

**Special Education in the 21st Century:  
- Provision of Special Support to Meet the Needs of Each Child - (Final Report)**

Following twelve months deliberation, The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan published the report of the Advisory Committee on "Future Directions for Special Education in the 21st Century" on January 15th, 2001, entitled "Special Education in the 21st Century: - Provision of Special Support to Meet the Needs of Each Child - (Final Report)". This report reflects the determination of the Japanese government to further improve special education in the 21st century and build on the foundation upon past achievements. However, the report is extensive, so only the first chapter entitled "Fundamental Policies on Special Education for the Future" and summary of "Special Education in the 21st Century" are included below.

**Chapter1 Fundamental Policies on Special Education for the Future**

**1. Development of Special Education in Japan**

The special education system in Japan was established in 1947 by the School Education Law which stipulates the establishment of schools for the blind, schools for the deaf, and schools for children with intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities and health impairments (hereafter these types of school are referred to as "special schools"), as well as special classes in ordinary schools. Compulsory education in schools for the blind and schools for the deaf, which started in 1948, was accomplished in 1956. Meanwhile, the establishment of special schools proceeded steadily and attendances at all special schools were made compulsory in 1979. In the same year, "home tutoring education" started. In this program, students unable to attend school due to some disabling condition(s) are enrolled in elementary, or lower secondary departments of special schools and teachers from these schools teach them at home, or in medical institutions. Since attendance requirement at special schools and home tutoring education became compulsory, the number of children whose obligation to attend school are postponed or exempted has decreased. Furthermore, in 1993 teaching in resource rooms began for students with mild disabilities. These students are enrolled in regular classes and usually taught in regular classes, but at certain times during the school day they go to the resource rooms where they receive special education. In addition, since 2000, home tutoring education has been offered to students enrolled in the upper secondary departments of special schools.

As a result of these developments, in 2000 there were 992 special schools nationwide with 90,000 children. At the same time, 18,000 elementary and lower secondary schools

(50% of all such schools) offered special classes (26,000 special classes), with a total enrollment of about 73,000 students. In addition, 28,000 students were being taught in resource rooms. Thus, 191,000 students were provided special education nationwide in 2000, which accounted for approximately 1% of all school-age children in Japan. Of the total of all students in compulsory education, the number of students receiving special education was approximately 150,000, or about 1.3% of all students in this age group.

Special education in Japan has experienced continuous improvement. The system actively promotes programs for the educational activities for independent life so that children and students with special needs can acquire the basic skills to maximize their ability, to exert their potential, to become independent, and to participate to the maximum extent possible in society. Special education also promotes joint activities with students at ordinary elementary and lower secondary schools as well as with people in the local community.

**2. Fundamental Policies on Special Education for the Future**

In the past, Japanese special education has focused on building and improving special schools and special classes to provide careful and warm education with appropriate consideration for the type and degree of each child's disability.

Recently, however, the social context of special education has been changing. For example, the concept of normalization has attracted much attention, disabilities have become severer and more diverse and educational administration is gradually becoming more decentralized and more diverse. To meet these changes, it is necessary that special education in the future should understand the special educational needs particular to each child with

disabilities from his/her view and should offer educational support the most appropriate for these educational needs, as described as follows in detail.

(1) Society as a whole should support the independence and social participation of students with disabilities throughout their lives to achieve a `normalized society`.

To achieve the principal of normalization, the Japanese government published a document entitled "New Long-Term Programme for Government Measure for Disabled Persons: Establishing a Society in which Each Person Participates" and embarked on actions in the fields of education, social welfare, medicine, labour and so on. In 1993, the government revised the `Fundamental Law for Countermeasures for the Mentally and Physically Disabilities` to the `Disabled Persons Fundamental Law` to promote the independence and participation of people with disabilities in a variety of social, economic, cultural, and other areas.

In the future, people with or without disabilities should understand, help, and support each other as human beings living in a common society. With this goal in mind, society should support the ultimate independence of people with disabilities comprehensively and throughout their lives by establishing unifying framework of support from various fields such as education, social welfare, medicine and labour. These support frameworks will enable students with disabilities to live a life of fulfillment in the community as active members communicating others and actively participating in society.

