



International Baccalaureate®  
Baccalauréat International  
Bachillerato Internacional

Primary Years Programme, Middle Years Programme and Diploma Programme

# Special educational needs within the International Baccalaureate programmes





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# IB mission statement

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

## IB learner profile

The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.

IB learners strive to be:

<b>Inquirers</b>	They develop their natural curiosity. They acquire the skills necessary to conduct inquiry and research and show independence in learning. They actively enjoy learning and this love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives.
<b>Knowledgeable</b>	They explore concepts, ideas and issues that have local and global significance. In so doing, they acquire in-depth knowledge and develop understanding across a broad and balanced range of disciplines.
<b>Thinkers</b>	They exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively to recognize and approach complex problems, and make reasoned, ethical decisions.
<b>Communicators</b>	They understand and express ideas and information confidently and creatively in more than one language and in a variety of modes of communication. They work effectively and willingly in collaboration with others.
<b>Principled</b>	They act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness, justice and respect for the dignity of the individual, groups and communities. They take responsibility for their own actions and the consequences that accompany them.
<b>Open-minded</b>	They understand and appreciate their own cultures and personal histories, and are open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities. They are accustomed to seeking and evaluating a range of points of view, and are willing to grow from the experience.
<b>Caring</b>	They show empathy, compassion and respect towards the needs and feelings of others. They have a personal commitment to service, and act to make a positive difference to the lives of others and to the environment.
<b>Risk-takers</b>	They approach unfamiliar situations and uncertainty with courage and forethought, and have the independence of spirit to explore new roles, ideas and strategies. They are brave and articulate in defending their beliefs.
<b>Balanced</b>	They understand the importance of intellectual, physical and emotional balance to achieve personal well-being for themselves and others.
<b>Reflective</b>	They give thoughtful consideration to their own learning and experience. They are able to assess and understand their strengths and limitations in order to support their learning and personal development.



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# Introduction

This document outlines the position of the IB with regard to special educational needs in IB programmes. It is intended for school leaders, programme coordinators and all IB teachers. Its purpose is to help schools with both the structuring and practices of special needs education.

The IB recognizes the difficulties associated with attempting to find a universal term for special education. Selecting a term that is acceptable internationally, easily recognizable and that indicates a student's learning needs is problematic. The generic term "special educational needs" (SEN) has been adopted since it caters for the wide spectrum of need along a continuum that encompasses cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. At some point this may need to be reconsidered in the light of selecting terminology to meet legal requirements related to discriminatory practices.

This document should be read in conjunction with the following IB documents.

- *Programme standards and practices*
- *Rules for IB World Schools: Diploma Programme, Middle Years Programme*
- *General regulations: Diploma Programme, Middle Years Programme*
- *Handbook of procedures for the Diploma Programme*
- *The Diploma Programme: From principles into practice* (April 2009)
- *MYP: From principles into practice* (August 2008)
- *Making the PYP happen: A curriculum framework for international primary education* (December 2009)
- *Making the PYP happen: Pedagogical leadership in a PYP school* (December 2009)
- *Learning in a language other than mother tongue in IB programmes* (April 2008)
- *Towards a continuum of international education* (September 2008)
- *IB learner profile booklet*
- *Candidates with special assessment needs*
- *Teaching students with particular special educational and learning needs—a resource for schools*

# Special educational needs in IB programmes

IB programmes “encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.” (IB mission statement 2004) In the field of special education the IB philosophy and practice are particularly significant. Difference and diversity are central in IB World Schools where all students enrolled in IB programmes should receive meaningful and equitable access to the curriculum. Enhancing the motivation to learn from multiple perspectives, through collaborative teaching approaches, can lead to positive outcomes for all students. These outcomes include improved academic and social skills, increased self-esteem, and more positive relationships with others in the community. Teachers are also rewarded professionally and personally as they develop an enhanced sense of community within each classroom.

