

ST. VINCENT & THE GRENADINES

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St. Vincent and Grenadines Country Report

Ms. Laura Browne, Permanent Secretary

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (GoSVG) is a signatory to initiatives for promoting equity and equality in education.

These include:

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) – which emphasizes that basic right of every child, is an equal opportunity to primary education.
- The Education for All Dakar Framework for Action 2000 which states that the schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions.

The promotion of policies to achieve equality of educational opportunities has been one of the most consistent objectives since the achievement of Independence in 1979.

The Education Policy of 1995 articulates the rationale and philosophical basis of educational development in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The Government's philosophy of education is based on the beliefs that all children have the right to education and the ability to learn.

The guiding principles of the Government's philosophy states that:-

- Education is a fundamental human right.
- All forms of education should be developed to meet the multivariate learning needs of its citizen.
- The concept of equity should be central to the practice of education.

The Ministry of Education embraces the principle that all children can learn and recognizes that the learner must be actively involved in the learning process. The National Curriculum and Assessment Framework (NCAF) endorses this principle and promotes a shift to curriculum integration to include differentiated learning in the classroom.

The Ministry of Education seeks to provide all persons of St. Vincent and the Grenadines with learning opportunities appropriate to their learning needs and to ensure a quality of education that will equip them for life. (Mission Statement)

With the phased introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) completed in 2005, the concept of inclusive education has been adjusted. ALL students who have attained the age of eleven years at the beginning of the academic year, or will attain that age by the following September (Education Act 2006) may be admitted to a secondary School.

This allows lower achieving students the opportunity to attend secondary schools. Before 2003, at the primary level (Grades K-6), 60% of the enrolled student population in Grade 6 did not satisfy the minimum assessment requirements and did not have the opportunity to attend secondary school.

In 2003, (the year Universal Secondary Education was introduced), 60% of students registered at the Grade 6 level in primary schools gained places at secondary schools.

In 2005 (the year Universal Secondary Education was completed) 98% of the students registered at Grade 6 in primary schools were placed in secondary schools.

Universal Secondary Education has increased **access** to secondary education.

Equity is being addressed through modification to the structure and process of the education system, with the improved distribution of resources including the deployment of trained staff and through the promotion of equality of opportunity for all learners and teachers.

Quality is being addressed through the ongoing teacher training and the upgrading and restructuring of the curriculum through the National Curriculum and Assessment Framework.

The National Curriculum and Assessment Framework is designed to provide a quality education for all school age learners through equal opportunity.

The NCAF of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines provides access to twelve years of universal education for all Students including those with special education needs and those from different ethnic, social and linguistic background.

The NCAF, in keeping with the Government's commitment to equity and equality for all, seeks to provide equality of access for all students in accordance with their individual needs and abilities.

With the establishment of more geographically accessible schools to cater for the students in the rural areas and the introduction of free universal basic education; access to secondary level has increased.

To accommodate the physically handicapped, where access to wheel chairs is difficult, ramps are being built in schools where such children attend.

Newly constructed schools are now being designed to allow full accessibility for students with disabilities.

However, at both primary and secondary level, there continues to be low levels of attendance and achievement among certain vulnerable groups particularly males, children of single parents, child guardians (often females) and rural students.

In formal institutions where 'mainstreaming' of disabled learners occurs, it has not been accompanied by a change in the organization through modifications of its curricula, its teaching and learning strategies or even the acceptance of inclusive education by teachers and students.

The Government is committed to equipping adults with life skills through several initiatives for personal development, self-employment and general entrepreneurship. This is based on the principles of equal access for all to both formal and non-formal education of comparable quality.

The establishment of the Adult Education Unit in the Ministry of Education provides support for adults who dropped out of secondary school and provides training, leading to certification of adult in certain skills.

The Ministry of Education committed itself to the implementation of Universal Secondary Education, which was completed in September 2005.

This has led to:-

- a greater diversity of abilities and maturities in students entering secondary schools.
- A risk of further marginalisation of the already disadvantaged students.
- Inappropriate curricula to meet the needs and interests of the increased, more diverse student population.
- Over-stretched scarce resources-human, natural and physical – to meet the increased numbers, diversity and needs of students.
- A further fragmentation of the curriculum as different schools struggle to adopt different coping strategies.

Hence for Universal Secondary Education to be effective and meet the different needs of the entire ability range, the development of a National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Framework based on the Education Act 1992 was initiated.

This Policy Framework spans twelve (12) years of universal education (primary and secondary levels) from Grade K to Form 5. This National Curriculum and Assessment Framework was developed following consultations undertaken with a range of educational religious and business organizations, and a number of other stakeholder groups in St. Vincent and the Grenadines through public meetings and questionnaires. This data provided the draft National Curriculum and Assessment Framework which has already been accepted by Cabinet in June 2007.

The Education Act of 1992 and 2006 and the ESDP (2002 – 2007:10-11) seek to outline and address these concerns through measures, including the development of the National Curriculum and Assessment Framework, to provide national guidelines to all schools to meet these challenges and so seek to improve the learning environment, and also to provide opportunities for all students to be successful in their learning environment.

National Curriculum and Assessment Framework

The National Curriculum and Assessment Framework was designed to:-

- Provide a uniform curriculum framework for all schools thus providing more equitable access for all.
- Identify and provide basic resource needs to every student to reduce inequality of provision and so improve equity.
- Raise standards by providing Attainment Targets and basic Learning Outcomes that **all** students can achieve which will serve to motivate improved performance of teachers and students.

Particular attention has been paid in the development of the Learning Outcomes to ensure that progression and continuity is maintained as students pass from grade to grade, primary to secondary.