As for education, it is necessary to reinforce cooperation with the fields of social welfare, medicine and labour, and to mobilize all social resources available to fulfill the education of students with disabilities to exert their abilities and capacities as much as possible for their independence and participation in society.

To give an example, it is necessary for students in special schools to promote an association with peers and adults in the community to establish the basis of their life in their own community so that they can lead active and rich lives as members of these communities.

Furthermore, special schools and social welfare facilities should be urged to provide opportunities for lifelong learning, to promote employment and to support their lives for people with disabilities to live independently and to participate in their community after graduation, collaborating with the fields of social welfare, medicine and labour.

(2) Education, social welfare, medicine and labour in a body, should establish a framework to provide consultation and support for children with disabilities and their parents from

infancy to the post-school years through a integrated system of education, social welfare, medicine and labour.

To provide the most appropriate special support to each child with disability, education, social welfare, medicine, and labour should work in a body to establish a framework to provide consistent consultation and support for both children and parents from infancy to the post-school years having the common goal for their independence.

Together with establishing framework described above, it is necessary to set-up a consultation and support team with a common goal and understanding among parents, personnel of related social services such as education, social welfare and medicine and so on. Through the accommodation of that team for the parents of children with disabilities, common understandings of the accurate assessment of the condition of the children, of the process of full involvement with the child to maximize their ability and capability, of the kind of support from education, social welfare and medicine is needed and possible, will arise among parents and personnel of related social services.

A consultation and support team consisting of personnel from education, social welfare, medicine, and labour should produce a file of educational and developmental records of each child and make use of that file consecutively while adhering to strict guidelines about the personal privacy of such information. Using these files of the educational and developmental history, both parents and team members will be better able to understand the needs of the child. This will enable the team to offer the most appropriate and practical educational, medical, social welfare and vocational support available at all developmental stages from pre- to post-school.

Furthermore, after the special support has done, representatives from related organizations will evaluate the adequacy of executed support for each disabled child. Based on this evaluation, through educational/developmental meetings, parents and team members will be able to improve the programs of the next round of support.

It is necessary to establish the multidisciplinary framework including the fields of education, social welfare, medicine and labour to assess the special needs of children with disabilities accurately and to deliver the appropriate support to them and their parents from infancy through to the post-graduate stages of life.

(3) Enrich the education in special schools to meet the special needs of students with serious and/or multiple disabilities and fulfill the educational support to meet the needs of students with special educational needs in regular class.

Contemporary issues in special education include

fulfillment of education for the students with severe and/or multiple disabilities, diversification of disabilities, an increasing demand for early support, the increase in enrollment at upper secondary department of special schools, and diversification of courses of the people with disabilities after graduation.

Since special schooling became compulsory in 1979 and various improvements were made at special schools nationwide, the enrollment rate of students with severe and multiple disabilities at special schools has increased. In response, the government has fulfilled the home tutoring education, and has improved the quality of education for students with severe and multiple disabilities in cooperation with relevant authorities in medicine and social welfare.

Recently, however, the proportion of students with severe disabilities has been increasing who need total assistance in moving, eating, toileting, changing clothes, etc. in special schools. Students with multiple disabilities, including speech impediment emotional disabilities, have been also increasing. In addition, special schools are being called on to provide the early support as well as the consultation in the post-school years. It is usually social welfare, medical authorities that preschool children consult and social welfare, medical and labour authorities that support post-graduated students on vacation and social participation. These have been often done without coordination with education in schools.

For vocational and social independence of people with disabilities after graduation, it is necessary to coordinate the services offered by education and by other fields such as social welfare, medicine, and labour to improve the quality of education provided by special schools.

For students with mild disabilities enrolled in regular classes in ordinary elementary and lower secondary schools, the education in resource room came to be statutory by `The Enforcement Regulations of School Education Law` in 1993, and it became to be possible for these students to receive the part-time special education. And there is an increasing needs for further special educational support for students with learning disabilities, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and high functioning autism who are enrolled in regular classes.