In some schools special education is provided as a supplement to general education provision whereas in others the two are entirely separate. In recent years, the appropriateness of separate systems of education has been challenged, both from a human rights perspective and from the point of view of effectiveness (Florian 2007).

In many countries there has been a major shift towards locating special education centrally in mainstream education. Revised thinking has thus led to a reconceptualization of “special needs”. This new view implies that progress for students with special needs is more likely if we recognize that the difficulties experienced by the students result largely from the ways in which schools are currently organized, and from the more traditional teaching methods that tend to go along with such organization. The IB supports the premise that schools should be organized in such a way that student diversity of all kinds can be included as a resource, seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities for enriched learning. Diversity is a positive resource with regard to what it means to be internationally minded and interculturally aware.

Increasing demand for inclusive practices and a growing awareness of the rights of parents and students have changed perceptions of special educational needs in the community in general, and in education in particular. Historically, the special education teacher was separate from the class and/or subject teachers and was often consulted only after a difficulty or issue became identified as a problem. Over time, changes have taken place that have altered the focus from a medical model of a student with a deficit to a focus on the whole child. This focus has shifted to practising differentiation through identifying a student’s learning style, scaffolding their learning, and differentiating the curriculum in order to develop the student’s true potential.

The biggest dilemma for schools is how to support the teaching and learning that access and equity for students with learning issues require.

Recent research has found that “certain individuals or groups of children may benefit from adaptations to general teaching approaches, but in general pupils with SEN do not need qualitatively different pedagogy.” (Kershner 2007: 486) There is a shift from specialist teachers solving issues to collaborative planning by all teachers who are part of a student’s education anywhere along the learning continuum.

Teaching generic learning strategies separately from teaching academic content tends to result in students’ failure to apply these strategies when it really counts, which is in learning academic content as well as in daily living. Teachers new to IB programmes may require factual and procedural knowledge when teaching SEN students, such as:

- information about factors that affect a student’s learning, particularly with regard to inquiry-based learning
- how best to respond to the student’s needs

- how to differentiate and match teaching approaches to the student need, as indicated in the school's SEN policy
- knowledge of technology that has assisted in alleviating and removing barriers to learning.

If all these aspects are addressed in some way then it is possible for transformational learning to take place, enabling the majority of students to express their deep understanding and critical thinking in a variety of ways.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is an ongoing process that aims to increase access and engagement in learning for all students by identifying and removing barriers. This can only be successfully achieved in a culture of collaboration, mutual respect, support and problem solving. Inclusion is the learner profile in action, an outcome of dynamic learning communities.

Inclusion is more about responding positively to each individual's unique needs.

Inclusion is less about marginalizing students because of their differences.

The IB supports the following principles of an inclusive education.

- Inclusion is a process by which schools and others develop their cultures, policies and practices to include all students.
- An inclusive education service offers excellence and choice, incorporating the views of all stakeholders.
- The interests of all students must be safeguarded.
- The school community and other authorizing bodies should actively seek to remove barriers to learning and participation.
- All students should have access to an appropriate education that affords them the opportunity to achieve their personal potential.
- With the right skills training, strategies and support, the majority of students with special educational needs can be successfully included in mainstream education.
- Mainstream education will not always be appropriate for every student all of the time. Equally, just because mainstream education may not be appropriate at a particular stage, it does not prevent the student from being included successfully at any other stage.

Any inclusive environment must be effective, friendly and welcoming, healthy and protective, and gender-sensitive for all learners. The development of such child-friendly learning environments is an essential part of the overall efforts by countries around the world to increase access to, and improve the quality of, their schools.

Inclusion is an "organisational paradigm" that involves change. It is an unending process of increasing learning and participation for all students. It is an ideal to which schools can aspire, but which is never fully reached. However, inclusion happens as soon as the process of increasing participation is started (Booth and Ainscow 2002). Thus, differentiation is inclusion in practice. Inclusion and differentiation are most successful in the contexts of learning communities where there is a culture of collaboration that encourages and supports problem solving.