Recognizing that every learner has different needs, the decision was taken by all stakeholders, to design the National Curriculum Framework to afford flexibility for schools and students to customize the curriculum, subject to policy requirements, to cater for the individual needs of every student using the limited resources, and facilities so as to guarantee "Access for All".

Early Childhood Education

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines recognises that appropriate Early Childhood Education or pre-primary education can minimize disparities between children as they enter the formal education system (1995 Education Policy) and has introduced statutory regulations for Early Childhood Education (ECE) including the licensing of Early Childhood Education Schools, whose operations are currently being done by private agencies.

Access to Early Childhood is presently about 65% (2007). This figure is projected to rise to 85% by 2008. To increase access to pre-primary education, the Government of St. Vincent is investing in the privately owned and operated Early Childhood Education centres to upgrade already existing facilities, thus ensuring quality and equity in pre-primary education.

Additionally, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is constructing Early Childhood Education Centres in new primary schools with the projected construction of eight facilities.

These measures would provide for smoother transition from pre-primary to primary school. These centres will target all students including the physically challenged.

Special Needs Education (SEN)

A policy objective (ESDP 11.F1) is to increase access for children with SEN by making provision for them in mainstream schools wherever feasible. In the 2007-2008 academic year, accommodation has been made for SNE students to write national exams.

The National Curriculum Framework aims at the development of high level of basic knowledge and skills for all. Teachers and students at all levels are expected to perform consistently to the best of their ability so that all students including those with special needs realize their potential strength and develop through them.

The Education Act 1992 (revised 2006) is the major legal document governing education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and it establishes salient principles that guides the development of education for the future.

Part III Division 3 #27 states that:

“.....a person who is eligible for admission to an educational institution or school as a student shall not be refused admission on any discriminatory ground”where “discriminatory ground means a ground based on religion, race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed, social status, physical handicap and in the case of mixed gender schools-sex.”

Part VI Division 3 #112 makes provision for “special education programme for any student of compulsory age and to have the programme delivered in the least restrictive and most enabling environment that resources permit.....having due regard to the educational needs and rights of other students”.

Conclusion

The implementation of Universal Secondary Education in September 2005 has led to greater diversity of abilities and maturities especially in terms of literacy and numeracy entering Secondary Schools. Additionally it has also identified varying problems at the Primary level.

Presently, there are several programmes that would aim to address these problems. The Ministry of Education on its own or under various donor-funded programmes is providing training opportunities and support for teachers:

- Training of 30 teachers in the Diagnosis and the Assessment of Learning Difficulties for primary and secondary students in the mainstream classroom (ongoing).
- Learning support for primary teachers to remediate learning difficulties at the primary level.
- Assessment of Reading Capability of Grade 6 students since implementation of USE to evaluate the impact of interventions in the area of literacy remediation at secondary level on students' reading achievement.

This has seen marked improvement in reading level as shown in the table.

Further support in the provision of 25 000 reading books and DVD's for Grades K-2 of all primary schools.

Year	Below Grade 4 (%)	Grade 6 and above (%)
2005	62	24
2006	38.3	46.5
2007	32.88	58.61

- Academic Mentoring Programme (Secondary School Based) to enhance the school's ability to effectively and efficiently cater to students with identified needs while at the same time maintaining a high standard of education for the rest of the schools' population. (Piloted in 2006)
- Learning Support Programme to remediate literacy and numeracy deficiencies at the secondary level, in all secondary schools and the provision books and materials for schools. (Introduced September 2007)
- Remedial Education Strategies Training Programme with emphasis on Special Education for slow learners, Basic literacy and numeracy for 100 Primary and Secondary School teachers and the supply of educational materials.
- Establishment of Teachers' Resources Centres with resources for Arts & Craft, Music, Dance and Drama (Scheduled for Spring 2008).
- Training in Item writing for Primary and Secondary School teachers to improve the monitoring and evaluation system in all schools.
- Training for 100 Secondary teachers in the Introduction of ICT in classroom instruction in the teaching of Science and Mathematics, and the provision of software licence and laptops for all secondary schools to improve teaching/learning of Science and Mathematics.
- Ongoing training of principals and teachers in differentiated teaching to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to deal/cope with students of varying abilities.
- Training of teachers in SNE at the graduate and post-graduate level to teach children with SENs
- Improved access to better quality secondary and relevant TVET education in the Southern Grenadines with the construction of a new secondary school.

CHALLENGES TO BE ADDRESSED

1. The problem of social stigma and discrimination towards people with disabilities. This has led to the exclusion of some children with disabilities from the school system.
2. Low expectations of slow children by teachers and society.
3. Difficulty in identifying and diagnosing children with special needs and lack of clear system of record keeping.
4. Limited access to the of transport children with disabilities attending school, which makes it difficult for parents to bring their children to school regularly; more so, when the regular buses do not want to transport disabled children and when other passengers complain when they do.
5. Shortage of trained staff including therapist for speech impairments and mental, ADHT and physical disabilities.
6. Insufficient integration of children with special needs into mainstream primary and secondary schools.
7. The inclusion of Special Education in the Teacher Training Programme. Training offered at Teachers' Training College needs to address and be responsive to local needs.
8. Inability of teachers to adapt curriculum to cater for the individual needs and abilities of students.
9. Lack of adequate resources/learning materials to provide necessary support for effective instruction.
10. Inability of teachers to make better use of limited resources to enhance delivery of classroom instruction.
11. Accurate data needed to determine the number of learners excluded from the school system through training during school hours, absenteeism and drop out.
12. Greater involvement of all stakeholders – especially parents in their children's education.
13. Need for more quality pre-school within easy access of all pre-school aged children especially in the rural areas where poorer families live.