

# The extent and practice of inclusion in independent schools in South Africa

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*In line with international trends in education, South Africa has embraced inclusive education as the means by which learners who experience barriers to learning will be educated. As inclusion is beginning to be realised in South African schools, a gap in the emerging research base on inclusive education is that of inclusion in the independent sector. A study was undertaken to establish the extent to which learners who experience barriers to learning are included in independent schools belonging to ISASA (the largest independent schools association in South Africa) and the practices that facilitate inclusion. The results of a survey administered to principals were analysed quantitatively and reveal that most ISASA schools include learners who experience various barriers to learning and employ inclusive practices that are described in the international literature. We report on salient aspects emerging from the study and focus on the diversity of learners found in ISASA schools, as well as the inclusive practices found at school-wide, classroom, and individual levels. The practices described are the provision of on-site specialist personnel, support for teachers, building modifications to ensure access by persons using wheelchairs and various instructional practices and assessment adaptations. Recommendations arising from the study may give direction to South African schools pursuing inclusivity.*

## Introduction

One of the many challenges facing education in post-apartheid South Africa is that of realising the constitutional values of equality, freedom from discrimination and the right to a basic education for all learners, including those who experience barriers to learning. Under apartheid, learners were not only educated separately according to race, but a separate special education system served those learners with disabilities or impairments. To address this and bring educational practice in South Africa into line with the international trend of including learners, who experience barriers to learning, in general or mainstream classes, South Africa has enacted legislation and formulated policy which establishes an inclusive education system. Inclusion is broadly understood as the process by which learners who previously might have been taught in a separate special education system, because of the barriers to learning they experience, would now be taught in regular schools that have taken the responsibility of changing and improving to provide the support necessary to facilitate access and participation. Inclusion is a worldwide trend in education, given impetus by the United Nations focus on disability rights and children's rights and in initiatives that have seen these rights being realised. South Africa is a relative newcomer to inclusive education and can benefit from the theoretical journeys and practical experiences of those coun-

tries. However, because of South Africa's unique historical, educational and socio-economic context, the expression of inclusion will be different and the challenges and opportunities experienced here will require local research and response.

In 2001, South Africa published the White Paper Six on Special Needs Education. Published after a consultative process, the Paper outlines a national strategy for systematically addressing and removing barriers to learning through establishing full-service schools, converting special schools into resource centres, training education managers and teachers, developing institutional and district support structures and pursuing a funding strategy (Department of Education (DoE), 2001). Many of these provisions follow the recommendations of The Salamanca Statement of 1994, a UNESCO document that asserts that inclusive regular schools are a means of combating discrimination and achieving education for all in a cost effective way. There is, however, an aspect of the Salamanca Statement that South Africa's White Paper has disregarded. The Salamanca Statement exhorts governments to plan to educate all persons "...through both public and private schools" (UNESCO, 1994:13). South Africa has a well established and growing private (or independent) education sector that serves 2.9% of South African learners (DoE, 2008:5). However, there is no mention in the White Paper of the role that ordinary independent schools will play in an inclusive education and training system. (The White Paper does mention that independent special schools will be audited, together with state special schools.) This omission is noteworthy since there is evidence that independent ordinary schools in South Africa are pursuing inclusion in education (Cohen, 2000:11; Gardener, 2003:22).

A research base in inclusive education in South Africa is emerging. Congruent with international trends in research in this field, studies focus either on research at the level of individual learners, or at the systems level. The latter is concerned with schools, classrooms and the education system and can be expected to yield valuable information about inclusive practice (Hunt & Goetz, 1997:24). The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994:24) and many writers in the field of inclusive education emphasise the need for research into inclusive practice (Armstrong, 1998:49; Ferguson & Ferguson, 1998:307; Slee, 1995:30). This need for research is not because there is some universal 'best inclusive practice' to be discovered (this would deny the complexity of each classroom situation), but to increase the repertoire of strategies that schools and teachers can use to ensure that diverse learning needs are met (Waldron, in Walther-Thomas & Brownell, 2001:177). An identified gap in research in inclusion in South Africa is the area of inclusive practice in the independent school sector. A study was designed to address this gap and we report on key aspects emerging from the study.

### **Research into the inclusive practices of independent schools**

The aim with this study was primarily descriptive and was to describe, through analysis of data collected from independent schools practising inclu-

sion, the extent to which learners who experience barriers to learning are included in independent schools and the practices that facilitate inclusion. There was also an exploratory dimension in the research as inclusion is relatively new to South Africa. To achieve the research goal, the following research question was formulated:

*To what extent are learners who experience barriers to learning included in ISASA member schools and what practices facilitate their inclusion?*