The *IB learner profile booklet* states that the learner profile provides a tool for whole-school reflection and analysis. It enables schools to question “to what extent do our philosophy, our school structures and systems, our curriculum and units of work enable students, and the adults who implement the programmes, to develop into the learner described in the profile?” (*IB learner profile booklet*: p. 2) If this reflection and analysis is being carried out through differentiation to cater to the individual needs of each learner then inclusion, as set out by Booth and Ainscow (2002), is being practised.

[B]ecoming more inclusive is a matter of thinking and talking, reviewing and refining practice, and making attempts to develop a more inclusive culture ... we cannot divorce inclusion from the contexts within which it is developing, nor the social relations that might sustain or limit that development.

Dyson 2006

## Differentiation

There has been a tendency in some schools to assume differentiation is merely another word for helping underachievers. In practice, planning a unit of work or developing coursework to provide a range of learning approaches for achieving common goals should show that all students benefit from the differentiated process. Although differences between students become more marked as they get older, they are evident among learners at any age. Differentiation is accepted as a method of continuing review and adaptation of goals and learning methods within a classroom.

It is important to ensure that each individual is supported to make the most effective use of the range of learning opportunities provided. There should be a variety of activities and resources that match the goals and methods of the learner and are relevant to their skills and knowledge. It is essential that all students have an understanding of themselves as learners so that they will be able to self-advocate independent learning skills within any of the IB programmes.

### Definition of differentiation

Differentiation is not a new construct, and has been based on good teaching practice for some time. It is a way of thinking about teaching and learning. Historically, it evolved from developing appropriate curriculum for two areas; the gifted and talented, and the slow learner. Later, differentiation was acknowledged as sound practice and principles for all students, particularly when the work of Gardner and Sternberg came to the fore in education. Tomlinson (1999, 2001, 2003, 2008) states that differentiated instruction may be conceptualized as a teacher’s response to the diverse learning needs of a student. There are differentiated opportunities that present themselves throughout the curriculum in all IB programmes.

Differentiation is seen as the process of identifying, **with** each learner, the most effective strategies for achieving agreed goals. The work of Gardner on multiple intelligences has broadened the whole concept of ability. Sternberg’s Triarchic model of thinking styles reinforces the fact that as well as having the ability to do something differently, learners also have the ability to think differently, and to apply these thoughts in a different way to others in their cohort. Learners have a preferred way of thinking before doing that must be considered if an optimum match is to occur at various times throughout their schooling. If this match does not occur then many learners will become unhappy and disenchanting with the learning process and, therefore, may not achieve their true potential until they leave the education system. We, as teachers, must be sensitive to this variety, and be flexible enough in our thinking to accommodate those who may not perform in the generally accepted way.

Given this diversity, it seems fair to assume that students and teachers will need a wide range of strategies, and flexibility of timing and approach if they are to achieve common goals. Any issues in establishing

differences in levels of attainment must not be an excuse for implying that the only significant variation between learners is in a single dimension of ability. Differentiation calls for greater understanding in the way learners work, either alone or with others, based on their individual needs and goals. It requires the learner to take a more active and responsible role in the planning, carrying out and reviewing of what is learned.

In some IB schools differentiation has become a long-term whole-school strategy that enables the community to maintain the momentum to transform teaching and learning habits, develop classroom relationships and expectations, and address suitable patterns of assessment that reflect the shift in thinking. Differentiation should be visible and transparent in policy documents in order to meet IB expectations for authorization and evaluation. A good curriculum must be coherent, relevant, stimulating and challenging, and all tasks should be respectful of students as diverse learners. Differentiation can help learners access the content at an appropriate level through a variety of resources, and should become an integral part of each teacher's curriculum planning. In the past it has often been hard to persuade many staff that effective differentiation within the classroom is a relevant and necessary part of every teacher's professional expertise. Tomlinson and Eidson (2003) state: "If, as teachers, we increase our understanding of *who* we teach and *what* we teach, we are more likely to be flexible in *how* we teach."

