Individual Support within the Austrian Education System

Strategies for the Development of Quality in Special Needs Education

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1 Preface

This publication deals with the final results of the project “Quality in Special Needs Education,” which was carried out in the years 2004 to 2006 by a project group of the Zentrum für Schulentwicklung (Centre for School Development - today Bifie – Federal Institute for Educational Research, Innovation and Development, translator’s note) and the Teacher Training Academy of the diocese Graz-Seckau (today the Catholic Teacher Training College Graz), supported by the Federal Ministry for Education.

In the first part, results of the project that have already been published are addressed and summarised. The main part of the report, though, comprises the results of the deliberations of five work groups worked out in the course of three sessions, each lasting several days, in the 4th quarter of 2006.

These results were available as presentations and related text fragments by the end of 2006. These documents were compiled by the members of the project core group and put into a consistent text version – which led to this publication. The questions and methods of the work groups are described in more detail in Chapter 4.

All persons responsible for the results shown in Chapter 5 are listed below according to their work groups. The members of the core project wish to express their gratitude to all persons involved in this project phase for their committed work and the quality of the elaborated results!

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Preliminary versions of this text were counter-checked by the following persons, who gave valuable stimulations for complements and improvements:

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Katharina Rosenberger (Work Group 5).

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Last but not least, we want to thank the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, specifically Mag. Lucie Bauer, for the creative and material support of this project, which made possible an intensive, exceptional work process that was appreciated by all persons involved on the occasion of a project retrospect in March of 2007.

Graz, in September, 2007
2 Background, Philosophy and History of the Project

Since the year 2000, efforts have been made to develop and implement educational standards within the Austrian school system. The sector of special needs education, however, has rather been excluded from that. Overviews of the development of educational standards in Austria (Lucyshyn 2006, Schluga 2006) lack any indication that special needs education might possibly be included therein. The reason for this is evidently that the discussion on educational standards has been mainly held on performance standards (Specht 2006a, Neuweg 2007).

In their closing report, the so-called Future Commission (Zukunftskommission), which was launched to assure and increase education quality, pointed out the problematic situation of excluding special needs education from the discussion on standards. In the field of special needs education, uniform result standards are not considered to be appropriate for the assessment of pupils and schools, due to the pupils' highly diverse situation, social background and development, which influence their way of learning. It has been, however, proposed that structural and process standards of special needs education, rather than result standards, be defined. School and education should be designed in such a way that pupils with special educational needs "(a) experience the greatest possible degree of support to be able to develop their individual abilities, and (b) are provided with a maximum of opportunities for their inclusion in their social environment and society" (Haider et al. 2005, pg. 49).

The Future Commission regarded a comprehensive and focused evaluation of institutions of inclusion and special schools as a prerequisite for the development of standards in the field of special needs education. On the basis of reliable data, the need for changes in the legal and financial framework should be identified, the parameters for the organisation of special educational provisions formulated, and educational requirements and prerequisites to instruction specified. In the framework of such an evaluation, the effectiveness of the present usage of resources should in particular be assessed, and measures implemented by educational policies, school organisation and pedagogy should be suggested to improve the educational opportunities and chances for a better life for children and adolescents with disabilities.

Also the section responsible for special needs education within the Federal Ministry for Education pointed out in a discussion paper from the year 2002 (cf. Specht et al. 2006, pp. 69-75) that the field of special needs education should focus especially on process and structural standards, having two lines of argumentation: firstly, we cannot compare the situation, social background and development – which influence their way of learning – of all children and adolescents with special educational needs of an age group; secondly, even the fundamentals of the evaluation of performance
standards – that is the curricula – have rather a framework character than those of mainstream schools. In addition, the tendency is emerging that curricula of special needs education are increasingly complemented by Individual Education Plans (IEP), which eventually makes the definition of general performance standards for children with special educational needs hardly purposeful or feasible. This is why in the field of special needs education the formulation, implementation and consistent control of structural and process standards should replace the (traditional) uniform scale for pupils’ performance.

In spring of 2004 a project group (the “QSP core team”) was formed by members of the Centre for School Development Graz\(^1\) and the Teacher Training Academy of the diocese Graz-Seckau\(^2\) with the goal to elaborate in the framework of the project “QSP – Quality in Special Needs Education” a “map” of strengths, weaknesses and development potentials of special needs education in order to develop proposals for changes and improvements on this basis. The QSP project was initiated by the Centre for School Development and the Teacher Training Academy; the project group did not act upon any assignment or instructions. The project was financially supported by the Ministry for Education, especially by Section I/8, which is responsible for special needs education. It was clear right from the beginning that the project results were to be understood as the opinions of experts that may vary from the Ministry for Education’s positions. The project consisted of two phases:\(^3\)

1. The empirical part of the project pursued the goal of taking stock of special needs education in Austria. Those factors were to be isolated that currently promote or hamper quality in special needs education to gain approaches to quality assurance and quality development in this field. The following steps were taken between the end of 2004 and the beginning of 2006:
   (a) Interviews with experts in special needs education and their evaluation. On the whole, 160 persons – teachers and headmasters at schools with a focus on inclusion and special schools, scholars, representatives of educational administration and school inspectorates, members of staff of institutions of initial and in-service training for teachers, school psychologists, parents’ representatives, representatives of initiative groups and non-school institutions for persons with disabilities - filled out a comprehensive questionnaire to evaluate the situation of special needs education. In particular, the interviewees were asked to propose approaches to improvement measures in the field of special needs education (cf. Specht et al. 2006, pp. 77-91).
   (b) An analysis of data from the Austrian school statistics covering the period from 1994/95 to 2002/03 concerning central indicators of the sector of special needs education.
   (c) An analysis of data from the study “Schule BEWUSST” (Specht 2006b, Specht &

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1 Werner Specht (project manager), Lisa Gross-Pirchegger (01 2005 to 09 2006) and Elisabeth Stanzel-Tischler.
2 Andrea Seel and David Wohlhart
3 Cf. also the presentation by Werner Specht on the goals and development of the working process on the occasion of the result presentation in Salzburg in December of 2006. [http://qsp.or.at/downloads/Einfuehrung_Specht.pdf](http://qsp.or.at/downloads/Einfuehrung_Specht.pdf) [13.04.07]
Grabensberger 2007) from the point of view of special needs education: about 3900 adolescents of 3rd grades at 69 schools of lower secondary education (Hauptschule) were interviewed on the quality of school and education. Among the 177 classes analysed were also 56 classes with pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Thus, it was possible to compare classes without children with SEN and inclusive classes.

The empirical findings and conclusions of the QSP core team were presented at a symposium in Graz in May of 2006 and published as the ZSE Report Nr. 70 (Specht et al. 2006). Further publications (Specht 2006c, Wohlhart et al. 2006) and the installation of a website shall promote the dissemination and discussion of the results of the first project phase. A summary of the findings and conclusions is provided in the following chapter of this report.

2. Following the presentation of the results at the symposium in Graz, the second, concept-oriented project phase was launched in June of 2006. Based on the findings, work groups were formed to define fields of activity for which by the end of the year implementation-oriented improvement proposals should be elaborated. The approach of this project phase is described in Chapter □, pg. 26 et seq.

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4 [http://qsp.or.at/index_a.html](http://qsp.or.at/index_a.html) [13.04.07]
3 Summary of the Empirical Part and the Conclusions of the Project Group

The main results of the empirical part of the QSP Project are described in Specht et al. (2006) and on the project website. In the following, the central results (Section 2) and the conclusions of the QSP core team (Section 0, pg. 17 et seq.) have been summarised.

3.1 Central Results

1. Quantitative Development of Inclusive Education

Since the legally binding concept of inclusion was integrated into the mainstream school system in 1993 on the level of primary school, and in 1997 on the level of lower secondary school (Sekundarstufe I), first the percentage of children with SEN who were integrated in mainstream classes increased continually and reached 56.6% on the primary level, and 51.5% on the level of lower secondary education in 2002/03. Since the school year 2000, the ascending curves have slackened clearly. The stagnation of the inclusion movement can be explained on the one hand by ever more favourable legal regulations on inclusive classes. In 2000, the pupils of the first generation of the “mainstream” inclusive classes reached the 8th grade. However, this does not explain why since 2000 there has been practically no increase in the quota of inclusion. Neither can we speak of any kind of natural degree of saturation at a level of 50 to 60 percent of children with disabilities in inclusive classes, because the developments in the individual provinces (except for Vienna) are quite similar to federal developments - though on quite different levels: at the primary level, Styria stagnates at about 83 percent, while Vorarlberg stands at about 43 percent of SEN-children in inclusive classes.

2. Quantitative Development of Special Educational Needs

Between the school years 1994/95 and 2002/03, the SEN quota of grade 0 to 8 increased steadily though not dramatically from 2.97% to 3.43%. However, there was a reverse trend in the area of primary school and lower secondary education: while at primary school level the SEN quota at first decreased and then has remained stable since 1997/98 at about 2.80%, at the level of lower secondary education the share of children with SEN increased quite steadily to reach 3.99%.

If we take a look at the school year 2002/03 we see that the share of children with SEN in primary school continually increased from 1.8% (grade 0 (= preschool level))

to 3.7% (grade 4). In lower secondary education, we find another increase between grade 5 and 8, which amounts to about 0.5%, which probably can be related to the fact that pupils with SEN stay longer in schools of lower secondary education than their classmates.

This development reflects both reasonable and problematic traits concerning the allocation of SEN. Apparently, many children are still monitored during their first years at primary school before they officially get an approved SEN statement. This is sensible in terms of pedagogy to avoid premature labelling. Still, this development is problematic because special needs resources require an officially issued SEN statement. Consequently, additional lessons are lacking at a stage in children’s lives when they would benefit most from individualised provisions and prevention programmes in a heterogeneous learning context. Schools of lower secondary education benefit to a disproportionately high extent from these resources, which are probably partly used for tasks which are not genuinely of a special educational nature.

3. Uniformity or Diversity in Special Needs Education? - Different Developments in the Provinces

The share of pupils with SEN (in the school year 2002/03 the federal average quota for grade 0 to 8 was 3.43%, the value of Vienna was 4.71% and of Tyrol 2.81%), the development of the SEN quotas in the course of time, and the quota of inclusive education are today quite divergent among the Austrian provinces. These and many more differences clearly illustrate that even within a relatively centralised school system regional preferences and traditions emerge if federal legislation provides sufficient scope. The problem of these regional differences is that their underlying framework and value decisions become explicit only in a few cases, and this conveys the impression of a certain arbitrariness with regard to the concepts of quality in special needs education.

4. Appraisal of the Success of Inclusive Pedagogy

The antagonistic relationship between advocates of “classic” special needs education and the “inclusion movement” launched by parents of children with disabilities and committed teachers, which prevailed throughout the 80’s and early 90’s, has widely disappeared from the present discussion on education. Especially at schools of primary education, today the institution of inclusive classes is taken for granted, and hardly anybody challenges them. This trend is - despite the regional differences - also evident from statistical data: even in those provinces that have a less dynamic development of inclusion quotas, today at least 50% of children with SEN attend a primary school class.

