professional integration?	<p>The answer requires nuance in the absence of an adequate measure of educational success.</p> <p>Even if the life goals and school career are at the heart of public policy, there are potential disruptions at every stage of the journey. Pupils with disabilities perform less well and are more likely to take the vocational route, without it being possible to determine whether this is in line with their life goals.</p> <p>The well-being and interpersonal skills of pupils with disabilities are also difficult to assess.</p>
Can the French inclusive education system be considered efficient and effective?	<p>The response is reserved. The lack of statistical and financial data makes it impossible to assess the performance of the policy. The predominant reliance on support staff has resulted in massive and increasing expenditure, the efficiency and relevance of which are open to question. France is in an intermediate position compared to other countries, with the coexistence of educational and medico-social sectors that lack coherence between them.</p>

Source: Court of Accounts

Recommendations

Improving the management, monitoring and evaluation of public policy

3. Develop cooperation between schools, the medico-social sector and the private sector by developing a 'common working culture', a legal framework and cross-disciplinary training (*ministry of national education and youth, ministry of labour, health and solidarity*).
9. Implement a harmonised reference framework concerning the prescriptions of the departmental centres for persons with disabilities (MDPH), particularly in terms of individualised and shared human support staff for pupils with disabilities (*departments, national solidarity fund for autonomy, ministry of national education and youth*).
10. Establish an exhaustive database for statistical purposes (including medico-social data via the widespread use of the national pupil identifier) to monitor the education and professional integration of all pupils with disabilities (*ministry of national education and youth, ministry of labour, health and solidarity*).

Improving the use of accessibility and accommodation tools

7. Improve procedures for acquiring teaching materials and teaching aids adapted to pupils with disabilities, and provide training for educational staff (*ministry of national education and youth, municipalities, departments, regions*).
8. Compile an inventory of the needs still to be covered in terms of accessibility to school buildings and spaces and adaptation of the educational environment, and implement a planning process in consultation with local authorities (*ministry of national education and youth, municipalities, departments, regions*).

Improving the management of human resources dedicated to inclusive education

4. Strengthen initial and in-service training for educational staff, as well as cross-sector training modules (particularly between support staff and teachers) (*ministry of national education and youth*).
5. Enhance the attractiveness of teacher certification (CAPPEI) in order to improve coverage of needs in terms of the assignment of specialist teachers (*ministry of national education and youth*).
6. In order to take account of the implications of the budgetary integration of support staff for pupils with disabilities into the Ministry's workforce, a strengthened human resources management framework for these staff should be put in place (*ministry of national education and youth*).

Simplifying the pathway for pupils and their families

1. In order to secure and ensure equal monitoring of the progress of pupils with disabilities, ensure that the personalised schooling plan is systematically drawn up and sent to the family and the head of the school (*national solidarity fund for autonomy, departments*).
2. Ensure that the *livret de parcours inclusif* (inclusive pathway booklet) is made fully available throughout the country and that it is operational (access rights for professionals and families, interoperability with MDPH data, etc.) by the start of the 2025 school year at the latest (*ministry of national education and youth, national solidarity fund for autonomy*).