

INTEGRATING HANDICAPPED STUDENTS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Introduction

It has almost become a truism that including students with disabilities in mainstream schools is the preferred form of provision. Most countries in Europe have this as their goal and it has been the policy of the European Union for some years. But what is the current situation in relation to this goal for secondary education? This paper will use data gathered by OECD to throw light on this question. The data come from two sources. Quantitative data are gathered in conjunction with the OECD work on educational indicators (OECD, 2000, 2003). Qualitative data was gathered as part of an OECD/CERI study on including disabled students in mainstream secondary schools (OECD, 1999).

Statistical data

Before presenting the quantitative data, it is necessary to begin with some words of caution. Making cross-national comparisons in this area is full of difficulties and limits the nature and extent of comparison that can be made. First, national data sets are generally weak especially with reference to handicapped students in mainstream settings. Second, definitions of categories of handicap used for statistical work are inconsistent across countries and often quite vague, thus making comparisons uncertain. For instance, in France two different systems are used in parallel (in health and education). In Germany the definition of students described as partially hearing or deaf is as follows:

Children or youth who suffer a loss of hearing of more than 90db in the frequency range above 500cps or whose ability to hear is affected in such a way that even with hearing aids they need special education; or deaf students who, irrespective of their actual deficiency in hearing capacity, are not capable of noticing acoustic signals of their environment and making use of them for acquiring speech, speech hearing and an active or passive phonetic speech competence.

Whereas in France, for education, the following applies:

Disorders in this category concern not only the ear but also its ancillary parts and its functions. The most important sub-division is that of hearing impairment. The term "deaf"

should only be applied to persons whose hearing impairment is such that it cannot be helped by any hearing aid. Like blindness, deafness is a serious sensory impairment.

In addition, countries vary very substantially in the number of categories they use for collecting data. In the UK, at present, only one category is used while in Switzerland there are ten. In fact, if the broader concept of special education is used, which would include all students having difficulties in learning, the problems multiply considerably.

Third, the quality of the data varies across the stages of education. Typically becoming more limited as students go through the system.

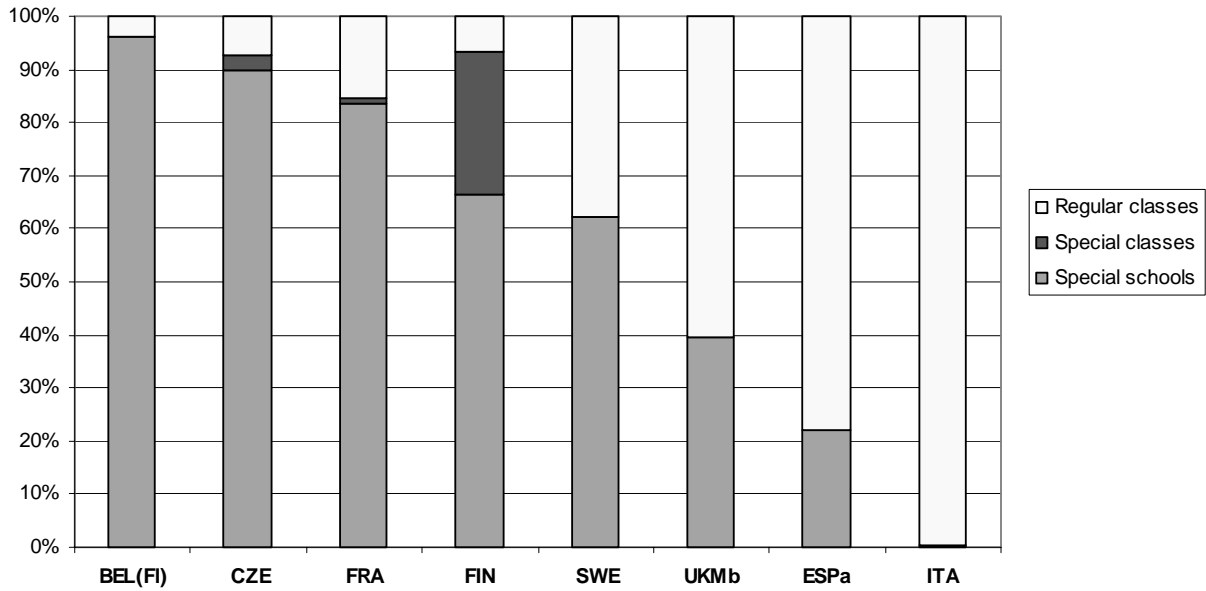
Fourth, in some countries not all students are included under the aegis of the Ministry of Education. In France, for instance, a substantial proportion of handicapped students are administered by the Department of Health. Thus the statistical data are not always complete.

Achieving cross-national comparability

Further words are in order concerning the data that are used in this paper and the method to maximise international comparability. The data used are gathered from national Ministries of Education. To all extents and purposes it is participation data. It is supplied by national representatives according to a format provided by the OECD/CERI (see OECD, 2000). As a result, the data is gathered by national categories of disability and then transposed into a format that brings together a headcount of all students who are receiving additional resources to help them access the curriculum. This group is then broken down by the countries to identify those students whose difficulties in learning are thought to be due mainly to organic difficulties or impairments. International consistency is assured through discussions at subsequent meetings and the category thus formed is called Cross-National Category A. (A full discussion of this procedure is described in OECD, 2000, 2003). It is data from this category following the OECD re-classification procedure that is used mainly in this paper.

One of the indicators developed at OECD shows where students with disabilities are educated - in regular classes, special schools or special classes. Chart 5.8 presents the data for lower secondary education for the countries that are able to supply it - Belgium (Flemish Community) (BEL(FI)), the Czech Republic (CZE), Finland (FIN), Sweden (SWE), France (FRA), United Kingdom (UKM), Spain (ESP) and Italy (ITA). In the chart, white bars indicate proportions in regular classes, black bars the proportions in special classes and grey bars the proportions in special schools. As may be clearly seen countries vary hugely in terms of place of education with the majority of disabled students in Belgium (FI.), the Czech Republic, Finland, France and Sweden being in special schools in contrast to Italy where only a very small proportion is in special schools. The UK and Spain occupy intermediate positions. The Czech Republic, Finland, France, Spain and the UK also make use of special classes, although for Spain the data are included in the special school data and for the UK the figure is hidden in the estimate for regular classes.

