

## Special Needs Education in Japan

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted at the 61st United Nations General Assembly session held in December 2006 and came into effect in May 2008. Japan signed this convention in September 2007 and is now preparing for its ratification.

A convivial society refers to a society where people with disabilities, who conventionally were not necessarily in an environment where they could fully participate in the society, can actively participate and contribute to the society. A convivial society is an all-citizen-participating society where everybody respects each other's personality and individuality, supports each other and accepts the differences among people.

In regard to the education for children with disabilities, Japan has made the decision to aim at forming an inclusive education system for building a convivial society. According to the report of the Special Committee on the Future Direction of Special Needs Education of the Subdivision on Elementary and Secondary Education of the Central Council for Education, an inclusive education system refers to "a system that enables children with and without disabilities to study together under the aim of developing respect for the differences in people and maximally developing the mental and physical abilities of children regardless of the presence or absence of disabilities, and to realize a free society in which every person can effectively participate."

Conventionally, education for children with disabilities in Japan has focused on providing substantial and detailed education by instructing at special institutes and settings, such as Special Schools for the Blind, Special Schools for the Deaf, Disabled Schools, and Special Education Classes, according to the types and degrees of their disabilities.

Concerning the circumstances surrounding education for people with disabilities, there has been a shift in recent years to a more convivial society where every citizen, regardless of the presence or absence of disabilities, respects and supports the personality and individuality of others. For this reason, there is a need to shift the education system for students with disabilities from the conventional "Special Education," where they are instructed in special settings according to the types and degrees of their disabilities, to a "Special Needs Education," where the educational needs of each student with disabilities are grasped and appropriate educational support is provided, including support for students with Learning Disability (LD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and High-Functioning Autism (HFA), who attend regular

classes. Furthermore, there is a need to prepare a framework for promoting this shift.

## **1. History**

### 1.1 From the Meiji Restoration to the Second World War

In 1872, the Educational System was promulgated, becoming the foundation of Japan's public education system. The system called for universal schooling with the aim of developing the abilities of citizens to strengthen national power. It includes a section that passively regulates "schools for handicapped" (*Haijin Gakko*). It is generally understood that, assuming from the common use of this term at the time, "schools for the wasted" must have referred to schools that accommodated children with visual, hearing, intellectual, physical/motor or other disabilities. Nevertheless, despite the regulation of "schools for the wasted" for children with disabilities, under the educational principal of the time to increase national wealth and power, education for disabled children was never provided.

Prior to the Meiji Restoration, the foundation of life and skill training for people with disabilities were mainly provided by the support of communities. However, the social and economic changes due to the restoration caused a great blow to the lives of people with disabilities. During this time of drastic social changes, the first private school for deaf and mute children in Japan was established by a private philanthropist in 1878. Thereafter a few schools for deaf and mute children were established privately and were later turned into public schools.

Schools for deaf and mute children were regulated as schools that align with elementary schools in the Second Revised Elementary School Ordinance (*Gakusei*) of 1890, and regulations were set out. In 1900, elementary school education was made compulsory clearly by the regulation in the Third Revised Elementary School Ordinance. Simultaneously, it was regulated that children with disabilities are exempt from or given a deferment for attending elementary school. For this reason, education for children with disabilities relied on the efforts of private philanthropists and was mostly a charitable social service.

Education for children with disabilities other than the deaf and mute children also started out from schools and institutes that were established privately. In 1906 the first institution for children with intellectual disabilities, and in 1921 the first institution for children with physical/motor disabilities were each established privately.

Under the education system at the time, with the mission to develop “national prosperity and defense,” children with disabilities were not included in the framework. However, due to the efforts of interested parties, a demand rose for compulsory and public education for children with disabilities. As a result, related provisions in the Elementary School Ordinance were separated out and expanded, and were promulgated in 1923 as the Schools for Blind, Deaf and Mute Ordinance. Though at this point the ordinance was limited to schools for blind, deaf and mute children, it triggered the transformation of such schools from a charitable social service to a public education system.