'Barriers to learning', as used in the research question, is the preferred South African term to explain why some learners do not experience learning success. The term is preferable to 'special needs' which signifies a medical or deficit approach to educational difficulties and locates the problem within the learner, rather than in the system (Howell, 2007:98). 'Barriers to learning' acknowledges that educational difficulties may arise from a number of sources, and may be intrinsic or extrinsic to learners. Intrinsic barriers include physical, sensory, and neurological and developmental impairments, chronic illness, psycho-social disturbances and differing intellectual ability. Extrinsic barriers are those factors that arise outside the learner, but impact on his or her learning. They may arise from the family and its cultural, social and economic context and include lack of parental involvement in education and family problems like divorce, death, and violence. Schools themselves may constitute barriers to learning when learners' mother tongue is not used for teaching and learning and when schools are not safe. Societal issues like poverty and lack of safety in the community may also result in learners not maximising their educational experience. Barriers to learning may best be understood as resulting from a complex interplay of learners and their contexts, including the reality of impairments or disabilities, socio-economic restraints and wider societal factors including values, attitudes, policies and institutions. Therefore learners will experience barriers differently depending on the family of which they are a part, the extent to which their schools facilitate access and participation and the resources in the communities and societies in which they live (Feldman, Gordon & Snyman, 2001:146). For ease of research, however, the various factors leading to barriers to learning were considered separately in the study.

The research question limits the study to the independent school sector in South Africa. South Africa's Constitution affirms the right of independent schools to exist, provided that they are registered with the provincial department of education, they do not discriminate on admission on the grounds of race and that they do not offer an education inferior to public education (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996:section 29(3)). Independent schools would therefore be those schools in South Africa other than public schools (Gauteng Provincial Legislature, 1995:9) and would, to some extent, be founded, owned, managed and financed by stakeholders other than the state (Kitaev, 1999:43). Many independent schools belong to an independent schools' association and the oldest and largest of these associations is the Independent Schools' Association of Southern Africa (ISASA). Membership of ISASA is open to any inde-

pendent school that meets ISASA's quality criteria and membership requirements. Because ISASA has a Diversity and Equity Policy that encourages members to include 'learners with special education needs' wherever feasible educationally (ISASA, 2002), the study was limited to schools that have chosen membership of that association.

The research question concerns not only learners who experience barriers to learning in ISASA schools; but also the inclusive practices that ensure the support of these learners. Support for learners who experience barriers to learning can be understood as all those actions that increase schools' capacity for responding to diversity (CSIE, 2000:11). Inclusive practice is an important component of support and refers to strategies adopted, technical support provided, structures and procedures applied and actions carried out in the pursuit of including learners who experience barriers to learning. A focus on inclusive practice, while not denying the importance of inclusive culture and policy, ensures that attention is given to what is actually happening in schools, rather than wishful thinking or rhetoric (Booth & Ainscow, 1998:3; 13) about inclusion. In the context of this study, a focus on inclusive practice is also suited to the empirical design of the research. Although the practical expression of inclusive education varies across countries and even within countries (Ballard, 1999:1; Forlin, 1997:22), it is possible to identify various aspects of inclusive practice that have been documented in the international literature and use these aspects as a theoretical base for an investigation into local practice.

Inclusion asserts that learners who experience barriers to learning should attend their neighbourhood schools and be taught alongside their peers in the regular classroom (CSIE, 2000:12; Giangreco, 1997:194; Morgan & Demchak 1998:26). As the inclusive regular classroom represents diverse learning needs, appropriate support for all learners needs to be provided. Specialist support personnel seem to have a vital role to play in the inclusive practice of schools in developed countries. Teachers, with specialist training in special needs education, work collaboratively with general classroom teachers in providing support to learners either within the classroom or on a "pull-out" basis (Forlin, 2001:124; Welding, 1996:116; Schnorr, Black & Davern, 2000:13). In the UK, a Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) would organise and manage a school's overall provision of support for learners through liaison and training, and would also provide support for individual learners (Roaf, 1998:117-120). Bradley, King-Sears and Tessier-Switlick (1997:205; 212) describe the role of occupational and other therapists working in multi-disciplinary teams at schools as they share their expertise in the pursuit of common educational goals.

In addition to the provision of specialist support personnel, inclusive schools in developed countries provide training and make practical arrangements to enable general classroom teachers to meet the variety of learning needs effectively. Training is regarded as essential for the successful implementation of inclusion (Baker & Zigmond, 1995:178; Paul, Rosselli & Evans,

1995:331; Rouse & Florian, 1996:77) with teachers needing not only knowledge and understanding of barriers to learning, but also practical training in teaching strategies that facilitate inclusion (Pivik, McComas & Laflamme, 2002:105). South African studies confirm the need for teacher training for inclusive education in this country (Burden, 2000:37; Hall, 2002:36). Literature from England (for example, Ainscow, 2000:77 and Booth, Ainscow & Dyson, 1998:220) and the USA (Giangreco, 1997:199) mentions the role of a teacher aide who assists the teacher by working with learners who are categorised as having special education needs. Other supports provided for teachers in inclusive schools are reduced class sizes (Hunt & Goetz, 1997:11; O'Shea, 1999:179) and manageable teaching loads (Salend, 1998:131).