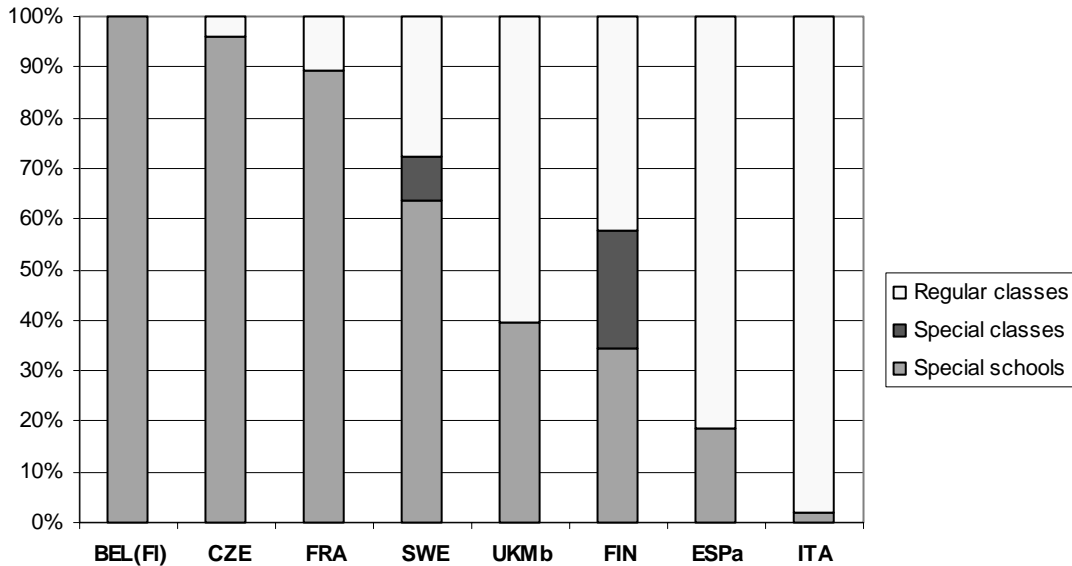
Chart 5.8. Percentages of students receiving additional resources in lower secondary education in cross-national category A by location



a Students in special classes are included in special schools
 b Students in special classes are included in regular schools

Chart 5.10 gives the equivalent breakdown for students in upper secondary education. Data is available for Belgium (Fl.), the Czech Republic, Sweden, France, the UK, Finland, Spain and Italy. As for the lower secondary data large differences exist between the countries in the type of provision. However France now educates a greater proportion of disabled students at this stage in special schools while Finland makes greater use of regular classes. In contrast to the lower secondary level, Italy also uses some special schools at the upper secondary stage of education.

Chart 5.10. Percentages of students receiving additional resources in upper secondary education in cross-national category A by location

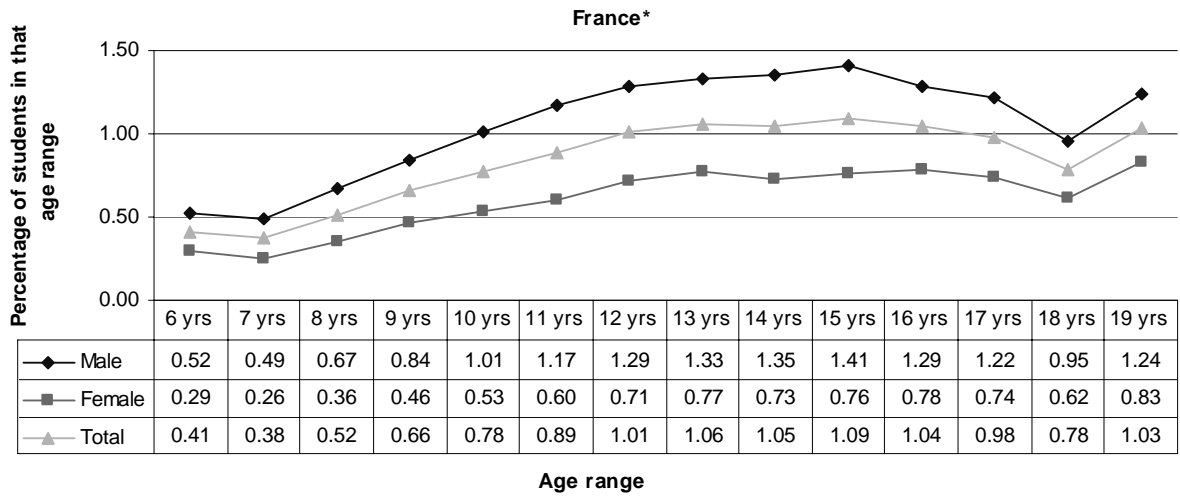


a Students in special classes are included in special schools
 b Students in special classes are included in regular schools

Handicapped students not administered by the Ministry of Education

Few countries were able to provide data on students not administered by the education system. Earlier work suggest that the proportions are quite small (OECD, 1995). France however, does keep data, perhaps because a relatively large proportion is administered by the Ministry of Health. Chart 6.6 shows the proportions at ages 6 to 19. As may be seen, the numbers increase with age to an asymptote at 15 then decline to age 18 and increase again at age 19. To improve comparisons, these figures have been added to those for France in special schools in the previous charts and this has the effect of increasing considerably the proportions provided by considering only the data from the Ministry of Education.