In 1941, the National School Ordinance was promulgated to replace the Elementary School Ordinance with the aim of strengthening the education system during the war. During the planning of the National School Ordinance, it was conceived to establish special educational facilities for mentally and physically disabled children, and to make education for deaf and mute children compulsory. However, such measures could not be executed due to financial and other reasons. However, the program for the schools for deaf and mute children was considered to be an equal or higher education program in regard to the program of the national school (elementary school). In addition, for children with other disabilities, including physical/motor and intellectual disabilities, regulations in this ordinance made it possible to form special schools and classes that give consideration to those disabilities.

### 1.2 Years following the Second World War

After the Second World War, the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law were newly established in 1947 to replace the nationalistic laws that had been in effect. The principle of equal opportunity in education was laid out in the Fundamental Law of Education, and three types of special schools were designated in the School Education Law as institutions that provide education to children with disabilities: Special Schools for the Blind, Special Schools for the Deaf and Disabled Schools. Education for children that belong to Special Schools for the Blind and Deaf was made compulsory. Furthermore, regulations were made to allow the establishment of Special Classes in regular elementary, middle and high schools for students that are difficult to provide education in regular classes. Disabled Schools were meant to accommodate “children with mental deficiency, physical/motor and other mental/physical disabilities.” In 1952, the Special Needs Education Division was set up in the Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau of the former Ministry of Education with a mission to promote Disabled Schools and Special Classes.

At this time, the primary factor preventing the rise in the attendance rate of Special Schools for the Blind, Special Schools for the Deaf and Disabled Schools was the heavy burden on the parents in comparison to a child attending a regular elementary or middle school. In response to this situation, the Law for the Promotion of Attendance to Special Schools for the Blind, Special Schools for the Deaf and Disabled Schools was enacted in 1954 to enforce policies for supporting and encouraging children with disabilities to attend school. As for Disabled Schools, the Act on Special Measures for the Arrangement of Public Disabled Schools was enacted in 1956 aiming at promptly making education for children that belong to Disabled Schools compulsory. This Act made way for providing support to Disabled Schools similar to what was provided to other compulsory public educational institutions. Furthermore, based on the final report of the Central Council for Education in 1959, it was designated that Disabled Schools shall be separated into schools that each correspond to the needs of children with mental deficiency, physical/motor deficiency and health impairments, and relevant schools were newly built.

As the quantity of education for children with disabilities expanded, demands rose for the necessity of qualitative enhancement and detailed services. Thus, the National Institute of Special Needs Education was established in 1971 to comprehensively conduct research on education for children with disabilities. Initially, six departments for research on education for children with disabilities were established in the following areas: visual impairment, hearing impairment and speech/language disorders, mental deficiency, physical/motor disabilities and health impairments, emotional disturbances, and multiple disorders. In 1973, the National Disabled School at *Kurihama* (presently the Special Needs Education School for Children with Autism, University of Tsukuba) was established adjacent to the above institute as a collaborative institute to provide education to children with severe/multiple disabilities.

In 1978, school attendance exemption/deferment as an educational measure was basically abolished, and in the following year, education for children that belong to Disabled Schools was made compulsory. At the same time, a visiting-teacher instruction system was implemented for children and students whose disabilities make it difficult for them to commute.

In 1987, Tsukuba College of Technology was established. This school is a three-year national junior college exclusively for students with hearing/visual impairment. This is the first junior college in the world to set up a program for students with visual impairment. In 2005, Tsukuba College of Technology became a four-year college and changed its name to National University Corporation Tsukuba University of Technology.

In 1993, enforcement regulations of the School Education Law were revised and instruction in Resource Rooms was regulated and institutionalized. Education in Resource Rooms refers to a system where, while enrolling in regular classes, students with disabilities such as speech/language disorders, hard-of-hearing, emotional disturbances, low vision, physical/motor disabilities, and health impairments are instructed at a special setting under a special education program for certain classes. With the partial revisions to the enforcement regulations of the School Education Law in 2006, education in Resource Rooms was extended to include students with autism, LD and ADHD.