The present framework of special education does not yet necessarily meet these needs mentioned above, because the special education in Japan has focused on the intensive education in the special schools or in special classes.

It is inevitable to meet the needs of special educational support for students with learning disabilities, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and high functioning autism who are enrolled in regular classes.

(4) Improve the system of assignment for children to

understand the special educational needs of each student and to provide indispensable educational support.

So far special education in Japan has endeavored to give an appropriate education in special schools and special classes according to the type and severity of disability. However, the view of special education should be shifted to the view that special educational needs of each student shall be understood and indispensable educational support shall be provided in order to cultivate "zest for living", a foundation to enable children with disabilities to maximize their abilities responding to the diversification of disabilities and social change.

The determination of assignment of students with disabilities is based on Article 22-3 of `The Enforcement Ordinance for School Education Law` which proscribes the national standards for the disability of students who should be assigned in special schools. Recently, however, due to progress in medical science and science and technology, as well as improvements of school facilities - including more sophisticated visual, hearing, and prosthetic aids - it has become possible to provide the appropriate education for students with disabilities in ordinary educational settings when the conditions are met.

At the same time, due to the enactment of the so-called `Decentralization Package Law` in April 2000, the assignment of students was changed from the national work to the work of each region.. This legislation means that local boards of education, based on their detailed consideration and responsibility based on relevant laws and regulations, determine the school a student with disabilities should attend.

In the future, to understand the special educational needs of students and provide indispensable educational support, government should review the national standards of assignment to special schools from the views of education, psychology and medicine reflecting the progress in medical science and science and technology. At the same time, it is necessary to review the procedures of assignment by local boards of education. This amendment means that the local boards of education should determine the assignment based not only on type and severity of disability, but also on the conditions of the community, school, support to be offered to the child, and the views of the child and parents. This also means that the local boards of education can enroll a student with disabilities in an elementary or a lower secondary school when there would be reasonable grounds for that the child would receive an appropriate education in that setting. Prefectural boards of education should make appropriate decision regarding the assignment to special schools and support the local boards of education to improve and fulfill the framework of assignment and related consultation and

support according to the policies described above.

(5) Revise the system of special education and reinforce the supports for municipal authorities and schools to promote the attractive and unique educational programs in schools and in local communities.

To understand the individual needs of students with disabilities from the perspective of each child and to provide appropriate support, each school should provide attractive and unique educational programs based on the local community. Also, local community resources should be utilized to provide a support framework to facilitate the independent lives of students with disabilities.

So far, Japanese educational administration has been operated under the national policy of equal educational opportunity and leveling up educational standard for all students with the cooperation of national, prefectural and local governments. This meant the education system has been standardized according to references made by the national government. Recently, however, there has been a trend towards the decentralization of a variety of administrative area.

In special education, to promote the independent and creative activities in each school and in each community, the administrative system of special education should be reviewed and the necessary supports to municipal authorities and schools by national or prefectural authorities should be reinforced.

It is necessary for more appropriate assignment of each student based on the comprehensive assessment of his/her special educational needs to review the procedures of assignment, advance the functions of committees of assignment and fulfill the system of consultation and support. At the same time, it is necessary for the national government and prefectural boards of education to assist local boards of education.

It is also necessary to revise existing regulations and their applications so that, under the leadership of the school principal, special schools and elementary and lower secondary schools can become more independent and autonomous. In this way, it will be possible for these schools to offer more attractive and unique educational programs designed to meet the needs of all children and the communities in which they live. In particular, special schools are hoped to develop their role as the local centers of special education applying their full resources such as their expertise, institutions and facilities in the area of disability.

Furthermore, for teacher development of special education the national government and prefectural boards of education need to encourage all teachers in special schools to obtain special education teaching certification. At the same time, in-service training seminars dealing with a variety of

topics should be offered.