Chart 6.6. Age distribution of students not registered within the education system



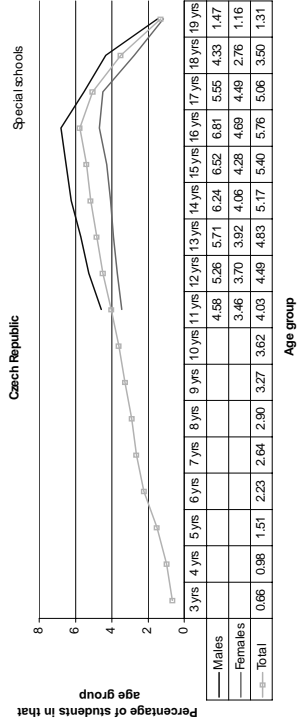
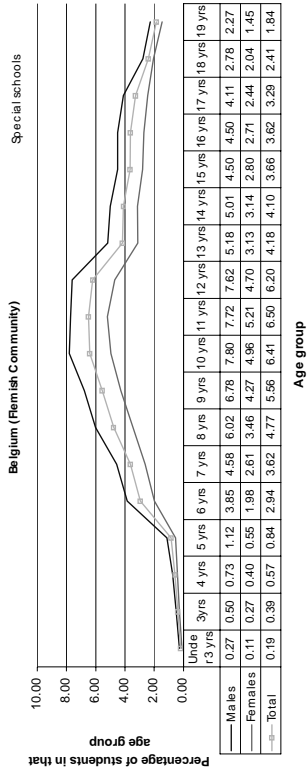
* Students not administered by Ministry of Education

Data based on age and location

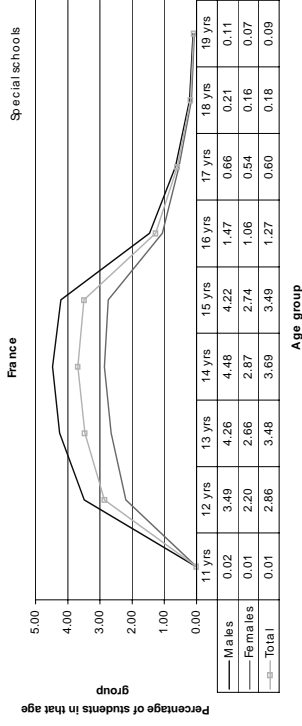
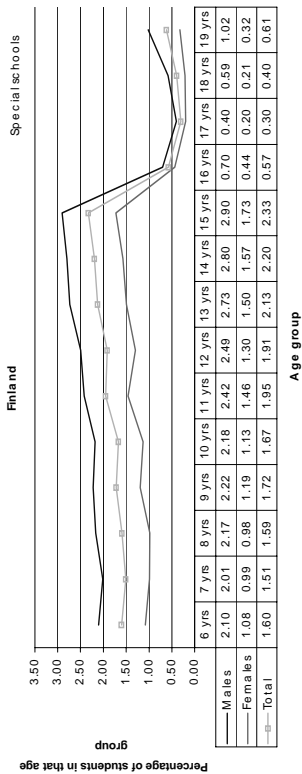
Data are also gathered by age and by location. In this case either special schools or special classes. This gives some indication of movement from one form of provision to another. In special schools for most countries the proportions of students in special schools tends to rise to an asymptote and then to decline and this decline begins at different ages in different countries. For instance in the Netherlands it starts at age 13 and in Finland at age 16. In Spain, on the other hand, there is a steady increase in proportions as age increases.

As for the special school data, in special classes most countries follow the increase followed by a decline model possibly indicating that students on average tend to stay in one form of provision or another. France is an exception showing an increase to the age of 11 followed by a large dip at age 12 and then a steady increase. Comparing this data with that for special schools would suggest that students who are failing in special classes at age 11 or who are unlikely to make a successful transition to the secondary school are transferred into special schools. Special classes are then used in the lower and upper secondary period for students who need special help.

Chart 6.3. Age distribution of DDD students receiving additional resources in special schools

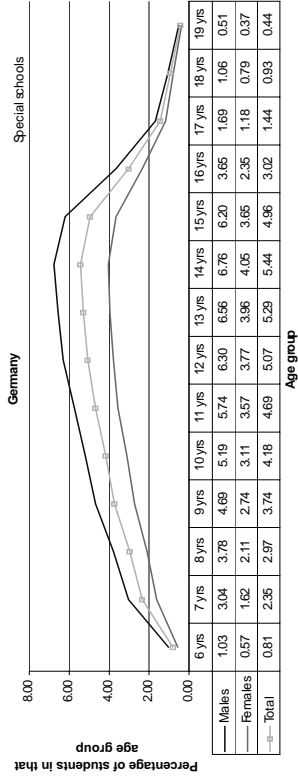


Note: Data not available for children in the age group under 3 yrs, or separate male female split below 11 yrs. It includes students without handicaps (?)

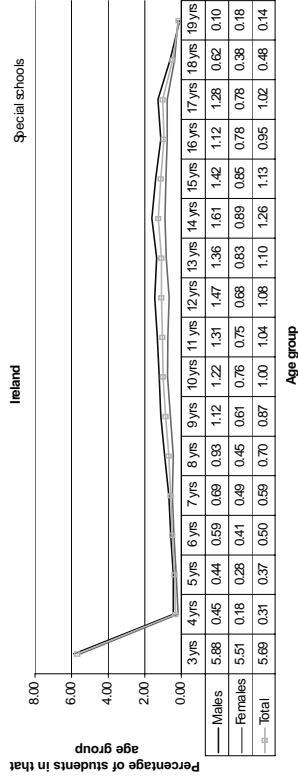


Note: Data not available for children in age groups under 6 yrs

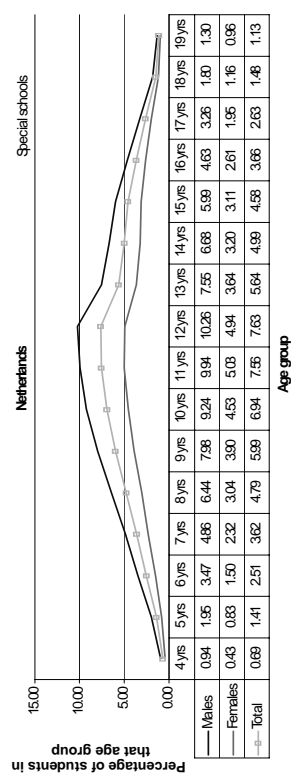
Note: Data type of provision coded as 'not applicable' under 9 yrs, 9–10 yrs negligible.