These inclusive practices represent ways in which inclusive schools organise their human resources to ensure that they have the capacity to meet diverse learning needs. In addition, schools have to consider how their buildings and the physical environment could constitute a barrier to access. Inclusive schools would therefore need to adapt classrooms and other facilities to allow for access by people who use wheelchairs and other adaptive devices (Morgan & Demchak, 1998:26). Inclusion means that classrooms will consist of learners with a variety of learning needs and instruction has to be planned to ensure that all learners will benefit (Sapon-Shevin, 2007:198; Schnorr, Matott, Paetow & Putnam, 2000:51). In particular, co-operative learning (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996:781; Sapon-Shevin, 2007:185; Udvari-Solner & Thousand, 1995:156) and teaching that accommodates a variety of learning and cognitive styles (Kluth, Biklen & Straut, 2003:19; Udvari-Solner & Thousand, 1995:158) are instructional techniques shown to be well suited to inclusive classrooms.

In addition to using teaching strategies that benefit all learners in an inclusive classroom, teachers have to acknowledge that certain learners will still need planned and specific interventions to address the barriers to learning that they experience. Significant attention in the international literature on inclusion is given to strategies that ensure individual access and participation in the curriculum. This access is often achieved through making accommodations and adaptations to teaching, learning and assessment. The USA uses individualised education programmes (IEPs) which contain a description of a child's educational performance, annual goals and objectives, a statement of which special education or other services a child requires and a description of instructional and assessment modifications that a child requires (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1999 34 CFR 300.347). Aiello and Bullock (1999:99) maintain that the IEP is an essential component of inclusion. Assessment is a significant area where modifications can be made to minimise the impact of any barriers to learning. Modifications may be made in the way the learner performs a task, like having a task read to the learner, or allowing oral response, or, the most frequently used modification, by providing additional time that reduces test anxiety and allows for the efficient use of test strategies (Elliot & Marquart, 2004:350-351; 365). In grading or marking learner performance, learners who experience certain barriers

to learning would not be penalised on criteria like spelling or handwriting and other assessment criteria may be modified (Bradley & Calvin, 1998:27). If modifications have been made to assessments in the light of individual needs, standardised reports would then have to be modified in some way (Bradley & Calvin, 1998:26-28; Bursuck, Plante, Epstein, Jayanthi & McConeghy, 1996: 308).

An individual learner who experiences barriers to learning may need to rely on technology to facilitate access and participation in the general classroom. Technology is available in the form of assistive devices that offer learners independence and the opportunity to enjoy maximum success (Male, 2003:71; Mayberry & Lazarus, 2002:84). Learners may benefit from using word processors, digital personal organisers, multi-media such as film clips and assistive devices, such as microphones and Braille translators.

While not exhaustive, this account of international inclusive practice provides a useful framework for the exploration of South African inclusive practice. However, not all of the international inclusive practices described have been incorporated into South African policy and guidelines, for example, teacher aides and special needs co-ordinators are not mentioned in the White Paper, and specialist support personnel are envisaged to operate at district, rather than school level (DoE, 2005:17). Unlike state schools which are bound by Departmental policy, independent schools enjoy relative freedom and are well placed to respond innovatively to the challenges of inclusive education. They are not lock-stepped into Departmental timetables for change, have relative freedom in recruitment and are accountable primarily to their boards or owners. Independent schools can therefore implement those inclusive practices that enable them to meet the learning needs of the children they serve. Research into the practice of inclusion in the independent schools belonging to ISASA would reveal the extent to which independent schools belonging to ISASA have embraced the inclusive practices described in the international literature.

### **Research design and methodology**

Permission to undertake an investigation in ISASA schools was sought from and granted by the National Director of ISASA. The research question calls for numerical data and descriptive statistics to ascertain the extent and practice of inclusion in ISASA schools, and a self-administered questionnaire completed by the principals of ISASA schools was deemed an appropriate instrument to gather the required data. A questionnaire was formulated that asked for biographical details of responding schools, for the numbers of learners who experienced intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to learning, and for information on key issues in inclusive practice derived from the literature. The questionnaire was refined after a pilot study and with the input of experts in educational research and inclusive education. A comprehensive sampling strategy was used in that all ISASA schools (excluding pre-schools) were sent questionnaires electronically, with follow-up postal questionnaires sent to non-

respondents. Three hundred questionnaires were sent and 120 questionnaires were returned, representing a 40% response rate. This response rate is deemed acceptable in the light of other studies into the independent education sector where a response rate of 32% to 34% has been achieved (Du Toit, 2003:385; Squelch, 1997:130).

The returned questionnaires were checked for accuracy and completeness and schools contacted to supply missing information. The data were analysed descriptively, using the mean as a measure of central tendency and frequency distribution to answer the research question. While the primary focus of the study is on these descriptive statistics, inferential statistics (chi-square and Fisher's exact tests) were used to test hypotheses about the dependence of variables within the study. The findings were recorded and the data interpreted in terms of their significance both within the research study and their broader meaning in the light of reviewed literature (De Vos, Fouché & Venter, 2002:223).

## Findings

### Profile of responding schools

The first section of the questionnaire gathered biographical information about responding schools. It was necessary to determine whether the population of responding schools was broadly representative of ISASA schools, and also to compare the responding schools to independent schools in South Africa as a whole. In terms of school location by province, school size as determined by number of learners enrolled, and school type (primary, high or a combination of primary and high), the responding schools are representative of both ISASA schools and independent schools in South Africa in general. In terms of fees charged, the responding schools are representative of ISASA schools, but not of independent schools in the country as a whole. Tables 1 and 2 indicate the annual tuition fees charged by responding primary and high schools.