In addition, when local boards of education offer programs based on their own policies and individual schools conduct their own educational activities, these organizations should make clear where principle responsibility lies.

Therefore, each school needs to examine and evaluate its management and the performance of its curriculum. To make a school open to the community and unique in its characteristics, the results of this in-house review should be shared with parents and the local community and the school should be prepared to for reflecting their opinions in an ongoing process of review of school management and curriculum. At the same time, local boards of education should examine the self-evaluations of individual schools and use the results to improve the overall education process.

## **Special Education in the 21st Century (Final Report): Summary**

### **Chapter1 Fundamental Policies on Special Education for the Future**

1. Development of Special Education in Japan (omitted)

#### **2. Fundamental Policies on Special Education for the Future**

\* In response to the recent changes of the context surrounding the special education, it is necessary for the special education in the future to understand the special educational needs particular to each child with disabilities from his/her view and to offer educational support the most appropriate for these educational needs.

\* The fundamental policies on special education for the future are described below.

(1) It is necessary that society as a whole should support the independence and social participation of students with disabilities throughout their lives to achieve a `normalized society`.

(2) It is necessary to education, social welfare, medicine and labour in a body, should establish a framework to provide consultation and support for children with disabilities and their patents from infancy to the post-school years.

(3) It is necessary to enrich the education in special schools to meet the special needs of students with serious and/or multiple disabilities and to fulfill the educational support to meet the needs of students with special educational needs in regular class.

(4) It is necessary to improve the system of assignment for children to understand the special educational needs of each

student and to provide indispensable educational support.

(5) It is necessary to revise the system of special education and to reinforce the supports for municipal authorities and schools to promote the attractive and unique educational programs in schools and in local communities.

## **Chapter2 Improving the Assignment**

### **1. Establishing a Consistent Advisory Support System from Infancy to the Post-School Years**

\* Local boards of education should establish a system in which education, social welfare, and medicine provide coordinated consultation and support to children with disabilities and their parents.

\* The national government should examine the functions and membership of a special advisory support team so that an advisory support system backed by the coordinated activities of education, social welfare, and medicine shall be established.

\* Prefectural boards of education should cooperate with the work of social welfare, medicine, and other related departments in the bureaucracy and encourage municipalities within their prefecture to establish an advisory support system.

### **2. Reviewing the National Standards and Procedures of Assignment for Children with Disabilities**

\* Reflecting the progress in medical science and science and technology, the national standards of severity of disabilities to enroll in special schools should be reviewed from the views of education, psychology and medicine. At the same time, it is necessary to review the procedures of assignment by local boards of education. This amendment means that the local boards of education should determine the assignment comprehensively based on type and severity of disability, facilities and equipment or lower secondary schools etc. This also means that boards of education can enroll a student with disabilities in an elementary or a lower secondary school when there would be reasonable grounds for that the child would receive an appropriate education in that setting.

\* The range of students who need additional care in special classes or in ordinary classes should be clarified.

### **3. Enhancing the Role of the Advisory Committee that Deliberate Which School Meets the Needs of Each Child**

\* The responsibilities and status of the advisory committee should be clarified.

\* The advisory committee of local boards of education should provide parents with the opportunity to present their opinions during the deliberations. The committee should also

provide advice for school principals on the educational support in special classes or in resource rooms.

\* When the decision of a local board of education differs from that of parents, the advisory committee of prefectural boards of education should offer professional advice objectively.

## **Chapter3 Supporting Students who need Special Educational Support**

### **1. Improvement of Education Relating to Conditions of Disabilities**

#### **1-1 Improvement of Education that Reflects Students with Severer and Multiple Disabilities as well as Social Change**

\* Special schools should make efforts to devise methods for supporting students utilizing individual education plans, programs to promote independence, periods of integrated study, hands-on activities and joint activities with ordinary schools reflecting the situations of the community and their students.

\* For students enrolled in special schools who require daily medical care, it is necessary to examine how to establish a medical support system in cooperation with medical institution and to improve education in consideration of the findings.