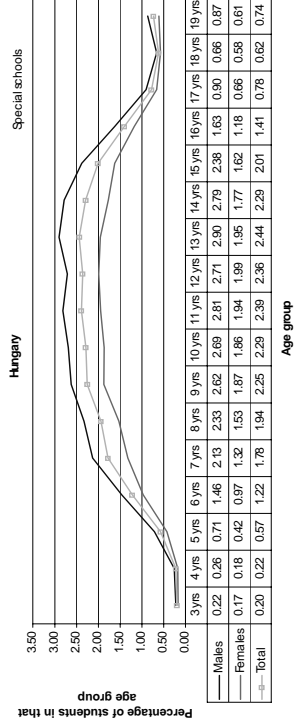
Note: number of children in age groups under 6 yrs is zero



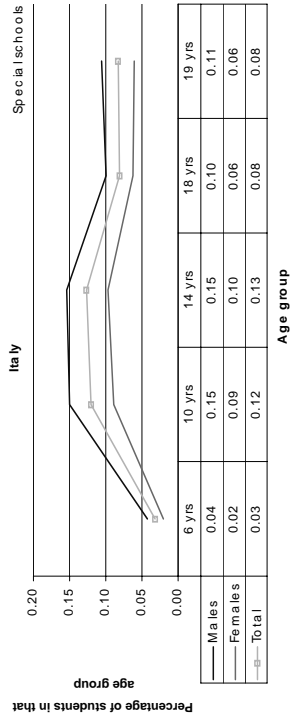
Note: number of children in the age group under 3 yrs is zero



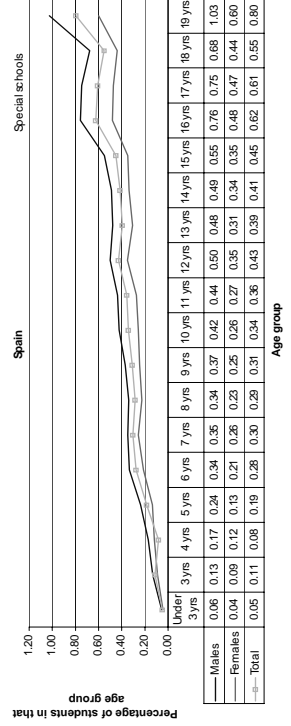
Note: Number of students in age group under 3 yrs is zero

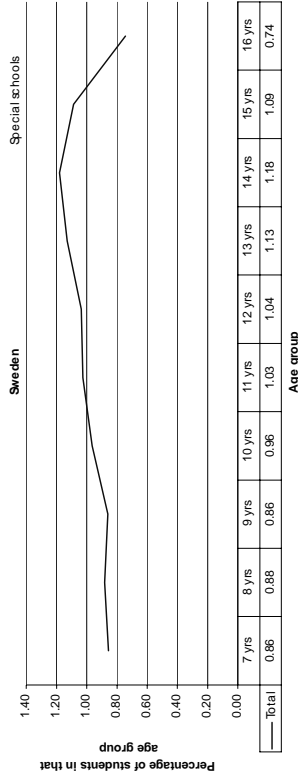


Note: number of children in the age group under 3 yrs is zero



Note: children in age groups under 3 yrs-5 yrs are included in the 6 yrs age group, students in the 7-9 yrs age groups are included in the 10 yrs age group, students in the 11-13 yrs age groups are included in the 14 yrs age group, students in the 15-17 yrs age groups are included in the 18 yrs age group





Note: No provision for children in age groups 6 yrs and under; 17 yrs and above data not available. Estimations based on assumption that the school year corresponds with the age of students.

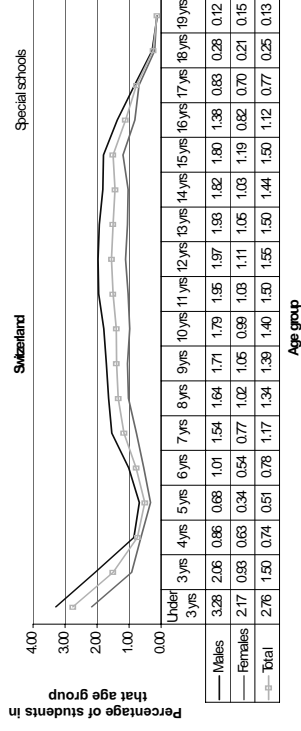
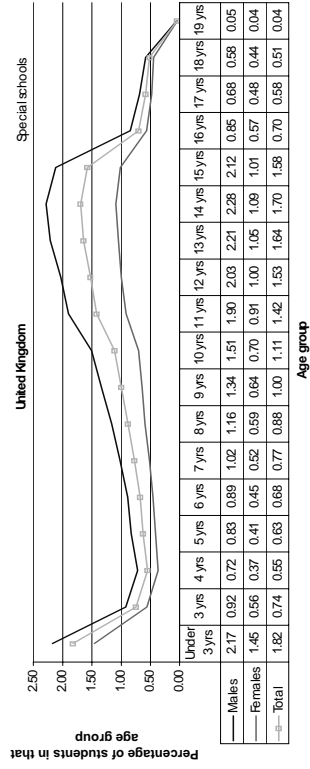
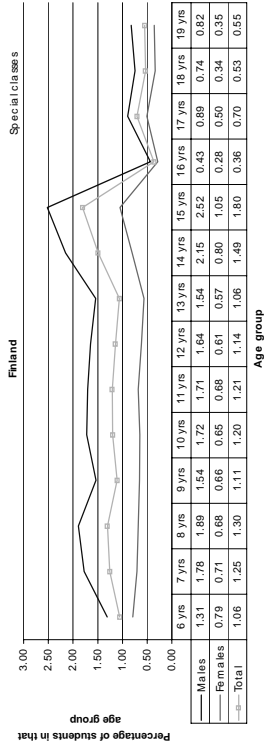
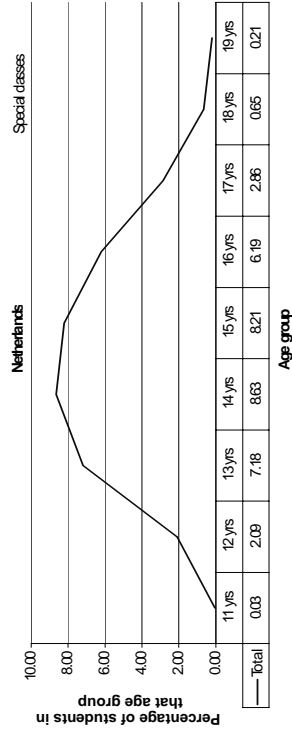