**Table 1** Annual tuition fee — primary schools

Primary fee category	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative frequency	Cumulative percentage
R19,000+	39	33.33	39	33.33
R13,000–R19,000	23	19.66	62	52.99
R7,500–R13,000	18	15.38	80	68.38
R5,400–R7,500	7	5.98	87	74.36
R3,750–R5,400	3	2.56	90	76.92
R3,750–	5	4.27	95	81.20
n.a.	22	18.80	117	100.00

**Table 2** Annual tuition fee — secondary schools

Primary fee category	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative frequency	Cumulative percentage
R24,000+	30	25.21	30	25.21
R16,000–R24,000	13	10.92	43	36.13
R8,500–R16,000	7	5.88	50	42.02
R5,400–R8,500	1	0.84	51	42.86
R3,750–R5,400	3	2.52	54	45.38
R3,750–	2	1.68	56	47.06
n.a.	63	52.94	119	100.00

It is evident that the majority of responding primary schools charge in the upper three fee categories, with less than a half of responding primary schools charging in the top fee category. This is consistent with ISASA's observation that more than half of their member schools charge in categories below the top category (ISASA, 2005a:4). Of responding secondary schools, slightly more than half (54%) charge in the top fee category. Most ISASA member schools charge fees in the upper three categories, but less than half of all schools charge in the top fee category (ISASA 2005b). This indicates that the schools responding to this survey are broadly representative of ISASA schools in terms of fees charged. The schools responding to this survey are not, however, representative of independent schools in general in South Africa in terms of fees charged. The HSRC survey of 2002 noted 52.9% of schools in their lowest fee category (R0 – R6,000 per annum) and only 13.8% of schools in their highest fee category (above R18,000) (Du Toit, 2003:387).

Of the 120 schools that responded to the questionnaire, seven were special schools and seven were schools that, for various reasons, do not include learners who experience barriers to learning. A maximum of 106 responses was therefore expected for the questions concerning inclusion and inclusive practices.

#### Inclusion of learners who experience barriers to learning

Barriers to learning may arise from factors intrinsic or extrinsic to learners, or a combination of both. In the questionnaire administered, school principals were given a list of possible intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to learning that learners in their schools might experience. Principals were asked to indicate the number of learners experiencing each barrier, and where learners experience more than one barrier, schools were asked to indicate the learners under the most significant barrier experienced, so that learners were only counted once. Figure 1 indicates the total number of schools reporting barriers to learning experienced by their learners. Schools were counted if they serve at least one learner who experiences the particular barrier. It also indicates the average number of learners experiencing each barrier to learning.



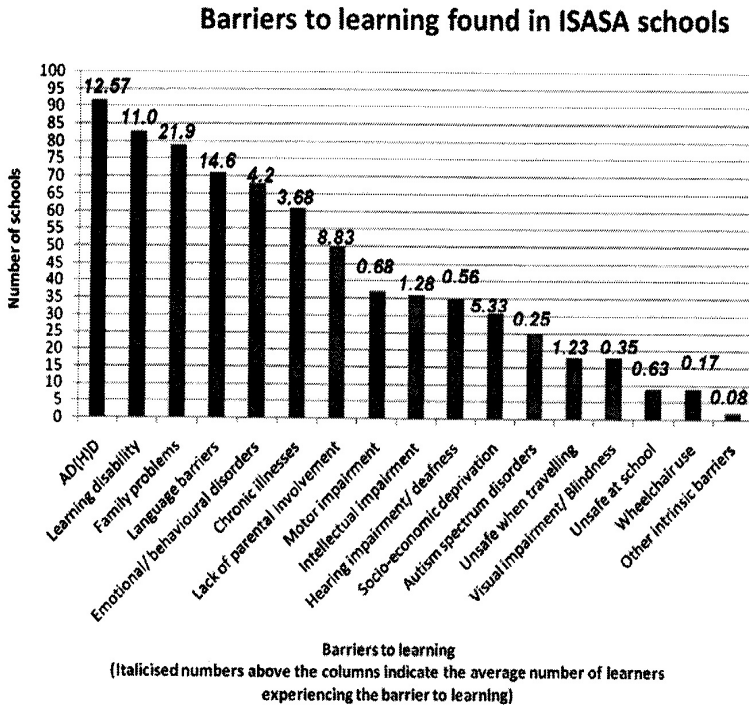


Figure 1 Barriers to learning found in ISASA schools

AD(H)D and learning disability are noted as the barriers reported by the highest number of schools, and family problems and language barriers are the barriers to learning experienced by the highest average number of learners. Lack of safety when travelling or at school is the least reported extrinsic barrier to learning, and visual impairment or blindness and wheelchair use are the least reported intrinsic barriers to learning in responding schools.

Inclusive schools would expect to have regular classrooms that are characterised by a diverse learner population. Table 3 shows that more than half of the schools responding to the survey (52.94%) note that learners who experience barriers to learning comprise 6% or more of their general education classrooms.