Today, there is hardly any dissent among Austrian experts in special needs education concerning their general view of the value of inclusive support of pupils with special educational needs. About 80 percent of the interviewees agreed rather or completely with the statements that inclusive education improves special needs
support and that the support of children in inclusive classes has generally proved successful. In the end, the disputes of the 80’s on the *principle* of inclusive education have come to a conclusion in favour of it.

5. **Controversial Issues**

The discussion on the usefulness in principle and the educational value of joint education of children with and without disabilities has been decided. The debate on the limits of inclusion and how to organise the institutional structures and competences of special needs education, however, is not over yet.

The question of whether *all* pupils with SEN are fit to attend classes of general education splits the interviewees into two nearly equal groups. The lines of conflict and dissent between the two groups run along the following issues: joint education to promote *all* children with SEN or limitation to *certain groups*? Are there types of disabilities which require a “safe haven”, that is, a small group and specific intensive care for adequate support? And: if so, which pupils would be affected by that, how can their group be delimited in terms of quantity and quality? And: is the availability of different institutional forms of care for children with disabilities not a characteristic quality feature of the Austrian school system?

Almost 60% of the interviewees think that the promotion of children in special school classes is still a sensible form of special needs support and regard the dual system of inclusive and segregating forms of education as an advantage that makes it possible to support pupils with different forms of disabilities optimally.

6. **The Quality of Inclusive Education**

The nimbus of the close interrelation between inclusion and quality of education and school, which prevailed throughout the 90’s (cf. Specht 1996a, 1997; Feyerer 1998), has steadily disappeared, especially in the area of lower secondary schools. Although the theory of the quality-enhancing effect of inclusion was also quite often represented in the QSP expert interviews, the answers of the interviewees more frequently brought up quality problems in the practice of inclusion. The reasons for these problems are seen partly in the lack of willingness or competence at the school locations to implement inclusion, but to a greater extent in the (regionally different) deficient framework conditions, problematic resource management and unfavourable structural conditions especially in the field of lower secondary education.

A topical comparison of classes of lower secondary education without SEN pupils and inclusive classes in the context of the “Schule BEWUSST” study showed that

- In inclusive classes pupils rated the quality of their school environment in several of the analysed aspects higher than pupils of classes without SEN pupils; they considered no aspect to be more problematic.

- However, the quality-enhancing effect of inclusion was apparent only in “real” inclusive classes with more than three pupils with SEN; the effect was rather
insignificant in classes with individual inclusion (1-3 SEN pupils).

- The effects were independent of the regional environment, that is, they occurred as often at schools in rural communities with few problems as at lower secondary schools in cities or conurbations - albeit on a different starting level.

Aspects that were considered to be significantly more positive were architectural environment and building ecology, the quality of the school as a place of learning and living, class leadership of the teacher, and support orientation and individualisation of education. There were no differences concerning aspects where problems would have been expected, given the critical discussion of this issue: structure of education, norm-deviant behaviour of pupils, aggression, tendencies towards violence and vandalism.

The results of this “Schule BEWUSST” study indicate that the problematic aspects of inclusive education at the level of secondary education are possibly exaggerated in the public discussion and the perception of experts.

7. Quality-Enhancing Changes in School Legislation

About two thirds of the interviewees gave statements on the issue of possible quality-enhancing changes concerning the legal bases of special needs education. Only a few of them agreed at least basically with the current legislation in this field. The majority of the respondents criticised the current situation or suggested changes.

The suggestions for changes demanded especially specifications and national harmonization of regulations – especially with regard to the maximum number of pupils in a class, maximum number of children with SEN in inclusive classes, guarantee of deploying only qualified teaching staff, therapists and support staff, and assuring sufficient funding of special needs education. Wishes for deregulation of existing regulations or making them more flexible, on the other hand, were considered to be less important. A few interviewees demanded to continue inclusion after the 8th grade by taking over the pre-vocational school pilot project on joint education of children with and without disabilities into mainstream schools, but more often they claimed the expansion of inclusive education to other types of school of higher secondary education. They also pointed out that occupational training was very relevant to children with SEN.

What the interviewees finally aimed at was an improved pedagogy: most important was a better support and more provisions for children/adolescents with special educational needs. However, some of the individual proposals were contradictory, and thus cannot be individually evaluated.

8. Resources and Quality

As for the question of correlations between material and personnel resources and quality issues, only few of the interviewed experts spoke out on the material situation. They called for architecture and room equipment suitable for persons with disabilities and a flexible pool of resources that should be administered by the competent Special Education Centre.
Most statements dealt with the area of personnel resources. The calculation model for personnel resources, which presupposes a federal level with a share of 2.7% of pupils with SEN, is regarded by many interviewees as inadequate, and the resources as insufficient because they are capped. The discrepancy between the capping of special needs provisions through a national quota and the allocation of resources to individual pupils via SEN statement was clearly evident.

The deployment of non-teacher personnel for supportive tasks was seen as an approach to increasing efficiency with simultaneous cost cutting. The interviewees considered teacher teamwork to be a decisive factor of successful inclusion, especially the two-teacher model in inclusive classes.

The questionnaire also included explicit questions on the shifting and cutting of costs. Most statements on that were quite general and indicated that there should be no cost-cutting in education, especially not in special needs education. Concrete suggestions mainly referred to structural costs: The parallelism of inclusion and special school did not always seem to be objectively justified. The discrepancy between the general demand for local inclusion and a better bundling of resources in fully equipped inclusive schools was also mentioned.

9. The Issue of Standards for Special Needs Education

About two thirds of the interviewees gave their point of view concerning the question whether - and if affirmative, which - product, process and structural standards should be formulated for the field of special needs education. About one third of this group were in favour of the formulation of standards for learning results (product standards), and more than two thirds advocated binding requirements for the design of instruction and school management (process standards) in the field of special needs education.

Product standards were considered not to be sensible and useful by their opponents, who refer to the diversity of children with SEN, the danger of overrating cognitive performances and exam-orientation. On the other hand, many experts demand product standards as standards established by education plans or as standards for general fields of education. However, there is a basic consensus on the view that children with SEN have quite different requirements and development potentials, and that individualisation and differentiation are therefore imperative. While one group takes this argument as their motivation for rejecting standards, the other group considers individualisation to be the precondition for their approval of standards, or to be the standard itself.

The situation with process standards is quite similar: while opponents of process standards refer to the teachers' free choice of methods, to requirements of instruction design which are enshrined in the curriculum anyway, and to an adequate professional training, advocates of process standards advert to the danger of arbitrariness and randomness in education and care, and call for clear-cut specifications by means of quality criteria and control for the areas of instruction design, methods of inclusive education, internal differentiation, open forms of
instruction focused on the respective pupil and cooperative team work. Issues of support were also addressed: apart from advocating Individual Education Plans, the interviewed experts were in favour of resource-oriented work and professional diagnostics.

When asked to give other measures of quality assurance, almost half the interviewees mentioned personal competences and their promotion via measures of initial and further training. Overtaxation should be prevented by deploying trained and experienced teachers. Other wishes comprised an increase of personnel resources, financial compensation of additional work and the reduction in the number of pupils in inclusive classes, but also adequate material equipment and interior facilities. In addition, the interviewees called for quality control, networks and support systems.

About a quarter of them addressed issues of society and educational policy as a prerequisite for high-quality work in the field of special needs education. In the context of school, they would welcome a better appreciation of special needs teachers, and within society a more positive presentation of schools by means of public relations.

10. Better Quality through New Curricula?

The question whether curricula reforms could contribute to improve the quality in special needs education was commented on by about half the interviewees. About 20% of the responses saw no urgent reform need in the area of curricula. In their explanations some experts referred to the frame character of curricula; on the other hand, they also said that problems resulted not from the curricula themselves, but from their implementation or non-implementation. Another 20% mentioned the general deficits and problems in the context of curricula, and almost 60% suggested concrete measures for improvement.

Many interviewees criticised the different structures of grades in the curricula of special schools and mainstream schools, and the allocation of learning contents to certain curriculum levels of special school curricula. These incompatibilities are considered to be inhibitory to inclusive education. In addition, the interviewees' statements which were critical of curricula were partly contradictory: for some of them, current curricula were formulated too extensively or with too much discretionary scope, and for the others they were lacking in flexibility.

Suggestions for the improvement of curricula most often comprised the introduction of a common curriculum for all pupils of an age group or the adaptation of special school curricula to the curricula of mainstream schools. The interviewees also repeatedly called for individualised curricula or education which should be based upon a general national curriculum for all children. In this context the task of adapting a general, inclusive curriculum to the special needs of the individual child was assigned to Individual Education Plans.

There were only a few statements on the subject curricula within which especially the poor training in foreign languages in the curriculum of general special school was
lamented. Finland and Schleswig-Holstein (Germany) were quoted as possible paragons for changes in the field of curricula.

Negative statements on curriculum reforms mostly came from experts who were school teachers or were active in educational administration. Reform proposals for or criticism of existing curricula were mainly uttered by persons who did not hold genuine school functions. In contrast to those who did not consider curriculum reforms to be necessary, the group of those in favour of changes in the field of curricula rather had a pro-inclusive school system attitude.

11. Problems in the Identification of Special Educational Needs

The concept of Special Educational Needs can be interpreted in very many ways – in many cases there is no consensus on to which children SEN should be allocated under which circumstances - and this is seen problematic especially with regard to the resource-directing function of SEN and the danger of an abuse of resources.

Many interviewees completely rejected the identification of SEN and proposed allocation of resources without the requirement that they be related to the children's deficits. The main reason for this was that the total of special needs resources is limited through quotas anyway, which do not take into account individual demands. Alternative approaches (inclusion, general integration, allocation of resources depending on inclusion performance (how many children with disabilities are cared for and how severe are their disabilities)) are mentioned in the interviewees' comments, although their answers rather describe a general discomfort with the status quo than concrete alternative strategies.

The SEN identification procedure itself faces both acceptance and criticism. The latter is mostly directed against the selective identification of SEN, the lack of taking into account the child’s record, the bias of the experts who issue opinions, and the opacity of the procedure. The function of classification dominates over the function of future provision strategies. Many interviewees want expert opinions to be continued within an Individual Education Plan, which seems to be sensible in the field of special needs education. However, this is done very seldom in practice. Counselling activities following the expert opinion are often (especially from the parents' point of view) considered to be insufficiently balanced and lacking in information as far as school selection and support possibilities are concerned. Some interviewees would welcome objective counselling provided by institutions outside the school system. One practice which does not seem to be completely comprehensible is the direct dependency of the allocation of a special school curriculum on the identification of a SEN, although this is not prescribed by the law.