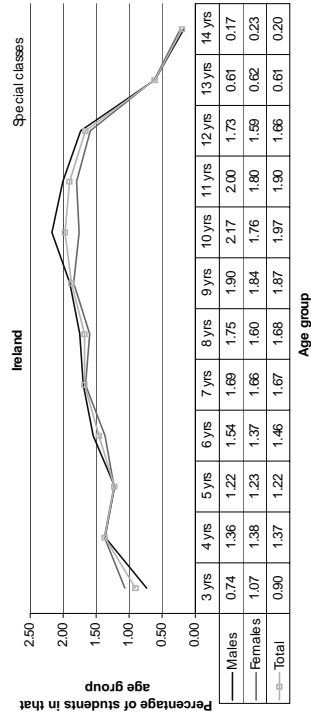
Chart 6.4. Age distribution of DDD students receiving additional resources in special classes



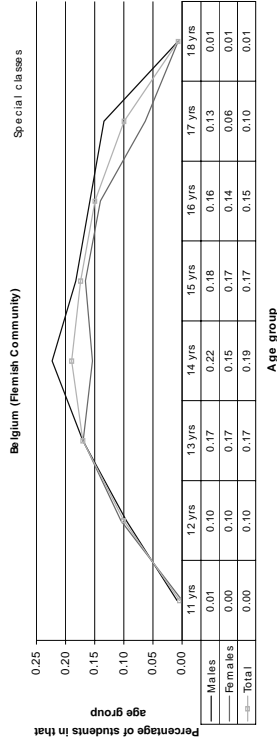
Note: Data no available for children under 6 yrs



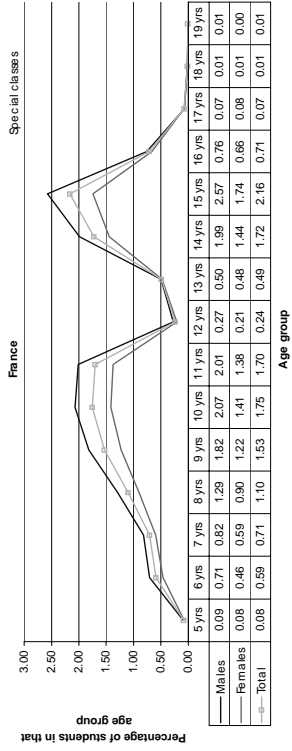
Note: number of students in age groups under 11 yrs is zero



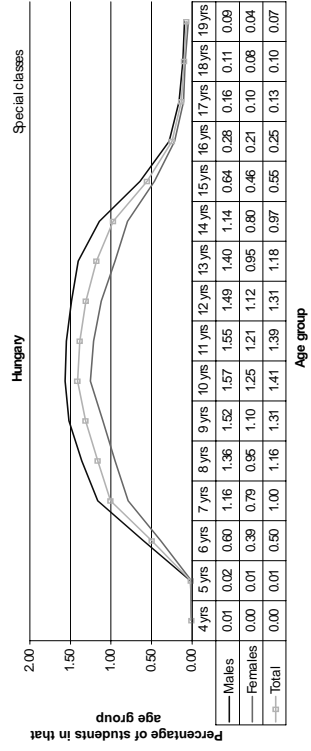
Note: Data for children in age group under 3 yrs included in 3yrs; data for students over 14 yrs not available



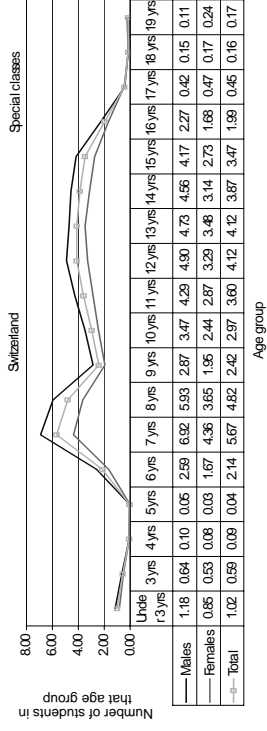
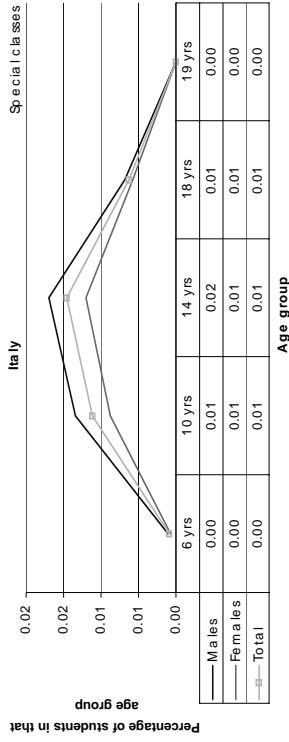
Note: age breakdown in special classes is available for secondary education only



Note: This type of provision coded as 'not applicable' under 5 yrs



Note: Number of students in age group under 3 yrs is zero



Note: children in age groups under 3 yrs-5 yrs are included in the 6 yrs age group, students in the 7-9 yrs age groups are included in the 10 yrs age group, students in the 11-13 yrs age groups are included in the 14 yrs age group, students in the 15-17 yrs age groups are included in the 18 yrs age group

In summary these data, with one or two exceptions, at the general level show a rather similar pattern with students who are failing to be successful in school being progressively placed in special provision and not returning since the proportions tend to increase over the age variable. However, they also show that the experiences for any individual student, in terms of placement will vary very substantially from one country to another. (For a full appraisal of the situation see OECD 2000 and OECD 2003. The issue is too complex to discuss in detail here)