In 2002 the School Education Law Enforcement Ordinance was revised to set the level of disabilities (enrollment criteria) for Special Schools for the Blind, Special Schools for the Deaf and Disabled Schools according to the developments of medical and scientific technology concerning each type of disability, and the criteria for the enrollment of children with disabilities to regular elementary and middle schools were amended. In addition, it was regulated that specialists must be consulted when deciding on which school a child with disabilities should attend. With further revisions to the School Education Law Enforcement Ordinance in 2007, it was also made mandatory that the parents should be consulted when deciding on which school a child with disabilities should attend.

Based on the principal of the special needs education to respond to the unique educational needs of each student regardless of their type of disabilities, the School Education Law was revised in 2007 to consolidate the Special Schools for the Blind, Special Schools for the Deaf and Disabled Schools all into Special Needs Schools. Special Needs School is defined as a school with the aim “to provide education aligned with the education provided at regular kindergarten, elementary, middle and high schools” for children with disabilities and “to develop their capabilities for overcoming difficulties experienced in learning and everyday life and for becoming independent.” In addition to providing education to its students, a Special Needs School is also defined to serve a role as an institute providing what might be called “functions as a support center,” such as providing advice and support on the education of students who require special attention that are enrolled in the local regular kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high schools.

With the revisions in 2011 to the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities, there was a regulation requiring measures to educate children with and without disabilities together as much as possible.

## 2. Teachers of the Special Needs Education

It is regulated in the Education Personnel Certification Act that teachers of Special Needs Schools basically must have both a special needs school teacher certificate and a certificate corresponding to each division (kindergarten, elementary, middle, or high school teacher). However, this rule is undermined by the condition “for the time being,” added by supplementary provision 16; and thus teachers at the Special Needs Schools do not necessarily have the special needs school teacher certificate. (According to the survey conducted in FY2011, about 70% of teachers at Special Needs Schools hold the special needs school teacher certificate.)

The number of universities that offer authorized programs for acquiring a special needs school teacher certificate as of May 1, 2010 is: 51 (out of 82) for national, 2 (out of 78) for public, and 63 (out of 576) for private universities. The number of junior colleges that offer authorized programs for acquiring a special needs school teacher certificate as of May 1, 2010 is 2 out of 364.

Table 1: Number of universities and junior colleges that offer authorized school teacher certificates as of May 1, 2010

			Courses for Teacher certificates as a whole	%	Courses for Teacher certificate for special needs school	%
University	National	82	76	92.7%	51	62.2%
	Public	78	53	67.9%	2	2.6%
	Private	576	469	81.4%	63	10.9%
	Sub Total	736	598	81.3%	116	15.8%
Junior College		364	257	70.6%	2	0.5%
Total		1100	855	77.7%	118	10.7%

Source: MEXT

[http://www.mext.go.jp/component/a\\_menu/education/micro\\_detail/\\_icsFiles/afieldfile/2011/07/13/1286672\\_01.pdf](http://www.mext.go.jp/component/a_menu/education/micro_detail/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2011/07/13/1286672_01.pdf)

## 3. Issues and Challenges

Below are the challenges concerning special needs education described in a report by the Special Committee on the Future Direction of Special Needs Education of the Subdivision on

Elementary and Secondary Education of the Central Council for Education on June 2012.