There is also a significant diversity in the barriers represented in the schools. Table 4 indicates the frequency with which schools report the number of intrinsic barriers to learning that the school addresses and Table 5 indi-

cates the frequency with which schools report the number of extrinsic barriers to learning that the school addresses.

**Table 3** Proportion of learners who experience barriers to learning in regular classrooms

q 3.2	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative frequency	Cumulative percentage
0%	3	2.94	3	2.94
< 5%	45	44.12	48	47.06
6–9%	13	12.75	61	59.80
10–14%	13	12.75	74	72.55
15–19%	13	12.75	87	85.29
20–24%	8	7.84	95	93.14
25–29%	3	2.94	98	96.08
30–39%	2	1.96	100	98.04
40%	2	1.96	102	100.00

**Table 4** Diversity in schools indicated by number of intrinsic barriers to learning addressed

Number of barriers represented	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative frequency	Cumulative percentage
No intrinsic barriers	2	1.9	2	1.9
1–2 types of intrinsic barriers represented	18	16.98	20	18.88
3 types of intrinsic barriers represented	16	15.09	36	33.97
4 types of intrinsic barriers represented	14	13.20	50	47.17
5–6 or more types of intrinsic barriers represented	54	50.94	104	98.11
No response	2	1.9	106	100.00

**Table 5** Diversity in schools indicated by number of extrinsic barriers to learning addressed

Number of barriers represented	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative frequency	Cumulative percentage
No intrinsic barriers	13	12.26	13	12.26
1 type of extrinsic barriers represented	19	17.92	32	30.18
2 types of intrinsic barriers represented	23	21.70	55	51.88
3 types of intrinsic barriers represented	22	20.75	77	72.63
4 types of intrinsic barriers represented	28	26.42	105	99.05
No response	1	0.94	106	100.00

Fifty-four schools (50.94% of respondents) note that five or more of the intrinsic barriers mentioned in the questionnaire are represented in their schools and 50 schools (47.17% of respondents) note that three or more of the extrinsic barriers mentioned in the questionnaire are represented in their schools. Inclusion is, however, more than providing access to ordinary schools for learners who may have previously been excluded. Human and material support must be provided to enable learners who experience barriers to learning to achieve their potential. This support would be found at school-wide level, classroom level, and at the level of individual learners.

**Inclusive practice**

In keeping with one of inclusion’s fundamental tenets that learners who experience barriers to learning are taught alongside their peers in the general classroom, very few ISASA schools (9 of 106 schools) teach learners who experience barriers to learning in separate classrooms for all or most of the day (Table 6).

**Table 6** Frequency with which learners who experience barriers to learning are taught in separate classes

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative frequency	Cumulative percentage
always	1	0.94	1	0.94
often	6	5.66	7	6.60
occasionally	2	1.89	9	8.49
not at all	97	91.51	106	100.00

Learners who require support receive this either exclusively from their classroom teachers, or, more often, in a ‘pull out’ system where they are withdrawn from the classroom individually or in small groups for a limited period to receive assistance from support personnel. A number of ISASA schools, as reflected in Table 7, report that they have specialist or trained support personnel operating on site at the schools, either in private practice or employed by the schools.

It is evident that a significant majority of responding schools have at least one remedial or special needs teacher available to support learners, and nearly half of the schools have an occupational therapist on site. The presence of specialist support personnel at schools suggests affluence, in terms of the additional salaries paid and venues provided by the schools, and the cost of therapies to parents. To determine whether the presence of support personnel at ISASA schools is related to the affluence of the schools, as determined by fees charged, the following hypotheses were formulated:

**H<sub>0</sub>** There is no relationship between school fees charged and the presence of support personnel at schools.

**H<sub>1</sub>** There is a dependent relationship between school fees charged and the presence of support personnel at schools.

**Table 7** Specialist support personnel available at responding schools

Specialist support personnel	Available in # schools	Total response	Percentage of total response
Remedial or special needs teacher	78	106	73.58
Occupational therapist	51	106	48.11
Speech and hearing therapist	45	106	42.45
Psychologist	37	106	34.91
Play therapist	16	105	15.24
Social worker	15	103	14.56
Physiotherapist	14	106	13.21
Counsellor	9	97	9.28

Chi-square and Fisher's exact tests were performed on compressed contingency tables. (There were many empty cells and cells containing zero observations on the original contingency tables which reduced the accuracy of the chi-square test). When considering primary school fees and specialist support, both chi-square and Fisher's exact tests showed significance on the 0.05 level. The null hypothesis can therefore be rejected at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$ . (The chi-square value of 21.0190 has a probability of 0.0018 which is less than 0.05. The probability calculated by Fisher's exact test is 0.0024 which is less than 0.05 and is therefore significant on the 0.05 level.) This indicates a relation between the number of support personnel in primary schools and the fees charged: more support personnel are found at primary schools with higher fees. When examining the results for the compressed secondary school table, significance only at the 0.10% level of significance is established by Fisher's exact test which is the more reliable test in this instance. The null hypothesis can therefore be rejected at  $\alpha \leq 0.10$ . (The probability is calculated as 0.0747 which is less than 0.1 and therefore significant on the 0.10 level). It is therefore evident that learners in more affluent independent schools are more likely to have access to specialised support personnel.