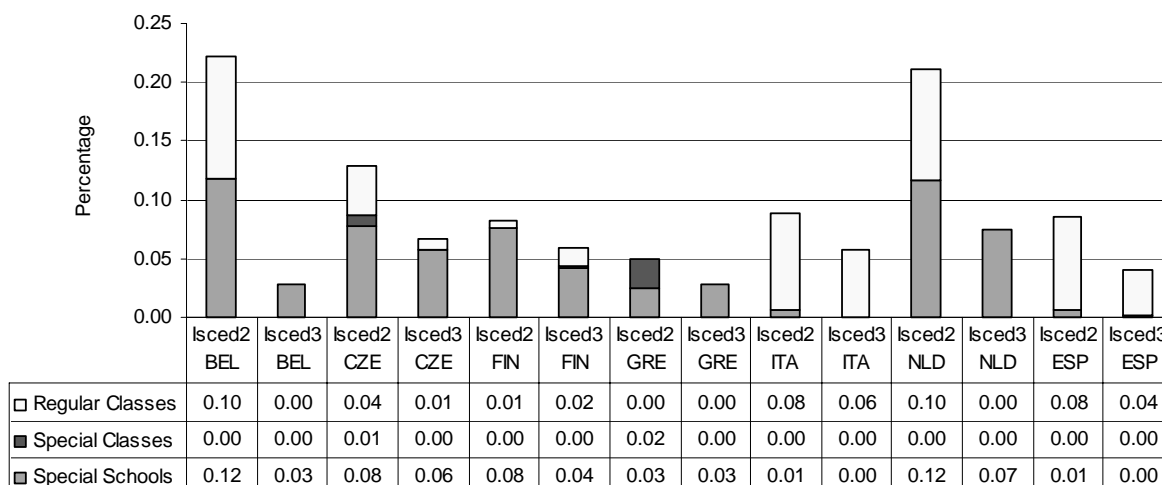
Data based on individual categories of handicap

It is also informative to look at data from the perspective of individual categories.

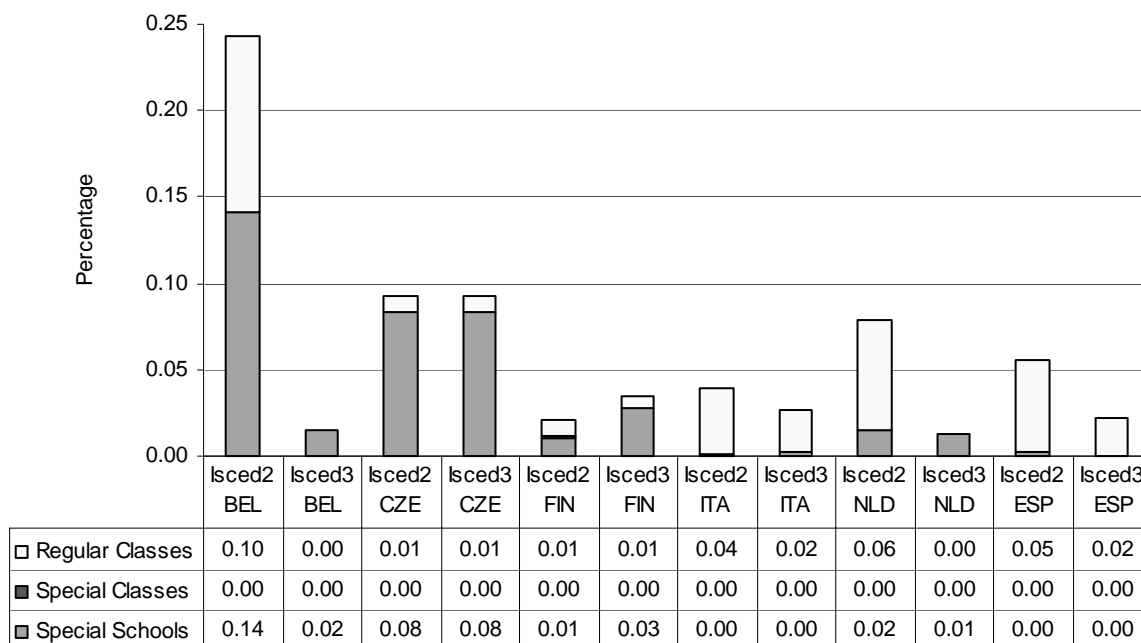
The following charts show data for four categories of disability: deaf and partially hearing, blind and partially sighted, physically handicapped and emotional and behavioural difficulties. The data are presented for lower and upper secondary education separately and broken down by country and place of education - regular classes, special classes and special schools.

As maybe seen for all of these categories, in all countries that can supply data, there are proportionally fewer students receiving resources for their disability in upper secondary in contrast to lower secondary education. The only exception is in the Czech Republic where there are slightly more students in upper secondary than lower secondary with physical disabilities. Even in special schools where students might be expected to stay on the proportions are substantially reduced in most countries.

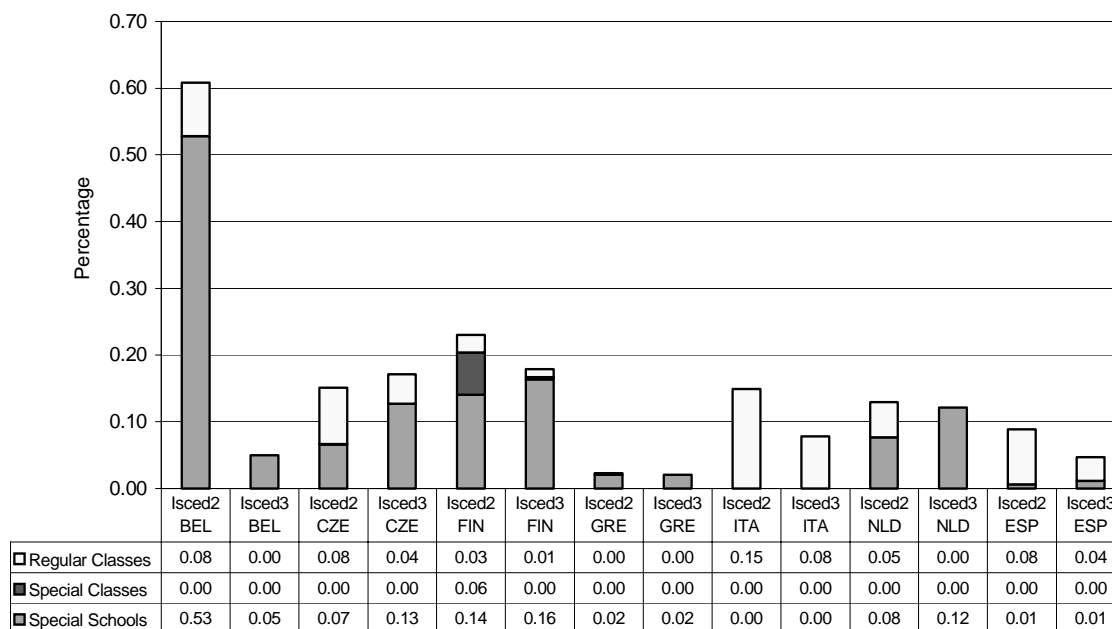
Percentage of hearing impaired and deaf students in lower and upper secondary education by location