The fact that, despite all the criticism, some interviewees found the SEN identification procedure to be correct is a sign for positive regional practices, which are worth investigating.
3.2 CENTRAL ISSUES: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE QSP CORE TEAM

The conclusions and recommendations by the QSP core team based on the empirical findings and discussions were bundled to form seven points of “central issues”\(^6\), that is, theses that essentially have a framework character, and therefore still require elaboration and further differentiation. The elaboration of some of the theses was carried out during the work group phase documented in this paper (cf. Chapter 0, pg. 28 et seq.). For the following presentation of the central issues, the point of departure underlying the theses have been summarised; the theses themselves have been taken over completely in this text.

1. Inclusive Education as the Standard Alternative of Special Needs Support (Focus 1)

The situational analysis has shown that keeping the parallel offer of special needs support in all regions - and therefore the parents' free choice between special schools and inclusion in mainstream schools - has become unsustainable fiction. Such an offer would blast any sensible economic framework of the special needs sector. The regional differences in the supply with special schools or inclusive settings, however, are hardly compatible with the postulates of unity, national comparability and permeability of the school system.

Thesis:

A thoroughgoing solution to these problems can only be seen in the restructuring of special needs education at school. A reform could comprise the following central elements:

- The hitherto existing parallel structure will be abandoned and one of the two institutional support forms will be defined as the standard alternative. According to the present legal regulations, the prevailing experts' positions and the state of the academic discussion, the standard alternative should be inclusive schooling.

- Since the position is hard to confute that inclusive instruction is not the ideal solution for each and every pupil, which is also supported by many experts, segregative forms of instruction should be possible if the children's needs for support cannot be addressed with inclusive schooling.

- Still, these special forms of segregative education are not to be put into practice as separate organisational units (special schools), but are to be integrated in the context of mainstream schools to enable all pupils to return to a normalized school environment possibly without any obstacles.

However, an implementation of this model would require careful planning with regard to selection, number and localisation of the school locations, which apart from their function as inclusive schools should also offer (if possible, only temporarily) care for pupils in segregative settings.

2. Making Resource Allocation for Special Needs Support More Flexible (Focus 2)

The decision on additional personnel resources is made only after the identification of a SEN, and so support measures are provided quite late, because the allocation of personnel resources requires a positive SEN statement. Special preventive support provisions for children who are in danger of developing a SEN that go beyond general support provided by general school teachers cannot be financed by the resource pool of special needs education. It is currently necessary to allocate SEN to a child before resources can be acquired. However, the support resources are not directly linked with the special educational need of the child. This becomes evident on the one hand in the different provincial laws which provide a narrower or broader scope for resource allocation, but even more in the national quota which assumes that 2.7% of all children of a certain age have SEN. There, a fundamental contradiction between the mechanisms of individual SEN identification and the quota-ruled allocation becomes apparent.

Thesis:

Provided that special needs support is considered to be necessary, it is - given the located breaks within the system - quite reasonable to elaborate a new strategy for the distribution of special needs resources. This should be achieved through the following guiding principles:
It must be possible to schedule resources on a national, provincial and regional level. This means that there must not be any unexpected resource fluctuations which cannot be tackled in terms of funding and personnel.

The stigmatisation of children should be kept as low as possible.

Preventive support and provisions should be possible within certain limits as far as doubtful cases are concerned.

The strategy should take into account that in many cases support is necessary over a certain period of time (not necessarily over a school year) (flexibility in terms of time) and that the extent of special needs can be very different (flexibility in terms of quantity).

On the other hand, we must take into account that institutions such as inclusive classes require a certain stability of personnel and therefore continuity, even if this means that support priorities change.

There are many indications that a regional distribution of support resources without personnel-related resource allocation which is nonetheless linked with some form of output-monitoring for quality assurance will be the best form of resource allocation in terms of pedagogy, and maybe also the most cost-efficient one. This system would work best if the respective school, supported (and supervised) by regional and/or supraregional Special Education Centres, has decision-making competence on its own level as far as support measures are concerned. Appropriate diagnostic procedures and education plans that can be evaluated must be implemented as process standards to meet the demands of output-monitoring and quality assurance.

3. Special Education Centres as Hubs for Resource Distribution and Quality Agencies (Focus 3)

In order to implement a demand-oriented support strategy which works largely autonomously, it would be necessary to establish regional agencies which plan, allocate and evaluate the optimal application of material and personnel resources within their region. The institution of Special Education Centres seems to be perfectly suitable for these tasks. However, with regard to their personnel and material resources, Special Education Centres are not always considered to be the competence centres they actually ought to be. Many interviewed experts also rejected the current organisation of Special Education Centres as special schools, suspecting role conflicts between the two functions of “support of schools of inclusive education” and “administration of the special school”.

Thesis:

The tasks of Special Education Centres and special schools should be separated in principle. Special Education Centres should be regional contact points for all parents and legal guardians who seek counselling on issues of education and care of children/adolescents with disabilities or other special educational needs, and expect independent expert advice. It will be advisable to establish a network with institutions of counselling, care and support of the preschool area and
institutions which provide support for the integration of young people into the labour market and to cooperate with all institutions of counselling, therapy and care of the respective region.

- Special Education Centres should play the key role in the provision and distribution of material and personnel resources which go beyond the minimum equipment of inclusive classes. In this context the tasks of Special Education Centres comprise the establishment and administration of a regional pool of appropriate teaching instruments, the imparting of the related methodological skills, and information and counselling services for teachers and support staff in classes with children with special needs. Special Education Centres should also promote targeted networking of competences available at regional kindergartens and schools.

- Regional Special Education Centres act as intermediators between the demands for resources and support of individual schools, and the material and personnel resources available at supraregional Special Education Centres on a provincial level.

- Moreover, it should be the task of Special Education Centres to assess the effectiveness of resource usage for the implementation of Individual Education Plans together with the teachers of the respective child and - if necessary - also together with external experts (Special Education Centres as agencies for quality assurance). This task requires the issuing of provision-oriented expert opinions (cf. Focus 4) and assessable Individual Education Plans (cf. Focus 5).

- In such a “Special Education Centre New” as it is described here, the collaboration of its staff to issue expert opinions concerning provision diagnosis would be eliminated. At the most, the expert committee (who issues the opinions) could be coordinated by the Special Education Centre. The decision on the optimal provision measures for a child should be made independently of the resource allocation or resource allocation control.

- Changes in the tasks of regional Special Education Centres must go hand in hand with considerations on the preconditions of material and personnel equipment or organisation and financing under which Special Education Centres New can accomplish their expanded tasks.

- The disengagement of regional Special Education Centres from the (general) special schools and their establishing as independent institutions is the precondition for their functioning as quality agencies.

- The Special Education Centre is subject to supervision by the regional school inspectorate. The municipalities, disabled associations and parent representatives of the respective catchment area should be granted rights to collaboration and control.
4. **Objective Procedure to Identify Special Educational Needs (Focus 4)**

Many of the interviewed experts criticised the current procedure of identifying SEN and its role for the allocation of resources (which should become at least limited – cf. pg. 19). In particular, they opposed that special educational support requires the existence of a disability, that national specifications for the identification procedure are superimposed by a multitude of regional decrees and regulations, and that the SEN identification procedure does not comply with the objectiveness, transparency and comparability that would be required. The question arises whether it is desirable in a national school system to have - as far as issues of genuine special needs education such as the identification of SEN is concerned - co-existing practical procedures without uniform procedure standards and rules for decision-making. This question even gets attributed democratic relevance, since the result of the current practice is educational opportunities which are regionally different.

**Thesis:**

- The current SEN identification procedure should be consolidated into a nationally uniform, transparent and provision-oriented procedure with which a pupil's special needs can be identified. The provisions which are listed as to be necessary in the expert opinion form the basis for the allocation of support resources by the Special Education Centre to the school which each respective pupil with SEN is attending (cf. pp. 19 and 20).

- The exclusive starting and reference point for the diagnostic analysis and the special provisions to be recommended should be the fact that a certain child/adolescent can only meet the challenges of education when he or she is supported by special needs provisions. The reasons why a child/adolescent cannot meet these challenges can range from mid-term learning or behavioural difficulties, which hamper learning, to lasting disadvantages through disability. The school should be responsible for short-term and preventive support provisions without having to launch a formal procedure to obtain expert opinions.

- Both parents/legal guardians and the school should be entitled to initiate a procedure to obtain expert opinions by filing an application at the regional Special Education Centre.

- The SEN expert opinion should be issued by an expert commission, which could be coordinated by the regional Special Education Centre (cf. Focus 3). The members of this commission should be, as obligatory members: a special needs expert, independent of the Special Education Centre, and the child's teacher, and if required, also a representative of school psychology, a school doctor or other experts. What we are aiming for is a holistic and multistage procedure for a diagnosis of the child and his or her environment.

- The provisions put down in the expert opinion form the basis of the child's Individual Education Plan, which must be followed, regularly evaluated and adapted at the respective school (see below).
It is to be elaborated which legal foundations of such a procedure should be implemented as structural standards, and which process standards should guide the procedure.

5. Individual Education Plans - Process Standards for Special Needs Support (Focus 5)

Although Individual Education Plans (IEP) were not explicitly one of the issues of the QSP-interviews, more than a quarter of the interviewees referred in different contexts to their importance for special needs education. The status of these education plans and their relation to the issue of standards were seen in many different ways. Some interviewees rejected standards, referring to the necessity of working with IEP, or wanted to replace standards with IEP. A quite considerable number of the interviewed experts could also imagine working with IEP as a fundamental element of special needs standards. In addition, some interviewees claimed that Individual Education Plans should replace the curriculum of general special school. At present there are regionally different regulations on the creation of and work with IEP. The impression is conveyed that diagnosis and documentation play quite a dominant role in support planning. More seldom, interviewees referred to the process character of individual support planning.

Thesis:

The analysis of expert interviews has shown that working with Individual Education Plans is considered to have an especially high potential for improving the quality of special needs support. Given the inadequate coordination between the curricula of general school and those of special school, it would also be beneficial to define individual education planning as the central process standard of special needs support and to oblige teachers to elaborate concrete support provisions for each individual child and to follow them during their work.

This general thesis must still be concretised, putting emphasis on two questions:

- Which minimum requirements should Individual Education Plans fulfil?
- To what extent and how should the following process and product components which form part of the minimum requirements be defined/standardised?
  - Educational target setting
  - Collection of information and diagnostics related to problems and potentials
  - Clarification of time perspectives
  - Didactic, pedagogic and therapeutic measures and support provisions
  - Team structures and competences
  - Necessary material, equipment, personnel resources
  - Systematic consistent reflection of the support process, the successes and obstacles, and the changes in the practice of support
  - Target assessment, ...

In this context the question seems to be of special interest on how to guarantee the practice of individual education planning, which gets away from mechanistic and/or primarily diagnostic procedures and recipes, and instead follows dynamic
development concepts which consider feedback loops, adaptations and corrections of the plans and non-linear progress as integral characteristics.