Responding schools were asked if they had appointed a special needs co-ordinator, and what the nature of the post was. Fifty four schools (51.43%) have special needs co-ordinators and the nature of the post is reflected in Table 8.

Of the schools reporting that they have a special needs co-ordinator, at least half note that the special needs co-ordinator is a person trained in some aspect of learning support, either a special needs teacher, or a psychologist or other therapist. The post is often (in 22 of the 54 schools) a senior appointment. In addition to enjoying the specialised assistance from therapists and other trained personnel, the international literature suggests that teachers themselves in inclusive schools need practical help to ensure that they can meet the additional demands of an inclusive classroom. They will need time to prepare and to plan collaboratively, and will need to be assured of a reasonable work load and class size that enables them to meet the needs of all

the learners in their classes. They may benefit from the presence of an aide in the classroom and will require training. Table 9 indicates the response of schools on a Likert scale of 1 to 4 (1 = often, 2 = sometimes, 3 = very occasionally, 4 = not at all) the extent to which various ways of supporting teachers were used.

**Table 8** Nature of the post: SENCO

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative frequency	Cumulative percentage
The SENCO is a general classroom teacher who assumes this as an additional responsibility	11	20.37	11	20.37
The SENCO is a specific post filled by a trained special needs teacher	14	25.93	25	46.30
The SENCO is a specific post filled by a psychologist or other therapist	7	12.96	32	59.26
The SENCO is a senior appointment carrying the status of HOD or deputy	14	25.93	46	85.19
The SENCO is a senior appointment filled by a general classroom teacher	2	3.70	48	88.89
The SENCO is a senior appointment filled by a psychologist or other therapist	3	5.56	51	94.44
The SENCO is a senior appointment filled by a trained special needs teacher	3	5.56	54	100.00

**Table 9** Support for teachers

	Often	Sometimes	Very occasionally	Not at all	Total
Aides providing classroom assistance are assigned to teachers	14	15	20	55	104
Timetables are adjusted to allow for collaboration	20	35	14	35	104
Class sizes are managed	56	16	9	24	105
Teaching load is reduced	16	29	14	46	105
Extra-mural responsibilities are reduced	20	22	15	46	103
Training is provided	25	45	15	20	105

With the exception of the provision of aides for classroom assistance, the mean for all the items of support falls within category 2 of the Likert scale, i.e. “sometimes”. The management of class sizes is used most often in support of teachers, and aides or facilitators are least often provided (the mean of the response to the latter item is 3.11 with a standard deviation of 1.12, indicating very occasional use).

In addition to ensuring that human resources are oriented towards the inclusion effort, schools have to make their facilities accessible to those who experience barriers to learning. Schools were asked in the questionnaire to indicate the extent to which their buildings, school grounds and specialist facilities are accessible to a person using a wheelchair by responding to a Likert scale where 1 = all, 2 = most, 3 = about half, and 4 = less than half. Table 10 indicates the frequency with which schools responded in each category.

**Table 10** Accessibility of school buildings, grounds and specialist teaching facilities to people using wheelchairs

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative frequency	Cumulative percentage
Accessibility of school buildings to people using wheelchairs				
all	13	12.75	13	12.75
most	24	23.53	37	36.27
about half	32	31.37	69	67.65
less than half	33	32.35	102	100.00
Accessibility of school grounds to people using wheelchairs				
all	20	19.05	20	19.05
most	41	39.05	61	58.10
about half	15	14.29	76	72.38
less than half	29	27.62	105	100.00
Accessibility of specialist teaching equipment to people using wheelchairs				
all	13	12.50	13	12.50
most	22	21.15	35	33.65
about half	16	15.38	51	49.04
less than half	47	45.19	98	94.23
n.a. (Primary school)	6	5.77	104	100.00

Table 10 reveals that less than half of the schools responding to this question (36.28%) indicate that “all” or “most” of their school buildings are accessible to people who use wheelchairs. More than half of the schools (58.1%) indicate that “all” or “most” of their grounds are accessible to people who use wheelchairs. The table also reveals that 60.57% of schools indicated that “about half” or “less than half” of their specialist teaching equipment, like

laboratories and home economics equipment, would be accessible to a person who uses a wheelchair. Some primary schools indicated that they did not use specialist teaching equipment so the question was not applicable to them. Therefore grounds are most likely to be accessible to people who use wheelchairs, whereas specialist teaching facilities are least likely to be accessible.

The various strategies described thus far show how ISASA schools have promoted inclusive practice at school-wide level. School-wide inclusive practice is the foundation on which effective classroom inclusive practice rests and it is at classroom level that specific ways have to be found to accommodate diverse and individual learners. Instruction needs to be planned in such a way that all learners will benefit, and, in particular, individual learners who experience specific barriers to learning may need interventions and curriculum modifications to enable them to experience success. ISASA schools indicated on a Likert scale (1 = Often, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Very occasionally, 4 = Not at all) the use of classroom strategies that address diverse learning needs. Table 11 indicates the average response from schools, based on the calculation of the mean.