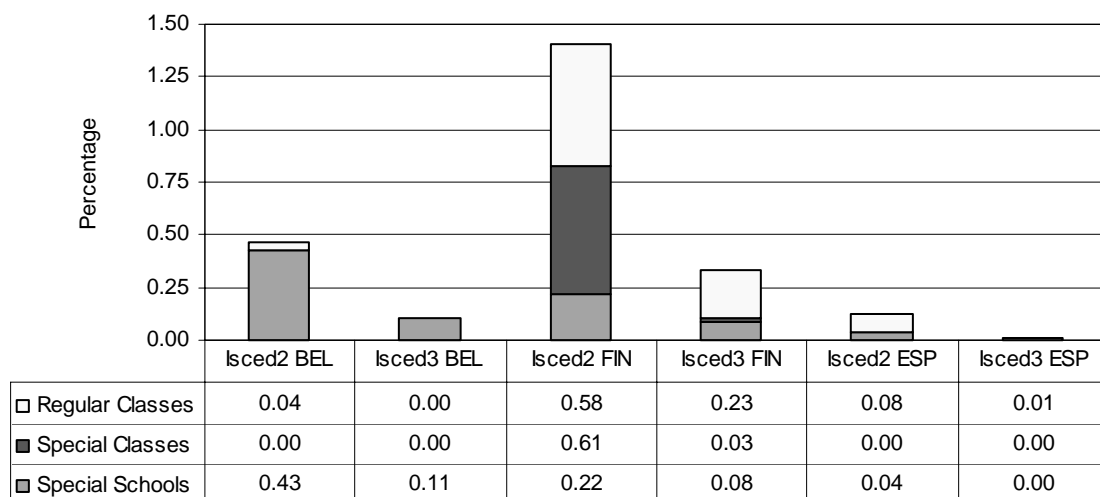
Percentage of visually impaired and blind students in lower and upper secondary education by location



Percentage of students with physical handicap in lower and upper secondary education by location



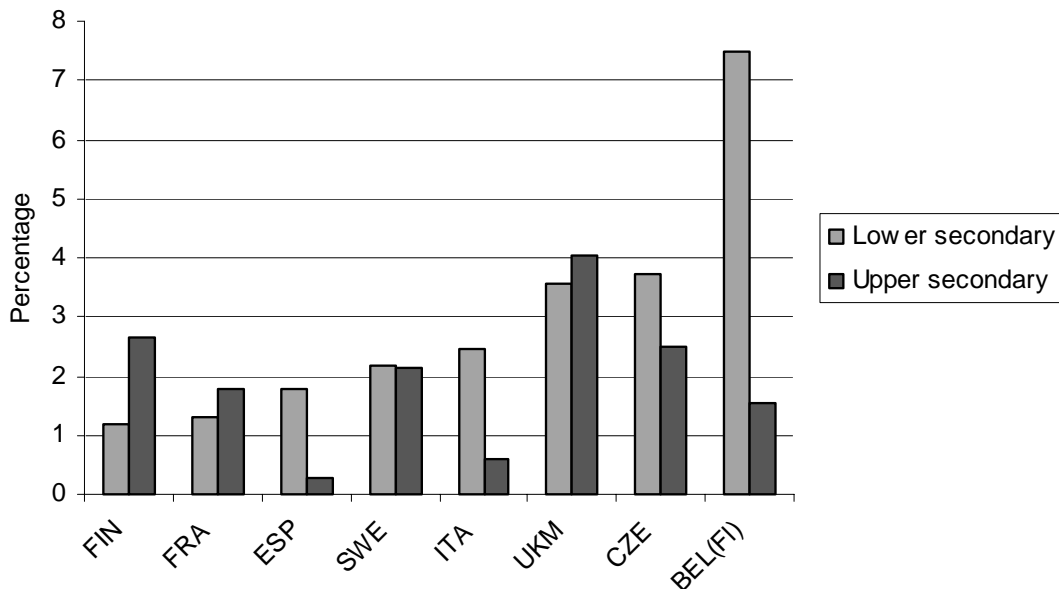
Percentage of students with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties in lower and upper secondary education by location



This data thus provides some indication that in these countries students in these disability categories do not extend their education into the upper secondary period. In the current economies of these European countries this provides a singular disadvantage for labour market entry and wage levels.

Chart xx shows the comparison for category A students as a whole. In Belgium (Fl.), the Czech Republic, Italy and Spain the proportions are less. However, in Finland, France and the UK the proportions in upper secondary are greater presumably reflecting particular policies in those countries to maintain handicapped students in upper secondary education. Unfortunately, the data is too limited to clarify this issue any further.

Chart XX. Number of students receiving additional resources in cross-national category A in lower and upper secondary education as a percentage of all students in lower and upper secondary



Case studies on including handicapped students in mainstream secondary schools

Apart from gathering quantitative data OECD/CERI has also carried out intensive case studies on secondary schools in a number of countries where good examples of inclusion are taking place (OECD, 1999). The European countries covered in this work were Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Italy and the UK. Data was also gathered from Australia and the USA which serve to confirm the European data.

In these countries in some places there are excellent examples of fully inclusive practices, but unfortunately space precludes a full discussion. As a consequence, only some conclusions are reported.