6. Optimal Usage of Resources and Support Potentials in Fully Adapted Inclusive Classrooms (Focus 6)

In the QSP interviews, the high acceptance of inclusive education was linked with many “ifs and buts”. People were in favour of the support potential for both children with and without disabilities, and the innovative potential for the change of school and education. Their positive attitude was, however, put into perspective, because they claimed that inclusive education mainly just had a potential. Required external framework conditions for the implementation of this potential are, according to the interviewees' view, especially the two-teacher system consisting of class teacher and inclusion teacher as the standard system in inclusive classes, a favourable class composition with authentic heterogeneity, and, especially, corresponding qualification of the teachers. They claimed that especially schools of lower secondary education were affected by the absence of favourable framework conditions, indicating the problems of individual inclusion and the support teacher system.

An old problem turns up in this context which has accompanied the inclusion movement since its beginning: the question how sensible and fruitful the inclusion of individual children by means of some support lessons can be in terms of pedagogy. The empirical evidence from the time of the corresponding pilot project and recent studies carried out in Styria have provided quite clear results: the deployment of support teachers in classes with individual inclusion is mostly unsatisfactory for these teachers because their instruction is not really inclusive but in fact specialising and segregative.

Some QSP-experts also see the problems of single inclusion from an economic point of view: the concentration of special needs support at well-equipped schools with main focus on inclusion is, according to them, not only more effective from a pedagogical point of view, but also more cost-efficient than support teacher lessons in individual inclusion. The most important argument in favour of individual inclusion is that care can be provided close to the children's homes - a factor which seems to be more important for primary school than for secondary school.

Thesis:

- The concentration of special needs support in inclusive classes with a persistent two-teacher system could lead to a significant increase in care efficiency and education quality with a simultaneous reduction of costs, or at least constant costs. Therefore, the concentration principle should be applied wherever it is possible, and classes with individual inclusion should be possibly avoided everywhere, especially at urban schools.
- In addition, it should be guaranteed that a teacher with special needs training instructs the class together with the class teacher or the subject teacher.

The question remains which legal implications, organisation and personnel usage
would go hand in hand with such a change in the current system. Suggestions should be elaborated on how to solve problems in this context. At the same time, guidelines should be developed on the preconditions under which exceptions to the concentration principle can be made.

7. Minimum Standards for Material Equipment and Personnel Resources (Focus 7)

In their statements, the interviewees repeatedly called for adequate material equipment and personnel resources for special schools and, especially, for inclusive classes: wheelchair-friendly architecture, appropriate classrooms for differentiation and therapy, appropriate instruction material and, above all, more teachers and better teacher qualification. In addition, they called for therapists and support staff.

The interviewed experts also expressed dissatisfaction with the situation that personnel resources and material equipment of a school location depended on its geographical setting, and that therefore great regional differences in this respect existed. Equipment in the field of compulsory school - and thus also of the regional Special Education Centres - is in the area of responsibility of the competent municipalities, which have different financial power and investment priorities. The maximum number of pupils per class, and the deployment of additional teaching staff for inclusive education are regulated by the Austrian provinces, which range within different limits and levels of obligation. Moreover, the deployment of additional teaching staff sometimes fails to meet the support demand of the pupils - especially at lower secondary schools - but is rather dependent on the occupation of available teachers or on the institutional interests of the school.

Theses

• Irrespective of whether the parallel system of special schools and inclusion will be maintained or not (cf. Focus 1) or whether fully adapted inclusive classes become the standard model of special needs support or not (cf. Focus 6), and irrespective of according to which basic principles resources are allocated (cf. Focus 2), national uniform minimum standards are necessary to guarantee basic material equipment and personnel resources of schools or classes where children with SEN are instructed. These minimum standards should regulate in particular:
  ‣ the maximum number of pupils in inclusive classes;
  ‣ the maximum number of pupils with SEN per inclusive class.

In addition, it should become binding that teachers without qualified training in special needs education are not deployed as additional teachers in inclusive classes.

These minimum standards could become binding via corresponding implementations and changes of the framework regulations provided by the School Organisation Act or - as long as the rights of the provinces to keep their implementation legislation in the area of external organisation of the compulsory schools is protected - via negotiations to reach an agreement between all provinces.
• Despite the fact that the interviewed experts want rather clear and uniform regulations on the maximum number of pupils in a class, the number of children/adolescents to be included in a class and the preconditions for additional personnel deployment also in terms of numbers (and not so much the expansion of scopes of action), it will still be important that schools retain sufficient scope of action to react adequately to concrete situations which concern their location. However, a quality control system must go hand in hand with this scope of action. Discretionary and obligatory provisions on superordinate levels of administration must still be avoided.

• A barrier-free access to all schools is a claim the public authorities must implement in a society which aims at “equal treatment of disabled and non-disabled persons in all areas of everyday life” (Article 7 of the Austrian Constitution).

• Discussions will be needed to solve the individual questions which basic material equipment and personnel resources must be available directly at the individual inclusive school locations (“basic resources” at the discretionary use of the school including resources for preventive support), which personnel resources and teaching materials must be available at regional Special Education Centres and which specific resources must be available only at supraregional Special Education Centres which focus on certain disabilities (cf. also Focus 3).

4 The Work Group Phase

4.1 The Reception of the Results of the Empirical Project Phase

At the beginning of May, 2006, the symposium “Quality in Special Needs Education” was held to present the results of the empirical part of the QSP-project and to plan the further course of action. Apart from representatives of school administration and school supervisory bodies, all those were invited to Graz who had showed an interest in further information and collaboration in project groups on issues of special needs education in the expert interviews. About 80 persons followed the invitation. Mr. Peter Walther-Müller from the Schweizerische Zentralstelle für Heilpädagogik (Swiss Centre for Remedial Pedagogy, translator’s note) in Lucerne held an introductory presentation on “Standards in Special Needs Education”.

The symposium and the presented conclusions from the research results met with approval and appreciation, but also some criticism from the participants. Criticism was mainly levelled at the proposal made in the context of Focus 1 to abandon the parallel structure of special schools and inclusion, and to implement inclusive schooling as the standard alternative.
4.2 Work Group Composition

At the end of the symposium the participants were invited to join work groups to elaborate on what had been presented and to suggest additional topics. At the end of June 2006, 26 experts and the QSP core team convened in Graz.

During the meeting in June, possible approaches for dealing with the topics were presented to the participants in the form of questions. Afterwards, groups as heterogeneous as possible were formed: within each group, the following expertise was ideally to be represented: expertise on special needs education, practical experience in school and experience either as an affected person or as the representative of an affected person, school administration, school legislation, the economics of education, moderation and leadership competence.

Taking into account these requirements, work groups were formed to deal with five topics. The group members then specified the titles of their work groups as follows:

- Quality Standards for Education in Inclusive Classes (Work Group 1)
- Individual Education Plans as Instruments of Education Planning, Evaluation and Quality Assurance (Work Group 2)
- Reorganisation of the SEN Procedure Towards a Better Consideration of the Principles of Provision Diagnosis, Participation and Transparency (Work Group 3)
- Measures to Change the Professional Self-Conception of (Special Needs) Teachers (Work Group 5)

In their first session, the group members agreed on the objectives of their work group, complemented or modified the questions proposed by the QSP core team, and reflected on whether or in which form the work group could be enlarged to reach a good working capacity. Most work groups wanted practical experts or jurists as additional team members. During the summer, practical experts were addressed and won over for participation partly by the work group members themselves, and partly by the QSP core team. The wish for permanent participation of jurists could not be fulfilled, but experts on school and public service legislation from the Ministry for Education participated in one of the subsequent sessions.

4.3 Assignments to the Work Groups and Working Process

The work of the QSP groups should be done during the months of September,

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7 Since the recommendations on structural changes were strongly opposed by some of the symposium participants, it was considered not to be useful to let experts elaborate differentiated implementation proposals for topics that were not likely to find consensus.
October and November, and find a conclusion in a joint presentation of the results in December of 2006 and a common publication. Generally, the groups should organise themselves on their own. The QSP core team offered the organisation of three working phases for all groups for two to three days to consolidate the working steps of the individual groups and to discuss multi-focus links between the topics. The QSP core team took charge of service functions such as the organisation and moderation of meetings, the establishing of contacts and the procurement of required material. Furthermore, the core team gave feedback to the work groups on their interim results. Travel and accommodation expenses were funded by the Ministry for Education via project funds.

4.3.1 Assignment Contents and Guidelines for the Working Process

The final product of the work group process was intended to be a publication leading from the description of the current situation and the related problems to a possibly concrete implementation-oriented strategy for change. This should be oriented along the questions how to improve the situation of pupils with disabilities in the Austrian school system, and how to organise a school system based on support, individualisation and equal opportunities. The results of the work groups should be as concrete as possible to provide a guideline for the implementation process, including argumentation threads, not only from a pedagogical view, but also taking into account educational policy, economy and administration.

Group spokespersons coordinated the groups’ activities and assured continuity in the work process, took care of documentation and putting the work products into writing, and maintained contacts to the QSP core team and to other work groups. A mailing list was set up as a communication platform, adding to the transparency of the whole process.

4.3.2 Progress of Work

The joint working phases of the QSP groups took place in Söchau/Styria from September 14 to 15 of 2006, in Traunkirchen/Upper Austria from October 23 to 24 of 2006, and in Stockerau, near Vienna, from November 26 to 28 of 2006. The results were presented to the educational community in Salzburg on December 15.

All QSP meetings had in common that their participants worked on the project with great commitment and enthusiasm. All involved in the project saw a positive challenge in the opportunity to participate in a working process aiming at the provision of high-quality educational opportunities for children with disabilities and special needs. Plenary sessions until late night and group discussions during the breaks were a normal part of everyday work. The working atmosphere was characterised by great openness, respect and tolerance, despite or maybe even because of the group members’ different backgrounds of school, interest groups, teacher training facilities, educational administration and school inspectorates.
In the end, representatives of school inspectorates, teachers and headmasters, persons engaged in initial and further teacher training and scholars were invited to the final presentation of the QSP work groups in Salzburg. After a retrospective of the project progress the results were presented. The concluding discussion brought about great consent to the work groups’ proposals. However, some also adverted to the necessity to work on the structure of Special Education Centres and the issue of quality assurance for special schools.

The members of the QSP work groups and the core team agreed in March of 2007, during their last joint session, that the QSP core team should prepare a final report on the results which were at hand in different forms and degrees of differentiation. The work groups were also involved in the preparation of this report: the draft versions of the following sections were counter-checked by members of the work groups and the final versions were submitted to the work group members for authorising.

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8 See http://qsp.or.at/index_a.html [20.04.07]
5 Results of the Work Groups

Having in mind the short time frame and the complexity of the issues to be dealt with, the results of the work group phase – which are presented in what follows – are surprisingly substantial. They grasp main problem areas of special needs education and offer proposals whose elaboration and implementation can contribute to the improvement of the support competence of the whole Austrian school system. With this in mind, it must, however, be said that the results cannot be seen as a monolithic, holistic concept that has been deliberated in all its aspects. The results are – as far as their contents’ consistency and their presentation are concerned – selective discussion results subject to compromises. As for the results, readers should therefore take into account the following conditions:

(a) The participants’ expertise was mainly focused on the concrete educational work, organisation and administration of support, and on the initial, further and in-service training of teachers. Legal, economic or political consequences of the pedagogically motivated improvement proposals could therefore only be touched upon in the best case, but not dealt with extensively on any account.