## Assessment

When it comes to assessing the differentiated units of work or set tasks ongoing assessment is a vital key to inform teaching and learning for both teachers and students. Assessment allows for self-reflection and peer review, which enhances and supports all learners in gaining independence and becoming advocates for their own learning.

Assessment should be diverse and relevant to the learner, allowing for differentiated assessments with different entry and exit points. The purposes and outcomes of the assessment process should be explicit to all. Elements of social interaction and personal growth should be part of the assessment process.

Differentiation should be implemented as an ongoing whole-school practice to:

- transform teaching and learning
- develop classroom relationships and expectations
- differentiate assessment practices.

## Four principles of good practice

The IB has identified four principles of good practice that promote equal access to the curriculum for all learners across the continuum, but that are particularly relevant to those with special needs. These principles are based on elements of good practice that are essential to the development of the whole person.

### 1. Affirming identity and building self-esteem

Social and emotional conditions for learning that value all languages and cultures and affirm the identity of each learner promote self-esteem.

Affirming the identity of a learner encourages the qualities, attitudes and characteristics identified in the IB learner profile, promoting responsible citizenship and international-mindedness. Conditions that do not affirm identity result in learners with poor self-esteem. Consequently, such learners will be unable to develop many of the qualities, attitudes and characteristics of the learner profile. The identity of each learner must, therefore, be affirmed.

Affirming identity can be achieved by:

- promoting a class and school environment that welcomes and embraces the diversity of learners
- by valuing and using the diversity of cultural perspectives to enhance learning
- by liaising with parents to establish understanding of how best to collaborate to achieve shared goals.

## 2. Valuing prior knowledge

New learning and understanding is constructed on previous experiences and conceptual understandings in a developmental continuum. Krashen (2002) stresses the importance of **comprehensible input** for learning to take place. If new information cannot be understood, it cannot be linked to prior knowledge and become part of deeper learning. The psychologist Vygotsky (1978) describes a **zone of proximal development** (ZPD) within which new learning can take place if there is support. The ZPD lies beyond the zone of prior knowing, which is where a learner can work independently without support. Anything outside the ZPD is not yet able to be learned.

When planning the range of new learning that can take place in any individual, previous learning experiences or prior knowing must be taken into consideration.

It cannot be assumed that those learners who have diverse learning needs will necessarily all share the same previous learning and background knowledge. It may be that these learners have a wealth of relevant background knowledge that can be activated as a base for further learning. However, the teacher may have to build up background knowledge in preparation for further learning.

Therefore, teachers should:

- explicitly activate learners' prior understanding
- use their knowledge of learners' prior understanding to differentiate tasks and activities that will build up the further background knowledge necessary for new learning to occur
- record information in learning profiles that will support planning for future differentiation and inform teacher practice
- consider the time and the strategies necessary for activating and building up background knowledge when planning a unit of work or lesson.

## 3. Scaffolding

Teaching methodology has identified a variety of specific ways in which teachers can scaffold new learning in the ZPD to help learners understand text and tasks.

Scaffolding is a temporary strategy that enables learners to accomplish a task that would otherwise be impossible or much more difficult to accomplish. Scaffolding should foster learners' increasing independence in taking responsibility for developing strategies for their own learning, thus always extending the ZPD. Scaffolding is a dynamic practice in the learning process.

The use of graphic organizers to develop a piece of written research is an example of scaffolding. Other scaffolding strategies may provide a more concrete, and less abstract, context for understanding. Examples of these are:

- visual aids
- demonstrations
- dramatization

- small, structured collaborative groups
- teacher language
- use of mother tongue or best language to develop ideas and initial plans.