By using a ratio of “use always” to “total responses”, it was possible to rank the strategies used. The strategies used most often, are, in order from most used: allowing extra time; modifying the classroom environment; hand-writing concessions; co-operative learning; spelling concessions; modification of assessment tasks; reading assessment tasks to learners; Individualised Education Programmes (IEPs); teaching to various cognitive styles and oral assessments. The strategies which are least used are, in order from least used: assistive devices, personal organizers, word processors, non-standard reports and multi-media.

The data presented represent the responses from principals to questions about their learner populations and the various strategies the schools employ to ensure that learners who experience barriers to learning have access to the school and are provided with appropriate support. There are limits to the extent to which data gathered from a self-administered questionnaire can be generalised, particularly when there is a low response rate and missing information. Despite these limitations, the analysed data can be used to answer the research question posed.

## **Discussion**

This study was undertaken with the goal of describing, through the analysis of data collected from independent (ISASA) schools practising inclusion, the extent to which learners who experience barriers to learning are included in these schools and the school-wide and classroom practices that facilitate inclusion. A research question was formulated, the first part of which asked for the extent to which learners who experience barriers to learning are being included in independent (ISASA) schools. This was answered by revealing the number of schools that include learners who experience barriers to learning and the average numbers of learners who experience barriers to learning. The list of barriers to learning given in the questionnaire was not accompanied by

**Table 11** Mean of responses to the use of classroom strategies

Classroom strategy	Average response	Mean	SD	Total
Co-operative learning, including peer-tutoring	Often	1.78	0.84	99
Teaching to accommodate preferred learning and cognitive styles	Often	1.96	0.79	103
Individualised Education Programmes (IEPs) are formulated for learners who experience barriers to learning	Sometimes	2.36	1.10	105
Modifying the classroom environment for learners who experience barriers to learning (e.g. seating arrangements, lighting etc.)	Often	1.81	1.00	105
Modifying assessment tasks for learners who experience barriers to learning (e.g. reduced or alternative tasks)	Often	1.89	0.89	104
Modifying the assessment performance of learners who experience barriers to learning by reading the task to the learner	Sometimes	2.02	0.95	105
Modifying the assessment performance of learners who experience barriers to learning by allowing oral response	Sometimes	2.29	0.97	104
When marking, spelling concessions are made for learners who experience barriers to learning	Often	1.76	0.79	104
When marking, handwriting concessions are made for learners who experience barriers to learning	Often	1.68	0.80	105
Extra time is given to learners who experience barriers to learning for the completion of tasks	Often	1.60	0.85	105
Learners who experience barriers to learning receive non-standard or modified term reports	Very occasionally	3.01	1.07	105
Using multi-media (e.g. film clips, slides and tape recordings) to benefit learners who experience barriers to learning	Sometimes	2.84	0.98	104
Learners who experience barriers to learning use word processors	Very occasionally	3.10	1.06	105
Learners who experience barriers to learning use digital personal organizers	Very occasionally	3.57	0.78	105
Learners who experience barriers to learning use assistive devices (e.g. microphones, Braille translators)	Very occasionally	3.65	0.83	105

definitions of the barriers to learning. It is therefore possible that different principals may have used different criteria when reporting on learners who



experience barriers to learning. These results should therefore be regarded as indicative of trends, rather than exact results. Given that AD(H)D is one of the most common childhood disorders, with a prevalence of between 3% and 6%, and even up to 20% of children worldwide, (Holz & Lessing, 2002:103), it is not surprising to find that a large majority of ISASA schools record serving learners who experience AD(H)D. Less than a third of responding schools serve learners who experience barriers to learning that could represent specialised tuition needs (e.g. Sign Language or Braille) or which could require significant adaptation of curriculum (for example, where learners have intellectual impairments) or facility (for wheelchair use). The fact that these less common barriers to learning are reported at all is encouraging. It suggests that there are ISASA schools willing to include learners with higher support needs. The low incidence of socio-economic deprivation as an extrinsic barrier to learning should be seen in the light of the school fee requirements described earlier (Tables 1 and 2). The majority of responding schools have been noted as charging in the higher fee categories which suggests that they draw learners from less socio-economically disadvantaged communities. The variety of barriers represented in the schools and the percentage of learners who experience barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms suggest that most ISASA schools are committed to ensuring diversity in their learner population.

The second part of the research question is concerned with the practices that facilitate the inclusion of learners who experience barriers to learning in the responding schools. A literature review indicated a wide range of inclusive practices used in developed countries. These inclusive practices include school-wide, classroom and individual level supports for teachers and learners. At school-wide level, it has been revealed that in ISASA schools various inclusive practices are used to provide support and accommodate diversity. Like inclusive schools in developed countries, many ISASA schools make trained support personnel (special needs teachers and various therapists) available at the schools. Given that learning disability is recognised as a frequently occurring barrier to learning (Figure 1), it is not unexpected to find that remedial or special needs teachers are found in many ISASA schools. Other frequently occurring support specialists include occupational therapists, speech therapists and psychologists. These are congruent with the frequent occurrence of learning disabilities, language barriers and family problems as barriers to learning (Figure 1). The presence of support personnel is, however, linked to the affluence of the school, and learners in more affluent schools are more likely to find additional support personnel at their schools. Like schools in the United Kingdom, many ISASA schools employ special needs co-ordinators. The fact that in many schools this is a senior appointment suggests that a high value is placed on the support of learners who experience barriers to learning.