(b) Despite regular efforts to consolidate the results of group work in plenary phases and bilateral meetings of work groups, it was neither possible to eliminate thematic overlaps fully, nor divergent points of view and focuses. This has brought about redundancies which – from the core team’s point of view – have contributed at least in some cases to a more differentiated holistic image, for example, in the issue of Individual Education Plans, which are seen once from a pedagogical point of view, and some other time from their quality assurance function. There have also been tensions with regard to the terminology used and its semantic contents that could not have been resolved in the present text. For example, one work group referred to the proposed low threshold level of intensive support of children without SEN as “special need”, whereas another work group termed it “level of preventive support” with regard to the primary objective of this intermediate level. The editorial team made efforts to achieve a clear presentation without ignoring these differences.

(c) The points of departure in terms of content of the work groups were most diverse. While Work Group 1 to 4 could rely on a problem analysis and thematically focused recommendations from the first phase of the QSP-project – the expert interviews – the topic of Work Group 5, “Measures to Change the Professional Self-Conception of (Special Needs) Teachers” was neither dealt with in the questionnaires nor was it one of the focuses of the first phase. This topic rather emerged across the discussions on the expert interviews and was considered to be central enough to entrust a work group with it. The members of Work Group 5 thus had to elaborate their own specifications of content, which was hardly possible within the given time.
(d) As already stated above, the problem areas to be dealt with represent a selection of a broad list of topics. Controversial focus topics such as the issue of a model for special needs support and the preference for fully adapted inclusive school locations over individual support were not dealt with for the time being, but are still to be addressed. Furthermore, the topic „Special Education Centres as Places of Resource Distribution and as Quality Agencies“ could not be dealt with due to a lack of interest. From the discussion process of the working groups, however, it can be deduced that a reorientation of the Special Education Centres to become Centres of Support will be very important for the implementation of most of the proposed solutions. In the text, you will find comments on several other topics that are still waiting to be addressed. From this point of view, the results of the QSP process can only be regarded as preliminary.

Finally, it should be stressed that – apart from a few exceptions – the proposed solutions cannot be adapted within the existing system and the current legal framework conditions. They require modifications of the system which can only be realised through a democratic will formation process. The proposals are to be understood as pedagogically motivated contributions and signposts towards this will formation process for the benefit of the children and adolescents who require a school system that is special.

5.1 High-Quality Inclusion: Standards for the Inclusive Promotion of Pupils with Special Needs

5.1.1 School Quality through Inclusive Pedagogy: Empirical Findings

There is little evidence about whether the fears, doubts and concerns that were expressed 20 years ago in the context of the pilot projects on the inclusion of pupils with disabilities in the mainstream school system have manifested themselves in school reality. In reports on teachers’ experiences and empirical studies, no evidence has been found that indicates a general overtaxation of teachers or children in inclusive settings. Also the buzzword of a suspected “levelling down” in a heterogeneous class context was often used, but it has not been verified up to now.

Rather the opposite is the case. Investigations in Austria indicate that education planned and carried out diligently does not only have a high support potential for children with disabilities, but even promotes the quality development of school and education on the whole.

- Already in the early 90’s an extensive survey was made, 788 teachers of 332 inclusive classes (at that time still pilot projects) being interviewed. The survey showed that most teachers – mainly from the field of primary education - felt that they could cope with their new task, that working with pupils resulted in a higher degree of satisfaction and enrichment of their professional life (despite additional strain), and that their overall attitude towards joint education
remained mostly positive, both in the case of subject teachers and that of special needs teachers (Specht 1993).

- Also the evaluation of pilot projects on the level of lower secondary education (Hauptschule) brought about mainly positive results. It included points of view and experiences not only of teachers, but also of pupils and parents of children with and without disabilities (for a summary, see Specht 1997a). In particular, it turned out that pupils in inclusive classes experienced a pupil-centred school and learning climate, and attended school with more pleasure, without experiencing negative impacts on the quality of main elements of subject teaching. The parents of the children without disabilities supported inclusive education, and the parents of the pupils with special educational needs were highly satisfied with the promotion of their children in inclusive classes. Furthermore, Feyerer’s study showed that education in inclusive classes was not traded in for a performance deterioration of pupils without disabilities (Feyerer 1997).

It became apparent already at that time, however, that the quality of inclusion at schools of lower secondary education was more subject to problems and disturbances than in primary education, and that it could yield less advantageous results in case of lacking positive framework conditions and teachers’ attitudes and competences (Joppich 1997, Lach-Rabl & Mathes 1997).

- The results of an Austrian-wide study on the evaluation of school autonomy in the area of secondary education (Specht 1997b, Bachmann et al. 1997) also yielded some important findings on inclusion as “by-products” of the study. It turned out that schools of lower secondary education with inclusive classes more often performed active, innovative education and school development work than others. Changes in forms of learning and teaching towards individualisation and pupil-orientation, the participation of teachers and pupils in the development process of the school, and intensive cooperation of the school partners were important observable characteristics of inclusive schools. Although this does not allow causal conclusions, it can be assumed that inclusive school development can unfold educational synergies which are beneficial for the overall quality of schools.

- A more recent study pointed in the same direction, even if its focus was on educational action and the social climate within a class. The study “Schule BEWUSST” in Styria (Specht 2006b), which comprised 177 classes of lower secondary education – among them 55 inclusive classes – of the 7th grade clearly showed that pupils in inclusive classes, compared to non-inclusive mainstream classes,
  - perceived their school environment – including material and social aspects – to be particularly pupil-friendly;
  - perceived class leadership to be more strongly pupil-oriented and education to be more stimulating and interesting;
  - perceived education to be remarkably individualising and based on support.
Problematic aspects such as disturbances, aggression or vandalism did not occur more often in inclusive classes than on average in all the evaluated classes.
However, the study also contains an important differentiation of this result: the above mentioned positive aspects only occurred in inclusive classes where during most of the time two teachers gave instruction via team-teaching (with 5-7 pupils requiring inclusion). Classes with individual inclusion and assistance teacher support by the hour did not positively distinguish themselves from the average.

- The results of the expert interviews of the QSP-project also point in quite a similar direction. There too, many interviewees emphasised that joint education had not only brought about a considerably better quality of special needs support of SEN pupils, but in many cases also more fundamental changes in the educational culture. They emphasised that joint education – at the settings where it was practised – often led to an overall improvement of school and education quality because more emphasis was put on individualisation and differentiation within education, and because it promoted the teachers' team orientation.

In summary, it can be said that the approach of joint education of children with and without disabilities has not just proved successful as a specific form of support for children with disabilities, as more than 80% of the QSP experts have conceded. It is almost as important that within inclusion important features of the learning and teaching culture have started to change gradually: teachers with different training focuses cooperate closely, individual support gains momentum vis-à-vis selection and separation, more attention is paid to the design of pedagogic learning environments, diversity and heterogeneity are seen as opportunities for cooperative learning, and not just as obstacles to conventional forms of education, performance assessment is done according to the individual learning progress and the criteria of reaching learning goals rather than to social point of reference.

5.1.2 Increasing Problems of Implementation

Notwithstanding the above described positive findings, it has become more evident in the last years that mere joint education of different pupils under a single (learning) umbrella is by no means a sufficient condition for the “new learning culture” to become a permanent reality. Education in heterogeneous classes is demanding and can easily fail if certain prerequisites are not fulfilled. At least three prerequisites are necessary to introduce and assure positive developments:

(a) the teachers’ willingness to change conventional forms of education;
(b) the teachers’ competence with regard to the design of diverse, situation-adapted learning arrangements;
(c) certain framework conditions under which both willingness and competence can unfold.

This is especially true for lower secondary education (Sekundarstufe 1). A noticeable trend was in the responses of the QSP experts, indicating

- that the practice of inclusion at primary schools was generally seen as positive and beneficial,
that, on the contrary, in schools of lower secondary education many conditions were perceived that were beneficial only to a limited extent to supportive education for children with and without disabilities.

In many cases the reserved attitude towards joint education and the preference of special school as a place for special needs support by part of the experts are not of a principal nature, but are related to the fact that at many lower secondary schools important framework conditions are not adequately fulfilled to permit the above mentioned strengths of joint education to fully develop. It is stated especially for lower secondary schools that there are very big quality differences in individual school locations in the implementation of inclusion, giving rise to the fear that, because of an increasing number of examples of inadequate practice, the parents’ confidence in the usefulness and pedagogic value of inclusion will be harmed.

**Critical Factors of Joint Education**

Quality risks are mainly seen in the following areas, affecting especially schools of lower secondary education:

- **Classes with too many children or with an unfavourable class composition**: the problem, which is considered to be the most frequent, is that inclusive classes are often characterised by an unfavourable composition which does not correspond to the normal heterogeneity of the pupil population. Frequently, in inclusive classes, pupils with special needs (but without an official SEN statement), such as behavioural difficulties, social disadvantages, migrants with insufficient command of German, etc. are concentrated, which results in an overtaxation of both children and teachers. Pupils with special educational needs cannot be adequately supported under such conditions.

- **Individual inclusion**: another problem potential is seen in individual inclusion, where individual children with SEN are supported by the hour by assistance teachers. In many cases the practice of individual inclusion seems to have negative impacts: pupils with disabilities are not adequately attended to and promoted, subject teachers are often overtaxed when they have to deal with SEN children during the lessons without assistance teachers, which in the end has a negative impact on the overall quality of instruction, and thus also disadvantages the children without disabilities.

- **Insufficiently qualified teachers**: the quality of inclusion is further jeopardised by the tendency to employ teachers in inclusive classes who have no special educational qualifications. Several QSP-experts reported that – again mainly at lower secondary schools – support teacher lessons were divided among persons without training in special needs education.

- **Ability groups**: another problem is the usage of ability groups in inclusive classes. Notwithstanding that learning groups with external differentiation do not constitute ideal inclusive settings, it seems to be a frequent practice to put all children with disabilities (not only those with learning difficulties) in the 3rd ability group where educational and instructional problem cases are
accumulated. It is obvious that the 3rd ability group is not an ideal social learning environment for the support of children with SEN.

- **Insufficient social consistency**: a problem typical of lower secondary school in the context of inclusive education is also the lack of social consistency due to teacher teams that are too large, or the allocation of support lessons to several teachers. Many children with special needs cannot be promoted optimally under such conditions because they need stable personal relationships. In addition, large teacher teams hamper the coordination between instruction and educational efforts (team building) which are especially important for inclusive classes.

- **Quality assurance**: finally, several interviewees shared the experience and observation that too little attention was paid to quality assurance of education and special needs support in inclusive classes at many school locations.