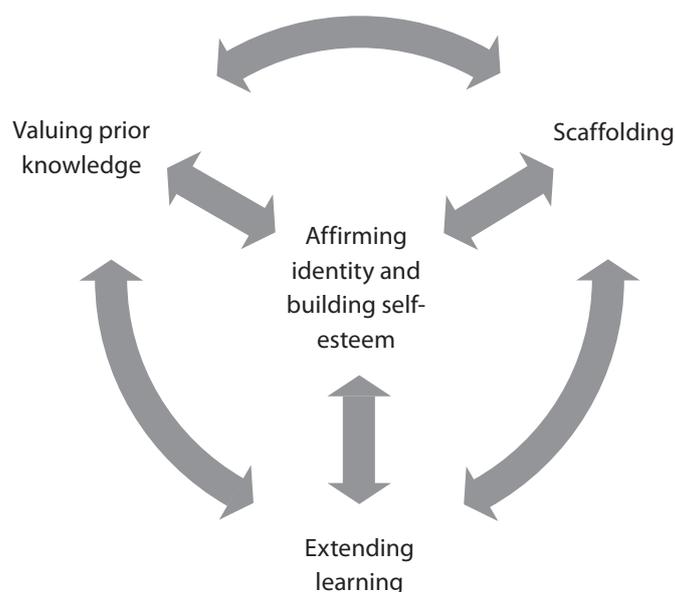
Knowing the level of aptitude of a particular learner allows a number of small steps to be incorporated into the learning process so they can work towards mastery while receiving constructive feedback on all attempts. Templates may be designed for particular tasks, with quite a large amount of detail provided in the first level that diminishes over time as the learner begins to grasp the requirements of the task. Such an example may be a template for writing up a science experiment, where key terms and phrases are given in a graphic organizer that can be used until they are internalized by the learner and the format can be completed without the scaffolding.

#### 4. Extending learning

As learners progress through the years, they are required to read and write increasingly sophisticated texts in the content areas of the curriculum. The academic language of such texts reflects:

- the complexity and abstraction of the concepts that learners are required to understand
- the increased density of low-frequency and technical vocabulary, much of which comes from Latin and Greek sources (for example, photosynthesis, revolution)
- the increasingly sophisticated grammatical constructions (for example, the passive voice).

Teachers can help learners extend their learning by combining high expectations with numerous opportunities for learner-centred practice and interaction with cognitively rich materials and experiences. Learners who read extensively, both inside and outside an IB programme, have far greater opportunities to extend their academic language and concepts than those whose reading is limited. The provision of opportunities to experience the enjoyment of reading, and to be aware of a wide range of genres for writing, are crucial to developing student learning. The use of assistive technology and software enables learners with language issues to access material they can engage with metacognitively.



**Figure 1**

*Visual representation of the four principles of good practice in an IB SEN learning cycle*

# Conclusion

Important lessons can be learned, within special education, from the complexity of international experiences. Cultural and linguistic differences sometimes create contexts that can lead to misinterpretation. In order to value this diversity we need to support knowledge creation, and its transfer across cultural borders, through sharing innovative practices. This in turn may lead us to be more sensitive to the nature of knowledge that can be moved from place to place, and the sorts of issues that may make it difficult. There needs to be awareness that any one country is not a homogeneous unit and that a historical perspective is vital to a deeper analysis of a special education context.

This document highlights some of the future directions in supporting schools that have students with special educational needs in their programmes. These steps may include the delivery of appropriate professional development activities via online modules and face-to-face workshops. Frameworks for policy documents and resources may be developed further to engage teachers in sharing best practices that can support schools new to the IB programmes. These resources may be used as guides for schools when developing evidence to meet the programme standards and practices requirements for authorization and evaluation in the future.

It has been said that “it is not difference, but the difference we make of it, that matters”. (Minow 1990) Our understanding of the relationship between teachers, learners, parents and schools as learning communities, and their relationship to society has deepened. This in turn now shapes the way we reinterpret the nature of special educational needs and how it is provided around the world.

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