#### **1-2 Educational Support for Students with Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and High-Functioning Autism**

\* In order to understand the situation of students with learning disabilities, ADHD, and high-functioning autism in ordinary classes, a nationwide survey should be done. Based on the results of this survey, all relevant personnel and the general public should be encouraged to develop a greater awareness.

\*Educational support for students with ADHD, high-functioning autism should be investigated based on the research by the National Institute of Special Education (NISE) and the criteria and effective teaching methods should also be examined.

#### **1-3 Improving Education Utilizing the Latest Information Technology (IT)**

\* Research and development of information equipment relevant to disabilities should be undertaken and teaching methods and system utilizing information technology should be examined.

\* Education of students in home tutoring education programs using information and communication technologies should be actively promoted.

## **2. Education at Special schools, Special Classes, and Resource Rooms in the Future**

### **2-1 Developing the Role of Special schools as Local Centers of Special Education**

\* Special schools should play the role of local centers of special education by, (1) offering guidance and counseling for pre-school children, and (2) by lending teaching materials and equipment to local elementary and lower secondary schools, providing advice to teachers at such schools, and offering in-service training.

### **2-2 Education in Special Classes, and Resource Rooms in the Future**

Education in special classes and resource rooms should be supported by all school staff. At the same time, utilizing part-time outside teachers, special part-time teachers, and limited-hour staff employed through the retiree re-appointment system should be considered.

## **3. Encouraging Upper Secondary Schools to Accept Students with Disabilities and Supporting Life-Long Learning of People with Disabilities**

\* Prefectures should consider building and enlarging upper secondary departments of special schools and establishing special schools, which only have upper secondary departments meeting local needs.

\* Boards of education should make efforts to improve the opportunities of life-long learning for people with disabilities in cooperation with welfare-related institutions. Special schools should support the life-long learning by people with disabilities.

## **Chapter4 Conditions for Improving Special Education**

### **1. Class Composition of Students and Teacher Allocation at Special schools and Special Classes**

\* Prefectural boards of education should assign teachers flexibly in consideration of the situation of the community and schools and the needs of students.

\* Special schools should be inventive about the curricula they offer and the teaching methods they use, such as creating a variety of learning environments beyond the traditional concept of the class. At the same time, the staff of the wide range is fixed by utilizing the teacher of the part-time outside teachers and the retiree re-appointment system, or the various human resources of a community as special part time teachers.

## **2. Teacher Development of Special Education**

### **2-1 Increasing the Proportion of Teachers Who Have Licenses for Special Education and Licenses in the Future.**

\* Prefectures should aim for all teachers in special schools have licenses for special education set concrete goals and plans for improvement, and promote programs through employment, allocation, in-service training and so on.

\* Considering the proportion of teachers who have licenses for special education in each prefecture, the national government should quantify the necessary number of holders nationwide, inquire as to the objectives, plans, and improvement status of the fraction on the part of prefectural boards of education, and assist them in their efforts.

### **2-2 Improving In-Service Training**

\* For improving the professionalism of teachers in special schools, appropriate training programs should be developed to meet the needs of the training objectives and the participants.

\* Prefectural boards of education should work towards offering targeted and systematic training seminars corresponding to the number of years in service at special classes and other experiences, as well as the needs of teachers.

### **3. Conditions to Promote Special Education**

\* Boards of education should reform school facilities in consideration of making these facilities barrier-free, thereby improving and more closely meeting the needs of the children, as well as improving their living environment of dormitories.

\* Teaching materials corresponding to improved content in the new Courses of Study should be acquired.

\* Special schools should make plans to implement an information network environment and to obtain the latest information equipment appropriate for the disabilities of individual students.

4. Improving the Function of The National Institute of Special Education (NISE).

\* To enhance its role as the Japanese national center on special education, NISE should, (1) conduct research to help in planning national administrative policies, (2) offer training seminars in response to new issues, (3) build a nationwide network of guidance and counseling information, (4) improve its role to disseminate information by a satellite communication network, and (5) improve collaboration, cooperation, and exchange with foreign research institutions.