In summary, the results of the expert interviews have shown many indicators of quality problems in the practice of inclusion, affecting mostly the promotion of pupils with SEN, but also instruction on the whole. The reasons for these problems are seen partly in a lack of willingness or competence at the school locations, but to a larger extent in the (regionally different)

- deficient framework conditions (for example, “lack of support for individually included children in classes that are too big” or “too many children with special needs,”
- problematic resource management (“according to our experience often additional resources ... are not used for inclusion, but for the schools’ additional offers ...”),
- and unfavourable structural conditions especially in the field of lower secondary education. There, the “inclusive class is mostly a ‘collecting pool’ for all children with poor performance.” Thus, problems pile up in inclusive classes, due to “children with psychological problems or massive behavioural disorders.”

### 5.1.3 Quality Standards for Inclusive Classes: Principles and Functions

In order to assure the quality of inclusive education, that is, to promote pupils with special needs optimally, while benefiting from the general quality potential of heterogeneous learning groups at the same time, the work group recommends the issuing of binding standards at all inclusive settings.

These standards neither set norms for instruction itself, nor do they regulate the teachers’ conduct and working performance. Generally binding norms for the design of instruction are not practicable according to the current state of educational research, because a major characteristic of good instruction is – and this is also true for inclusive classes – its variability and adaptability, which cannot be captured in a standard. Also teachers’ performance should not be bindingly regulated, because it would be detrimental to the attractiveness of inclusion in the context of school if inclusive teachers were subject to unilateral obligations.

The following standards rather aim at defining framework conditions which make a
better quality of inclusive education *more likely*, because they establish important preconditions for it. These preconditions comprise:

- a possibly high degree of social consistency and stability in the learning groups,
- a possibly balanced heterogeneity in the composition of learning groups,
- a possibly high qualification of teachers, comprising both subject and special needs education,
- the support of inclusive work in the context of school as a whole, and
- effective mechanisms of quality assurance and quality development.

The work group proposes that the Ministry for Education regulate these standards per decree to give them general binding character. This binding character, however, does not mean that the standards *must* be complied with in any single situation, because – as will be shown later – this would not do justice to the individual situations at the individual school locations, which often require context-specific solutions. The standards are rather meant to be guidelines from which any deviation should require explicit justification in the form of an obligatory report.

The standards are subdivided into standards relating to the *class as a unit of education*, addressing *school as an organisation* and as the supporting context, and standards for *regional education management* with the tasks of resource management and quality assurance.

### 5.1.4 The Standards

#### 1. Class Level

*Social consistency:* social consistency and continuity are generally important quality features of educational environments. Clear-cut and reliable social relationships facilitate the development of feelings of security, affiliation and responsibility. This is especially true for pupils who are especially dependent on specific support and protection by their environment due to their disabilities.

A lack of social continuity can become problematic especially in the differentiating subject and ability group system of lower secondary schools. Therefore, inclusive classes at lower secondary schools should adhere to the following binding principles:

- (a) The teaching lessons of the class teacher (who also has administrative duties in his or her class, translator’s note) of an inclusive class should at least amount to a half-time teaching duty.

  In order to guarantee this, the class teacher function should rather be transferred to the special needs teacher.

- (b) Education in inclusive classes should be possibly carried out via internal differentiation (and not via ability groups).

  When this is not possible, children with special needs who are instructed
according to the curriculum of special school should not be placed in the third ability group.

(c) The teacher team of the class should be kept small and, if possible, not comprise more than 8 persons.

To comply with this rule, it might be necessary to allow that teachers give lessons in subjects other than their own. It should, however, be ascertained that the quality of education will not deteriorate due to these circumstances.

The competent school inspector is to be notified if these standards are not complied with due to reasons of social continuity at the school location. The reasons must be stated in detail.

_Heterogeneity:_ successful inclusion requires per definition as much heterogeneity as possible in the composition of learning groups where inclusion is practised. For effective peer learning, pupils of different social backgrounds, interests and abilities must be instructed together. This principle is not only at risk at many urban schools of lower secondary education because many parents send their children to AHS (schools of general higher secondary education); it can also be violated within the schools by additional measures of homogenisation. Therefore, heterogeneity within inclusive classes should be guaranteed through the following standards:

(a) A guideline for class composition is that pupils in inclusive classes should be a representative cross-section of the pupils in the same year at a school.

(b) In particular, an overrepresentation of children with educational, behavioural or learning difficulties who do not receive additional special educational resources is to be avoided in inclusive classes.

Deviations from the demand for heterogeneity are not definitely assessable because this criterion is not clear-cut. Therefore, two measures should make compliance with heterogeneity standards transparent:

- Upon request of the class teacher or the parents’ representatives, the school governing body must report on the class composition.
- If the parents’ representatives or the class teacher have reasons to believe that the heterogeneity standards have been violated when the class composition was settled, the competent school inspectorate must verify on application whether the standards have been complied with.

_Qualified special educational support:_ in inclusive classes, children with special needs must be provided with those provisions and opportunities of special educational support which would also be available for them at special school. Qualified special educational support of pupils with special needs in inclusive classes should be granted by the following provisions:

(a) a special school teacher is employed in the inclusive class with a full-time teaching duty;

(b) teachers who are employed additionally (for example, assistance teachers for
lessons where no special needs teachers are available) must have completed further training on special needs education.

The competent school inspector is to be notified if these standards are not complied with due to school location-specific reasons. The reasons must be stated in detail.

School Level

Inclusive education can only fully unfold its quality when the inclusive classes are a constitutive part of the school and are fully supported by the school community. Already the studies on the evaluation of the pilot projects in the 90’s showed that the “integration of inclusion” – the support of joint education by the school community – was an essential prerequisite for a successful implementation (Specht 1993, Huemer & Gradauer 1997). If inclusive classes are little accepted or isolated, teachers are more often unsatisfied and subject to strain, which is likely to have an impact on the quality of education. Quality assurance at school entails that the school provides those framework conditions for joint education which guarantee the highest possible degree of promotion for all children and the consideration of the special needs of pupils who need inclusive education.

Schools can assure the quality of joint education for optimal support through the following measures:

(a) The location-specific support concept of the school (whose development has already become obligatory by means of the so-called support decree) explicitly includes the promotion of pupils with special needs.

The support concept is part of the school programme, is obligatory for all teachers and is constantly evaluated. The results of the evaluation are to be reported to the school forum (board where parents, pupils and parents are represented).

(b) Resources of special needs education are to be concentrated at the location to allow for maximum effectiveness. This is accomplished through the implementation of classes with assistance teachers and individual inclusion only in justified exceptional cases. It is important not to have more classes with individual inclusion at a location within a grade, but to concentrate resources in inclusive classes with a permanent team of two teachers.

Regional Level

On the regional level, standards are intended to assess and assure quality at school locations and to allocate resources appropriately and transparently. Especially in this context, the Special Education Centres would gain special significance as quality agencies. Since the development of these centres is likely to be a long-term process, and standards should be put into practice as soon as possible, the following two tasks should be taken over by the existing school inspectorates in cooperation with the existing Special Education Centres:

(a) Resources are allocated adequately and transparently to the school locations by a
team of experts cooperating with the school inspectorate, taking into account the location-related requirements. The concentration of resources at individual locations (inclusive classes) is to take precedence over individual inclusion near the home of the affected pupils!

(b) The quality of the practice at inclusive locations is regularly evaluated by means of external inspections. Expert teams (Federal School Inspectors, heads of Special Education Centres, school psychologists etc.) assess the compliance with quality standards on a school and class level.

(c) In order to document these activities, the regional education management body (currently the Provincial or Federal School Inspectorate) publishes an annual report on quality development of regional special educational support under special consideration of the conservation of quality standards for the inclusion of pupils with special needs.

5.1.5 Guidelines for the Development of Quality Standards at Special Schools

In the expert interviews, few individual factors were mentioned that were deemed to hamper or put at risk the quality of care of children and adolescents with SEN at special school. The group of those experts that claimed the necessity of special schools as institutions for support of pupils with special needs hardly called for enhanced quality assurance in this field. Critics of special school, on the contrary, rather listed structural factors that were unfavourable to optimal promotion of pupils with special needs:

- The lack of relationships outside special school favours tendencies toward ghetto formation, and results in an underestimation of the pupils’ performance abilities, inappropriately low expectancies on their competences and performances, and a general failure to challenge them appropriately.

- The structure of special school favours homogeneity of pupils, and thus makes it impossible to benefit from promotion effects that emerge in a mixed pupil population, as is the case in model learning, peer teaching, project teaching with division of work, and many more.

Therefore, quality assurance at special schools cannot start at the framework conditions, but must examine the processes for which – due to the reasons mentioned above in the context of standards for inclusion – it is hardly possible to formulate clearly assessable standards.

Quality assurance at special schools is rather a special case of those requirements of school development and quality work that are today applied to all schools: the development of binding concepts and school programmes, obligatory self-reflection and evaluation, result-oriented school development, external evaluation.

The dimensions of these requirements in terms of content cannot be formulated as externally prescribed standards but are to be developed from practice. Still, several guidelines can be listed as a conclusion:
• The creation of a binding character of demanding and challenging goals of education and individual support;
• best possible transparency (that is, the possibility to evaluate) of pedagogic decisions and methods, individual education planning;
• systematic self-reflection by obtaining feedback from parents, colleagues (peer reviews, colleagues sitting in on instruction), superiors (performance appraisal), school inspectorates and the schools of the next level;
• school-internal standards for further training and reporting oriented towards the concrete requirements of pupils and the corresponding institutional tasks;
• the conscientious establishment of relationships outside school by means of opening school, external teachers sitting in on instruction, external evaluation.

5.2 **INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS AS INSTRUMENTS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AT SCHOOL**

Working with Individual Education Plans in the field of special needs education has been provided on a federal level since 1996 in the curriculum of special school for children with severe disabilities.\(^9\) Item 6 “Education Planning” states:

> "... Every teacher must ... make individual planning for each pupil. The basis for the design of such education plans are the respective developmental and learning conditions of the pupil. Individual Education Plans require the formulation and implementation of the areas of experience and learning including the learning contents of the individual subjects. ..."

Item 9 “Curriculum Usage in Other School Types“ states:

> "... The existing differences between the available curriculum and the curricula of other school types require planning, selection and coordination adapted to the special educational situation of the individual pupils, which is also reflected in the Individual Education Plan. ..."

No other special educational curricula contain any specifications on the usage of IEP. The Ministry for Education is currently working on new curricula for special school, special school for children with visual disabilities and special school for children with hearing disabilities. Within these curricula – being put into practice tentatively in the school year 2008/09 – working with Individual Education Plans will become obligatory.\(^10\)

On the provincial level, working with IEP for children with special educational needs in the field of special school was introduced via decrees and guidelines in Upper Austria and Salzburg in 2001, in Tyrol in 2003, in Carinthia in 2004 and in Styria in 2005. In Burgenland and Vienna there are no written instructions, though there is a strong claim of the school inspectorates to apply education plans; in Vorarlberg and Lower Austria, teachers can freely decide on their usage (Hauer & Feyerer 2006, pp. 9, 10)

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\(^10\) Information provided by Lucie Bauer, Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, Section I/8; 29.05.2007
5.2.1 **Education and Resource Management as a Function of Individual Education Plans**

The expert interviews in the framework of the empirical part of the QSP project (Specht et al. 2006, pp. 23-48) has shown that the concept of “Individual Education Plan” is not uniformly understood and applied by all persons active in special needs education.

