

ABSTRACT

Six Government Special Education Units:- Purpose and Function

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Development in education has seen Special Education moving from an almost obscure position to where it can justly be recognized as an integral part of the total education process. However, much is still to be desired in terms of a positive awareness of special education even among so-called educators.

Special Education must be viewed not only as education for the feeble minded but must be seen as simply quality education where each learner is recognized first and foremost as an individual, with his own unique qualities and special needs. When education is individualized then it becomes special for the learner.

The project looked at the purpose and function of the six government units and used as its main sources of data collection, the teachers of the units, the principals of the main schools to which the units are attached and those teachers in the main school who have received students from the units. Other secondary sources of data collection were also utilized.

The six special education units were build on sites of regular primary and All-Age Schools as part of the government's commitment to mainstreaming.

However the findings have revealed a general lack of commitment to the mainstream process, by both the heads-of-units and the principals of the main schools. There is the definite need for more aggressive leadership in their roles as programme initiators, with more awareness programmes developed for the overall school communities.

It was felt by both the teachers of the units and those from the schools to which the units are attached, that the main schools stood to benefit more from the units if they offered well structured resource room facilities. In this way, more students would benefit from the programme and there would also be the strong possibility of a higher level of collaboration between the teachers of the units and the main schools.

Material and human resources were cited as major constraints of the units' operations. In terms of the shortage of qualified special educators for the units, the writer suggested the government's return to the policy of placing newly qualified teachers in the schools, as was practised during the early sixties and seventies. In this way the rural areas would be guaranteed teachers each year. The problem of housing would also have to be addressed.

The success of a special unit within an ordinary school will, therefore, depend to a large extent on the principals and on the partnership among parents, teachers, the community and on the government's total commitment to the programme.