The data given above show clearly that students with disabilities are educated usually in one of the three locations identified. - regular classes, special classes or special schools and for many countries segregated provision is still the norm. For a variety of reasons, the education systems of OECD countries have grown up during a period in which segregating some students with special educational needs has been seen to be necessary for the efficient functioning of the service for the majority of students. This has led to the development of two systems, operating in parallel, with students with special needs being given additional support to assist in their education.

This has had the effect of creating, first, a regular system which does not feel it has to adapt to the needs of *all* children, and second, a special system which collects the rejects and with considerable additional resources, often in segregated settings, attempts to remedy the failings of the first. Neither of these outcomes is desirable and neither is commensurate with current views on equity and students' rights.

Inclusion is a process which attempts to correct these developments through changes to the structure and functioning of educational systems and school practices to the benefit of *all* students. Bringing

together the legal and financial frameworks covering regular and special education and making the unified system responsible for *all* students are fundamental goals that challenge the education/special education dualism.

The case studies show that inclusive schools are learning organisations in which teachers are adapting their pedagogies to the diversity of learning demands presented by individual children. Schools do not operate in a vacuum, and inclusion also implies changes in the way teachers and other professionals are prepared through pre-service and in-service training.

This does not mean that these reforms can be achieved with none of the usual special education resources, quite the contrary. But it does mean that the locus of control and the organisation of these resources must change and become a whole school issue. This outcome has implications especially for funding and training.

A feature of inclusive systems is that schools are more self-contained in the way in which they provide additional support for students with special needs. This can take the form of:

- Additional flexibility in the establishment of class sizes and in their composition.
- Immediate support for regular class teachers from specialist teachers within the school and from assistants.
- The reduction of teacher/student and adult student ratios.
- Increased skills in curriculum differentiation and the development of more flexible pedagogies through the shared preparation of assessments and the writing of individual education programmes.
- Corporate curriculum development, including the making of curriculum materials to meet special educational needs.

These strategies are preventative by nature, that is they help to stop failure and create an environment which avoids the need to teach to the mean. The process provides increased flexibility for all staff, and within it special needs teachers and assistants can play a more general role throughout the working of the whole school.

The role of external services

Inclusive schools are supported by external services but attention needs to be given to how these services operate. For schools to be able to respond quickly and effectively to learning needs then they must have the skills in-house. In the most effective inclusive models, this means that a crucial feature of the way support services work is to empower the school-based personnel to solve their own problems through enskillment and on-going in-service training. In many effective systems parents and other community members are also involved.

Training

In the schools studied training was a key to success and the training of teachers and other professionals was followed up in some detail. However in general terms teachers appear to be ill-prepared for this work and this as an area in need of considerable development.

Costs

In the cases conducted in this study, disabled students cost two to four times as much as non-disabled students when educated in mainstream schools and rather more if in special schools. In Italy for instance 2.4% disabled students cost about four times more and in the UK in one school it was 2.5 times higher for 3% of students. For systems as a whole special schools were more expensive than regular schools by a ratio of about 1.2:1. Although in Reykjavik in Iceland the ratio was nearer 5:1 reflecting the severe nature of the disabilities contained in their special schools and where inclusion is strongly developed. By contrast a careful comparison of a special school and a regular secondary comprehensive school in the UK showed that the regular school was more expensive.

These findings, however, must be treated tentatively and they need replication. What they point to is the importance of analysing costs in the context of different educational governance policies such as decentralisation. They also argue for giving greater consideration to the links between the costs and the effectiveness of different settings about which there is little if any available data.

Among the countries visited, there has been a trend in recent years towards the devolution of the management of funding, from central government to regions, from regions to districts, and in some cases to individual schools. Where the extent of devolution of funds for ordinary education differs from that for special education, this can influence the extent to which inclusive education occurs. If funds for ordinary schooling are borne from district budgets but those from for special schooling are managed at regional level, as in parts of Denmark for example, districts may be tempted to press for special schooling for their more expensive students. In contrast, in Colorado in the USA, it emerged that the devolution of funding for both regular and special education down to the level of the individual school can enhance inclusive education if allocations truly reflect costs.

Clearly the role of funding for inclusion is very important and has been addressed more fully in Meijer (1999) where similar issues are discussed. Nevertheless, funding is far from the whole picture in terms of developing inclusive education and may well be of low importance in actual political decision-making given the relatively small difference in costs between inclusive and segregated provision noted in this study. However, a great deal more work is needed in this area before strong conclusions can be drawn.

Accountability

Accountability is an important, necessary and growing element of education systems. However, if special education systems are not factored in at the outset this can create further obstacles to inclusion. Regular schools may be discouraged from taking on special needs students who are likely to perform poorly in examinations. While this may be true for some special needs students, the evidence suggests that inclusive practices in fact improve the performance of non-special needs students. This may in part be due to the increased attention given to curriculum differentiation and pedagogy which generalises to all pupils.

General conclusions and some caveats

This paper has shown the differences that exist in some European countries in including students with disabilities into secondary education. It is clear that there are large differences between countries and large differences in the extent of provision when lower and upper secondary education are contrasted. It then described some issues relating to effective inclusive practices based on studies on secondary schools in some European countries. In these countries inclusion is happening - sometimes nationally as in Italy other times locally as in the UK.

There are three caveats related to full inclusion which emerged from these studies. The first is essentially political. It would seem that at present many parents would prefer their disabled children to attend segregated schools. In governance models, where choice is emphasised, in the present circumstances there would seem to be no option but to maintain some segregated provision. The cost appears not to be prohibitive. However, this decision has to be set against the inhibitive effect such an option would have on reform processes and the practicalities of maintaining a dual system.

The second caveat relates to students with severe emotional and behavioural problems who present a danger to other students. The ever-increasing number of violent students appearing at younger and younger ages seems to be a widespread international phenomenon. If such problems cannot be prevented by or contained in the school then other forms of provision will be needed. However, the study in the UK suggests that with well-structured, consistent and fair disciplinary procedures rates of exclusion for poor behaviour can be reduced. Furthermore, in Canada (New Brunswick) the schools and support services work together to keep students with emotional problems in the school.

The third caveat comes from the disabled students themselves, who pointed out that from time to time they would like to be able to mix with other students with the similar disabilities. It would be desirable if provision to meet this human need for solidarity were made available.