However, Individual Education Plans are seen as relevant instruments of quality assurance in the field of special needs education from various points of view: 20 percent of the interviewees commented on IEP in the context of the introduction of standards in the field of special needs education.

They rejected standards because they could be replaced by IEP.

Quite a considerable number of interviewees regarded working with education plans as a relevant standard of special needs education. (see pg. 15).

Also in the context of curricula they commented on IEP and repeatedly called for individualised curricula and education. In this context especially the task of adapting a general inclusive curriculum to the special needs of the individual child is assigned to individual education plans (cf. pg. 16). In addition, they suggested the inclusion of expert opinions obtained during the SEN identification procedure in the IEP to use them not only for a decision on the status of the child, but to make them the basis for support provisions. This would, however, require the introduction of a standardised SEN identification procedure which is oriented towards support diagnosis (cf. pg. 17).

In the conclusions and recommendations made by the QSP core team (see beginning of Section 0, pg. 17 et seq.) central importance is attached to the Individual Education Plan. IEP are seen from two points of view: On the one hand, they are an instrument for the planning, documenting and evaluating of goals or stages in the educational and development process of a child. On the other hand, IEP are supposed to play a central role in the distribution and control of special educational resources. In the focus of these two divergent, but finally complementary functions of IEP the following questions\(^\text{11}\), related to both points of view, became the starting point of deliberations:

(a) How are IEP exactly defined? Which purpose do they serve? What do we want to accomplish with them?

(b) How should an IEP be designed formally and with regard to its content to guarantee a permanent, systematic reflection of its goals?

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\(^{11}\) They were documented in the “Minutes on possible questions for the five work groups and on the results of the first work group session on June 27, 2006” of July 4, 2006.
(c) How should experts from and outside school and parents cooperate in the development and implementation of IEP?

(d) What is the relation between IEP and the curricula?

(e) How can the IEP be the basis for the assessment of the effectiveness of the application of support resources?

(f) What role do education plans play on the way to a support culture for all children?

(g) Who assesses how IEP are designed and implemented, and what they have effected? What role do Special Education Centres play in this context as quality agencies?

(h) How are the principles of empowerment and support related? Do they oppose or supplement each other?

(i) What role do Individual Education Plans play in the context of performance assessment?

In the concrete work process of the group, educational questions on the design and application of IEP as instruments for the promotion of individual children were clearly in the foreground. Deliberations on structural functions of IEP – such as in the context of resource planning and quality assurance – were in the background. The functions of individual support planning and the demands placed upon IEP in a system of special needs education where resources are no longer allocated once to a child, but become stronger and more flexible the competence of individual schools, were also discussed in the Work Groups 3 and 4, and are presented together with their results (cf. Section ..., pg. 68 et seq.).

5.2.2 Support Concept and Definition, Target Group and Central Contents of Individual Education Plans

Individual support of pupils is a central mandate of the Austrian school system. According to Art. 17, Sec. 1 of the School Education Act (in the version of BGBI. Nr. 20/2006) the teacher has the following responsibility:

“...according to the curriculum of the respective school type ... taking into account the pupils' development and the framework conditions (the teacher has to) impart the subject matter according to the results of the latest scientific research, aim at a common educational effectiveness of all subjects, design instruction descriptively and topically, lead pupils to autonomy and cooperation within the community, optimally promote each pupil according to his or her abilities, apply appropriate methods and useful employment of educational material to make the educational yield the basis for further education, and to consolidate it through according exercises.”

Promotion at school can take place in various forms: the design of learning environments and the learning and teaching processes in the form of differentiated provisions for self-regulated learning are support measures that complement the "classic" remedial education (Art. 8 of the School Organisation Act). The latter is to compensate for existing learning deficits, or to prepare pupils to change from a
special school to general school, or in lower secondary education, to jump to a higher ability group. Furthermore, support can be provided according to certain support concepts, such as dyslexia courses in speech therapy, or language courses for pupils that have been accepted as extraordinary pupils due to their deficient language skills. Within the broad range of support provisions, the work with Individual Education Plans is currently a specific form of support for pupils with SEN.

For Work Group 2, it was important to regard support as a promoting and enriching offer, and not to stick to the deficiency-oriented concept of support. “Classic” remedial education – often held after regular lessons for a small group of children with poor performance – is sometimes experienced by the pupils as a punitive measure, but in any case associated with experiences of failure (see, for example, LSR für Salzburg 2004). Also the early warning system according to Art. 19 Sec. 3a of the School Education Act becomes only effective with its support provisions in the eventuality of an impending “failed,” that is, in a situation that is highly precarious for the pupil, and thus provides support as a last option to compensate for deficits. A positive, though not individualised, approach to support can be found currently in school in the form of a voluntary course “Promotion of Interests and Talents,” which is not aimed at the compensation of deficits but provides pupils with the opportunity to develop their abilities further. Apart from promotion by means of optional courses, voluntary exercises and remedial education according to the different curricula, the circular on the obligatory location-related support concept also explicitly refers to the necessity of individual support and stimulation of pupils through differentiation and individualisation within ongoing instruction as a fundamental mandate of school.

From the point of view of a generally positively defined support concept, each individual person requires promotion independent of his or her performance status, because this serves further development. If such an understanding of support is well-encompassed, the aspect of "compensation for disadvantages" included in the concept of support can be dealt with on a more neutral basis: this aspect means that persons with disabilities are to be supported to compensate for disadvantages due to disabilities or due to additional efforts. In the area of school and education, the compensation for disadvantages means support provisions for children with disabilities. They can comprise the rearrangement of the premises or the adaptation of educational material, the specification of objectives and methodical-didactical measures in education, modifications of methods and criteria of performance assessment and evaluation.

12 The voluntary course “Promotion of Interests and Talents“ provides pupils with additional learning activities through which they can develop their personal interests and individual talents. Skills, abilities and knowledge are specially unfolded, further developed and deepened. The objective of this voluntary course is to promote important dimensions of the children’s personalities to the end of a harmonious personality development, and to avoid developments in only one direction. (See http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/3944/VS9T_Begab.pdf) [8. 5. 2007]

On the basis of this positive support concept, individual education planning is

- the diagnosis-oriented, planned accompanying of the learning processes of a child/adolescent.
- It follows a dynamic development concept which includes planning and feedback loops right from the beginning,
- is based on the individual strengths of a child/adolescent,
- starts at the current level of knowledge, skills and abilities of the child and
- aims at the establishment of competences that are relevant to life.

All children and adolescents in Austrian schools have the right to individual support and promotion, and would ideally be educated according to a specific education and development plan designed together with them. Currently, the practical realisation of this seems to be impossible. Therefore, the instrument “Individual Education Plan” is restricted to two target groups for the time being: Children/adolescents who have an identified SEN, and children/adolescents with “special needs” (according to Level 2 of the model of support guarantee in the school system (cf. pg. 63 et seq.).

The central components of an Individual Education Plan for both groups are:

- Description of the starting level of learning;
- Description of the support goals related to a certain period of time;
- Description of the planned support provisions;
- Process monitoring;
- Justifications of possible “planning loops”, that is, for the redefinition of support goals and provisions within the defined monitoring period due to process monitoring;
- Accomplishments (work results) elaborated by the child, which make possible the assessment of the learning processes and the achievement of goals.

5.2.3 Design and Implementation of Individual Education Plans: Prerequisites and Approaches

The design of an IEP for a child at school requires a diagnosis upon which the IEP is based. The diagnosis should comprise the child’s anamnesis and the findings of a child-environment analysis.\(^\text{14}\) If an education plan is designed for a child with SEN, the expert opinion issued for this child has to be taken into account. Moreover, psychological, medical and other expert opinions can contain essential information for education planning.\(^\text{15}\) Diagnostic measures during the production of an expert

\(^{15}\) For more information on the issuing of expert opinions in the course of the SEN identification procedure see Section \(\text{\[\]}\), pg. 66 et seq.
opinion within the SEN identification procedure or during the identification of special needs must not, however, just draw isolated conclusions on the current status but be compiled in a support opinion upon which the Individual Education Plan can build. In order to guarantee data protection, the expert opinions are not considered to be part of the education plan, but are to be administered separately.

The design of an IEP for children/adolescents with SEN is carried out by the special needs teacher who works with the child/adolescent, in cooperation with the other teachers of his or her class. If necessary, supported from the team of the regional Special Education Centre should be possible. In case of pupils with special needs the task of producing an IEP is carried out by the class teacher or the subject teacher in whose competence the focus of the support provisions fall. To this end, the teacher must cooperate with the respective experts.

There are certain conditions to be fulfilled by teachers to design and put into practice an IEP: First of all, teachers must adopt certain positions vis-à-vis the child and must also have the required competences to deal with education plans. It would be desirable that teachers have the following qualifications which support them when working with education plans:

- orientation towards the development profile of the child,
- respectful treatment of the child,
- empathy and clearness in their contact to the child
- giving the child security and trust,
- basing support provisions on the strengths of the child,
- considering mistakes as learning opportunities and respecting the child’s “learning detours”,
- appreciation of the child’s achievements,
- do not punishing the child,
- making use of intra-individual scales when assessing the child.

Required competences of teachers comprise knowledge about developmental steps and the conditions of learning processes - especially about strategies of perception and processing, and the handling of learning barriers. Diagnostic competences are another central qualification. They are not just about being able to handle instruments in a competent way. What is also important are interpretative competence, and a sufficient didactical repertoire to initiate, support and accompany individual learning processes. Qualifications in “pedagnostics” (Kretschmann 2004 – originally “Pädagnostik,” translator’s note) enable teachers to map learning progress continually and analyse them in a process-oriented way. They should also be capable of identifying the motivation and emotions of children and adolescents and including environment-related factors in their considerations. The ability to work in teams and communicative competences are further prerequisites for productive team work as a teacher in a class or as an interdisciplinary support team member.
The identification of the support goals and provisions defined in the IEP are not alone to be achieved by the special needs teacher or the other teachers that work with the child/adolescent. Persons outside school, such as parents and, not least at all, the child him- or herself must be involved in this process. Special support goals and provisions in the field of behaviour and basal cognitive processes, motor function and communication absolutely require the cooperation of school and the child’s/adolescent’s environment outside school.

In case it is not possible to involve parents and persons of the child’s environment outside school in the process of defining support goals and provisions, they should at least be informed on the contents of the IEP. At present, education plans are often “secret papers”. In the future, support goals and provisions at school should become transparent to the parents, the child and – where appropriate – also to other persons who support the child (therapists, caregivers etc.). In this context, it is important to formulate the contents of the IEP sensitively. Competence-oriented support planning must renounce deficit-oriented language.

