

Press Release

Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD)

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Special needs courses to be part of teacher training colleges' curriculum

Trainees joining primary teachers training colleges would be required to study subjects that will prepare them to handle children with special needs, once the proposed curriculum is rolled out.

This will be a departure from the current situation where the teachers are taken through a system that solely focuses on how to teach children, who do not suffer from partial or profound hearing and visual impairment, physical and mental challenges.

The 'Basic Education Curriculum Framework' (BECF) spearheaded by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) seeks to replace the current 8-4-4 system that has been criticised for being too exam oriented at the expense of other learners' abilities.

KICD Director, Dr Julius Jwan said the piloting that is targeting more than 30,000 learners will help review the curriculum further to ensure it is universally acceptable before being implemented in all schools.

He noted that unlike before, representatives of learners with special needs were part of the education reforms to ensure their interests are catered for.

"Teachers trained on special needs for various categories of learners are part of the pilot phase. We are able to tap into their experience to enrich the competency based curriculum," Dr Jwan said in Nairobi.

Early Childhood Education (ECD) teachers will also be required to go through the same training process to be fully recognized as competent to teach-early years education-which is the first level of the education system.

"At the moment, teachers from the colleges are just trained on how to teach regular learners. After the P1 training, they can decide to go for a Diploma in Special Needs Education (SNE)," KICD Senior Assistant Director-Special Need Education Beth Kahuthia said.

Every teacher joining college will be trained on special needs, according to a draft framework for Teacher Education in Kenya that once approved, will guide teacher training colleges.

"In the teacher education framework being designed, we have considered teachers who will be working with children with special needs," Mrs Kinuthia said.

"The concepts given to teachers will enhance inclusive education where learners with special needs will enjoy learning without feeling lost."

The draft framework whose findings are based on a countrywide study will go a long way in ensuring teaching and learning materials developed for regular learners are friendly to those with special needs.

"We have those with hearing impairment. The physically and mentally handicapped. Children

with profound and partial visual impairment can't share some learning resources. Those without hands need page turners and pen holders," Mrs Kinuthia said.

This group of learners has remained a disadvantaged lot over the years because they have been sitting the same national examinations under a curriculum that does not cater for their shortcomings.

This curriculum seeks to address such inadequacies that have left parents with disabled children feeling neglected, besides, the current education system failing to recognize and nurture their talents and interests.

Some parents hide their children in homes denying them the right to free and compulsory primary and subsidized secondary education, due to fears that the children cannot compete with the rest of the learners.

Out of the 470 schools that the government has identified for this academic term's piloting of the proposed curriculum, two in each county must be enrolling learners with special needs.

Mr Elmad Songe and Mrs Grace Rasugu Chief Curriculum Development Officers dealing with learners with various forms of disability said part of those trained are curriculum support officers on special needs education, to assist in monitoring of implementation of the education reforms.

"We have distributed the teachers handling learners with special needs in a balanced manner to get accurate feedback that will come handy in fine-tuning this curriculum," Mr Songe said.

He said, under the new curriculum, even children with serious disabilities who find it difficult to attend schools will be reached at their homes to benefit from education.

"We have developed home based intervention programmes to cater for them. Neighbouring schools must be able to support such children at home. Some of the special schools are far from some homes," Mr Songe observed.

Mrs Rasugu explained that the competency based curriculum provides an opportunity for learners with special needs to excel in their areas of interest, without feeling neglected

"The 8-4-4 curriculum places all learners in one basket of academia. It doesn't emphasise on identifying and nurturing talents. The proposed curriculum recognizes that a learner could be good in drawing but academically weak," Mrs Rasugu said.

The curriculum developers denied claims that foreigners took a leading role in formulation of the ambitious education reforms saying Kenyans have been the ones driving the process.

"This has been a real participatory process by the Kenyans for the Kenyans. We carried out a needs assessment and we are still engaging the public as we move to the next phase of testing the syllabus in selected schools," Mrs Kinuthia said.

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