ISASA schools are using some of the strategies described in the literature to provide support for teachers. It is most often noted that class size is managed. Independent schools are known for their low learner to educator ratio of 1:16.2 (DoE, 2006:4) and it is not clear whether effective support for

teachers who teach learners who experience barriers to learning is the reason for, or the result of small classes. The low incidence of classroom facilitators in ISASA schools is noteworthy, as the use of facilitators is a well documented inclusive practice in developed countries. Adjustments to timetables, teaching loads and extra-mural responsibilities are not often made, but training, which is regarded as essential for the implementation of inclusion, is being provided.

A learner, parent or visitor who uses a wheelchair may find difficulty in accessing many ISASA schools. Not many ISASA schools include learners who experience intrinsic barriers to learning that require wheelchair use (see Figure 1), so wheelchair access may not be seen as a priority. This may be compounded by the fact that independent schools would themselves have to fund the modification of facilities for wheelchair access and there may be insufficient justification to do so. As ISASA schools pursue inclusivity, attention will need to be given to access by people using wheelchairs, particularly to school buildings and teaching facilities.

In a classroom consisting of learners with diverse learning needs, teachers can employ a number of strategies that enhance learning for all learners, as well as providing specific support to those who experience barriers to learning. In ISASA schools, use is often made of co-operative learning and teaching for diverse learning styles. These are practices commended in the literature on inclusion and are indicative that teachers are applying instructional techniques well suited to diverse classrooms. Even if buildings are not always suited to access by people who use wheelchairs, teachers are often modifying their classroom environments to accommodate learners who experience barriers to learning. This may be related to the relatively high incidence of AD(H)D reported in schools, as positioning of learners who experience this barrier to learning is a way of addressing this barrier (Green & Chee, 1997: 103). Congruent with international inclusive practice, assessment modifications are used to varying extents. IEPs, by contrast, are only “sometimes” used in ISASA schools, although the use of IEPs is well documented in the literature.

Three of the four classroom strategies that are only used “very occasionally” are those that are technologically sophisticated and possibly expensive. Word processors could benefit learners who experience physical barriers and those who experience learning and language difficulties and digital personal organisers could assist learners who experience difficulty in organising their school lives. The cost and fragility of these devices may mitigate against their use. Given the relatively low numbers of learners who experience sensory and other impairments in ISASA schools (see Figure 1), it is to be expected that assistive devices are used “very occasionally” and many schools report that these are not used at all. Modified termly reports are also used “very occasionally”. Where modified assessment tasks and IEPs are used to accommodate learners who experience barriers to learning, it would be expected that these learners would receive school reports that would reflect the modified curriculum requirements. In ISASA schools, it seems that at least some learners on IEPs, or for whom assessment tasks are being modified, are not

receiving reports that reflect this.

A description of these practices, while not necessarily applicable to all contexts, serves to show the commitment of many ISASA schools towards accommodating diverse learners, and in particular, learners who experience barriers to learning. Relevant support for these learners is being provided through the inclusive practices described in literature from the developed world, and implemented in many responding ISASA schools.

## **Conclusion**

This study was motivated by the belief that inclusive education in South Africa has a role to play in the development of an inclusive society. The research base in inclusive education in this country is small, and an identified gap in the research has been the extent and practice of inclusion in the independent sector. With this study we have addressed this gap and established the extent and practice of inclusion of independent schools belonging to the Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA). Because each classroom situation reflects the unique and complex interplay of teacher, learners and the wider context, the findings and discussion of inclusive practice should not be seen as prescriptive, but rather as examples of what strategies could be effective in supporting learners who experience barriers to learning. Therefore it cannot be expected to generalise the findings of this study across all contexts. It is possible, however, to make various recommendations for schools in South Africa wishing to progress towards greater inclusivity.

Those schools (ISASA schools, other independent schools and state schools) wishing to pursue inclusivity and enhance their support for learners who experience barriers to learning can learn valuable lessons from the schools that participated in the survey. It seems that ready access to support personnel is an important way of meeting learning needs, and ways need to be found to make such support accessible to a greater number of learners. Because of the additional challenges of teaching a diverse learner population, teachers themselves need support, time release and training. Accessibility of school grounds, buildings and teaching facilities for people who use wheelchairs should be considered as an important indicator of a commitment to inclusivity. The use in ISASA schools of a variety of classroom practices that acknowledge the diversity among learners and differentiate according to individual learning suggests that these practices should be encouraged in inclusive classrooms. In these ways, schools can learn from one another and can increase their repertoire of strategies that enable support, address barriers to learning and provide quality education for their learners.

It is envisaged that this study will stimulate further academic discourse and research in the field of inclusive education in South Africa. It suggests that inclusion, despite its demand on human and material resources, is achievable in the South African context and that, by applying various inclusive practices, the support needs of learners who experience barriers to learning can be met in ordinary schools.

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