### 3.1 Special Needs Schools

- Adjustments must be made based on thorough planning in response to the recent increase in student enrollment and the severity/multiplicity of disabilities, including adjusting the scale/size of the schools.
- Special Needs Schools must expand their instruction/support functions to all local children with disabilities by functioning as coordinators within the local school clusters to further enrich their role to function as support centers.
- Special Needs Schools must engage in improving their expertise while strengthening their role as support centers. At the same time, the schools must build a cooperative framework with the municipal boards of education with consideration to role distribution.
- Measures must be taken to promote barrier-free relationships between children with and without disabilities by promoting exchanges and joint learning opportunities. Opportunities should be provided for exchanges and joint learning at elementary and middle schools in the area where the disabled child resides. This is to provide chances for the child to deepen ties with the local community. Furthermore, the understanding of parents and teachers regarding such undertaking must be promoted.
- Backup systems should be created for local special needs education by networking Special Needs Schools and the prefectural special needs education center and the special needs education section of the prefectural education center. Furthermore, active deliberations should be carried out on how to effectively place teachers for strengthening the role of the Special Needs Schools as a support center in order to promote special needs education not only during the compulsory education period but during kindergarten and high school as well.
- In order for local school clusters and the support center function of Special Needs Schools to effectively serve their roles, networks of Special Needs Schools should be established to clarify the role of each Special Needs School according to its type and location.

### 3.2 Enhancement of Teacher Specialties

- Schools should utilize outside personnel when needed to enhance the specialties of the school as a whole since it is difficult for all teachers to acquire specialties in a number of fields.
- It should be understood that when pursuing the above, the leadership of management-level personnel, such as the school head, is indispensable, as is the role of teacher consultants of the board of education that supports the school. For this reason, trainings must be conducted

for such management-level personnel and teacher consultants.

- Only about 70% of the teachers at Special Needs Schools hold the special needs school teacher certificate (certificate of a relevant disability type or an individual subject). From the viewpoint of enhancing the quality of education at Special Needs Schools, the specialties of teachers must be promptly secured by increasing the rate of certificate holders. Especially for teachers currently working, attendance of classes authorized by the law for licensing must be promoted, and the specialties of certificate holders must be continuously enhanced through training.
- Teachers instructing in Special Needs Classes and Special Classes are significant leaders of special needs education and their specialties have an extremely large impact on other teachers in the school. For this reason, the specialties of the special needs education teachers must be promptly secured through attendance of authorized classes; and once secured, they must be further enhanced through continued training.
- “Convivial society” refers to a society where people with disabilities, who conventionally were not necessarily in an environment where they could fully participate in the society, can actively participate and contribute to the society. To practice this concept in schools as well, preparations must be undertaken for creating an environment where students with disabilities can choose to become teachers.

## References

- 1) CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES  
[http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/treaty/pdfs/shomei\\_32\\_en.pdf](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/treaty/pdfs/shomei_32_en.pdf)
- 2) National Institute of Special Needs Education  
<http://www.nise.go.jp>
- 3) Special Needs Education School for Children with Autism, University of Tsukuba  
<http://www.kurihama.tsukuba.ac.jp>
- 4) National University Corporation of Tsukuba University of Technology  
<http://www.tsukuba-tech.ac.jp>

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## 日本の特別支援教育（記述内容の要点）

国連障害者の権利に関する条約への署名による共生社会の指向  
「特殊教育」から「特別支援教育」へ

### 1. 歴史

明治維新から第二次世界大戦まで

- ・ 学制における「癡人学校」の規定
- ・ 民間の篤志家による障害を持つ児童のための学校設立
- ・ 盲啞学校に対する法制上の準則
- ・ 「盲学校及聾啞学校令」の公布による慈善的社会事業から公教育体制への展開

第二次世界大戦後

- ・ 盲学校・聾学校・養護学校の設置
- ・ 盲学校・聾学校への就学義務化
- ・ 特殊学級の設置
- ・ 障害者に対する教育の量的拡大に伴う質的充実の要請
- ・ 就学免除・就学猶予の原則的廃止
- ・ 通級による指導の規定
- ・ 盲・聾・養護学校から特別支援学校へ
- ・ 障害の有無にかかわらず共に教育を受けられるよう配慮

### 2. 教員

特別支援学校の教員について

特別支援学校教諭免許の取得について

### 3. 課題

中央教育審議会初等中等教育分科会特別支援教育の在り方に関する特別委員会報告書から、特別支援学校と教職員の専門性向上について