

Supporting differently abled students

Uttara Singh highlights the need for inclusive education at mainstream schools

Each child is special in a unique way but children with special needs are even more special. Children with special needs, require positive reinforcement that helps them emerge with a strong sense of self-worth. While searching for ways to help children with disabilities, the focus must be to empower them. By providing a conducive and secure environment for learning, many special needs children eventually come into mainstream education.

Many children with special needs do not go to school though they have an equal right to education. To start the inclusive education revolution, first and foremost, people's attitude towards the differently abled has to be transformed from 'they cannot' to 'they can'. Children with special needs do not need pity or limiting terminology. Each one has their special skill set which can be honed by receiving the right impetus. In that light, it is

important to sensitise teachers, parents and students and encourage inclusive education.

India has been facing several challenges to address the requirements of special needs children. We can overcome these obstacles by creating more awareness of inclusive education. We need schools that have resources and a positive intent to re-structure their curriculum that caters to all types of students. We need teachers who have the skills, sensitivity and proficiency to meet varying demands within the classroom and by having the support of family.

If these changes are implemented, it will increase the confidence of special needs children to aspire for a valuable education. Inclusive education is a model of education in which children with disabilities

spend all or most of their time in school with children without special needs. Fully inclusive schools do not separate 'general education' and 'special education' programmes. Such schools are structured so that all students learn and grow together.

Government has various initiatives including Persons with Disability Act, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Right to Education, Accessible India Campaign, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. These initiatives are underway, but a lot needs to be accomplished. Ensuring barrier-free built environment in schools is as important as providing for barrier-

free transportation and roads to enable all children with disabilities to come to school and be a part of the regular school setting and further providing access to the use of information and communication technology.

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