Concrete support planning at school starts when the teacher begins to monitor and document the strengths of the child. Then the support needs are monitored and documented, taking into account the information of the support opinion. It is sensible to supply teachers with monitoring strategies by means of guidelines. On the other hand, mechanistic procedures such as checklists are rather to be declined.

The considerations that are necessary to elaborate the individual support provisions can be summarised as follows: What information does the existing diagnostic basis provide? How can the child’s strengths be optimally used? How must we design the learning environment in order that the support provisions become effective? What methodical-didactical approaches are recommended? What teaching materials are required to put the support provisions into practice?

It is obligatory that all teachers who teach the child/adolescent collaborate in the implementation of the support provisions. In order to guarantee the necessary motivation and compliance of the teachers, it seems to be necessary to attach corresponding significance within the school's programme and support concept to special educational support. Furthermore, through the involvement of all teachers in the design of the support goals and provisions and the joint regular reflection process of support work, the teachers' willingness to commit themselves - even as non-special needs experts - to the support of a child/adolescent with SEN or special needs should be increased.

The pupil’s achievements within his or her IEP are to be compiled - possibly by himself or herself - in a portfolio. This portfolio shall be given to the child/adolescent at the end of the school year as a “commented direct documentation of achievements”. A documentation of the child’s achievements is also sensible via catalogues of achievement goals. Combinations of both forms of assessment are also

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16 Possible procedures to identify support goals and provisions are Personal Future Planning (Doose 2004), MAP - Making Action Plan, Planning Alternative Tomorrows With Hope (PATH) and Circle of Friends (see Boban & Hinz 1999).
conceivable. Generally, alternative forms of assessment are to be preferred to grading with marks until the end of compulsory schooling, or until the pupils changes to another type of school.17

5.2.4 Approaches to Overcome Current Problems and Obstacles to Working with Individual Education Plans

In the framework of a sub-project of the quality initiative in special needs education, the Ministry for Education commissioned a study on the current significance of Individual Education Plans in the work with children and adolescents who are instructed according to the curriculum of general special school (Hauer & Feyerer 2006). In this sub-project – after an analysis of the application of education plans in Europe, the U.S. and Canada – the points of view of Austrian school authorities and teachers, and 50 IEP used in practice were analysed. In what follows, a summary of several central findings of this study is given, describing how teachers currently assess opportunities and limits of education plans and how they deal with them. Then, approaches to improvement measures are suggested.

5.2.4.1 Opportunities and Limits of Education Plan Work from Teachers’ Point of View

Only about 50 percent of the 650 teachers participating in the study who taught in inclusive classes at primary or lower secondary schools, or at general special schools according to the curriculum of special school, considered IEP to be very important or important. In contrast, school inspectorates consider IEP a “core element of special needs education” (Hauer & Feyerer 2006, pg. 56). This discrepancy shows that we have not yet been successful in convincing all those teachers who already use or should use IEP of the usefulness of this instrument.

An essential aspect that makes teachers believe that working with IEP is problematic is the effort involved. Most teachers rate this effort as high. The teachers’ age of service, their teaching experience, and the obligation to work with IEP are not related in any way to this belief (Hauer & Feyerer 2006, pg. 95 et seq.). When asked for inhibitory factors of working with IEP, many answers indicated a high work load. What teachers most often claimed was that during instruction in class there would be too little time for individual work according to the IEP, because children are too different. Moreover, the following problems were frequently addressed: Lack of information on the formal design of IEP, lack of diagnostic skills and problems with the methodical-didactical implementation of support provisions, incompatibility of class instruction and individual support, and problems in the collaboration with colleagues and parents. Many teachers considered the following support measures to

17 At primary and special schools alternative forms of assessment, such as verbal assessment or the commented direct documentation of achievements are currently possible as pilot projects at almost 25% of all public Austrian schools (Art. 78a, SchUG). In grade 1 and 2 the class forum can decide to introduce verbal assessment in addition to marks (Art. 18, Sect. 2 SchUG).
be helpful in coping with their current situation: material resources (samples, literature) for provision diagnosis, opportunities for further training, especially in diagnostic skills, opportunities to exchange opinions with colleagues (teachers of inclusive education at other schools), competent counselling and assistance at work, and more time for the activities to be dealt with in the framework of IEP (Hauer & Feyerer 2006, pp. 104-111).

Another problematic aspect of working with IEP is seen by 57% of the teachers in the potential conflicts between the mandate of individual support of a child and the necessity to assess his or her achievements according to the goals formulated for each grade of the general special school curriculum. Teachers mainly deal with this currently unsolvable contrariness by interpreting the curriculum generously and orienting themselves towards the child and his or her learning progress – which can even result in ignoring the curriculum (Hauer & Feyerer 2006, pp. 100-102).

Teachers are also critical of the situation of initial and further training related to IEP: on a federal level, only 23% of all teachers are satisfied with current initial and further training. Even in provinces with very active further training, such as Tyrol, not even half the teachers expressed positive attitudes. The teachers’ wishes for further training were in particular related to the enhancement of their diagnostic competences and methodical-didactical help when planning individual support provisions (Hauer & Feyerer 2006, pp. 69-72).

5.2.4.2 Current Practice of IEP Work

At present, teachers seek little cooperation when designing IEP. The persons to whom they most likely concede a right to participate in this field are their colleagues at school (about 80 percent). Parents are not regarded by a third and therapists not by a quarter as potential partners in the production of IEP. Round 60% of the teachers reported that they had in fact involved colleagues in the production of an IEP. Depending on the school type, only between 16% (special school) and 20% (primary and lower secondary school) elaborate the IEP together with the child’s/adolescent’s parents. Only 10% of the teachers see the involvement of the pupil as an option, and in practice it happens accordingly seldom. Almost a quarter of the teachers stated that they design the IEP on their own. About 90% conceded to their school management – and some fewer their colleagues - the right to access their IEP. Between about 50% and 60% of the headmasters and colleagues in fact took a look at the IEP designed by others. And just half the teachers stated that parents, and a quarter that therapists, should be granted access to the IEP. Depending on the school type, between 17% (primary school) and 27% (lower secondary school) admitted that no one except for themselves had accessed their IEP (Hauer & Feyerer, pp. 76-77).

If an IEP has been designed and the child changes school, it still is not taken for granted that the IEP is forwarded to his or her new teacher. Almost half the teachers who were in such a situation received the IEP of their new pupil; 7% received it upon request and 11% not even then. The rest did not attempt to procure the IEP of the child and created a new one (Hauer & Feyerer, pg. 88).
An analysis of 50 IEP that the interviewed teachers made available showed obvious deviations in structure and contained elements from the specifications issued by the school authorities and claimed by scholars (Hauer & Feyerer, pp. 113-141): for example, in several IEP it was not stated who had created them. Not all IEP contained the personal data of the children. The child’s anamnthesis was often missing, and in a quarter of the IEP cases, even the description of child’s initial learning situation. Not all IEP contained support goals. The support goals were hardly structured chronologically. Under the title “support provisions“, however, sometimes the support goals – which were not previously formulated in the sections they belonged to – could be found. Only half the analysed IEP contained support provisions that were explicitly labelled as such. On the whole, only 16 of the 50 IEP contained descriptions of the child’s initial learning situation, support goals and provisions. There was not a single IEP that contained examples of the pupil’s achievements and indications of a nexus between support provisions at and outside school.

5.2.4.3 Approaches to Improvement

This view of the current IEP practice and the teachers’ attitudes towards and their evaluation of Individual Education Plans shows that these fields have a large future development potential. Improvement measures for the existing problems can be found in the following approaches:

(a) Design and Publication of Uniform Standards of IEP Work

More clarity, acceptance and binding character in the work with IEP could be achieved by elaborating and establishing federal uniform standards for IEP work at school. This standardisation should include the following aspects: formal design of IEP, competences, working in networks, updates, implementation and handling, transparency of the IEP within and outside school (parents, therapists, and caregivers).

An Austria-wide uniform formal framework for education plans could help to achieve that all IEP contain the central elements – which is currently not the case. Standards could also facilitate working with IEP produced by another teacher. And last but not least standards would permit equal framework conditions on a federal level for all teachers working with IEP.

As for the design of education plans, sufficient space for differentiating comments to be added by teachers should be provided. Since working with IEP should be continual, and observations are to be recorded in writing in the education plan, the formal design of the IEP should allow for this requirement. Process monitoring is the basis for the setting of new support goals, allowing for “planning loops” that lead to the modifying of support goals and provisions.

Furthermore, it seems to be important to provide clarity on how often education plans should be updated at least within a school year. For keeping the minutes of the
support team’s meetings, scope should be provided within the IEP to stimulate cooperation within the teacher team, and to assure that working with IEP is not considered to be the exclusive task of special needs experts.

It is desirable that issues of data protection regarding the IEP (for example, the right to access IEP and expert opinions, forwarding of IEP to the new school of the pupil) be clarified and implemented via binding federal guidelines.

(b) Resolving Potential Conflicts between Individual Support and Assessment According to Grade Curricula

At present, the support goals stated in the IEP are oriented towards the learning goals of grade curricula which assume that the learning efforts of a grade can be generally accomplished within a school year.\(^\text{18}\) There, learning objectives must be accomplished automatically within a certain period of time, because assessment at the end of each school year must relate to a certain grade. This approach is in contrast to the orientation towards the children’s development progress, and neither corresponds to the claim for individualisation of a modern pedagogy, nor to the principles of a child-oriented support culture. Therefore, it seems to be useful to work towards the replacement of curricula oriented along grades with catalogues of attainment targets that are not grade-bound. We can achieve that assessment is child-oriented if his or her learning progress is assessed as the benchmark of an individual norm instead of the curriculum norm. At the end of compulsory school, one can decided on further support provisions or the necessity of selective measures via standardised assessment procedures.

(c) Teacher Training

Apparently, changes are also necessary in the initial training, further and in-service training of teachers to implement process-oriented support diagnosis and planning successfully. Competences in monitoring and diagnosis, methods to plan and design learning processes individually and differentiated, and cooperation and counselling are to be imparted. These factors must be taken into account in the curricula of teacher training and in the focuses of further and in-service training.

(d) Teacher Employment Law

The question “added value or just more work through IEP?” is a central issue in the context of the application of Individual Education Plans and the related laborious concepts of performance assessment and evaluation. Apart from comprehensive changes in the field of initial and further training, it is also necessary to modify teacher employment law to make IEP a “core element of special needs education”

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\(^\text{18}\) One deviation from the principle of the "grade curriculum" is the curriculum of special school for children with severe disabilities, which completely renounces school year related grades. Grade curricula are less strict in primary school and general special school at Grundstufe 1. There, learning goals are no longer defined according to a grade – or school year – but are summarised for the complete Grundstufe 1. This does not conflict with the regulations of pupil assessment, because all pupils of the first grade are entitled to advance to the second grade (Art. 25 Sec. 4 SchUG).
(Hauer & Feyerer 2006, pg. 56) as it is already seen by the school inspectorates. Teachers should not only be enabled to produce profound Individual Education Plans, they should also be able to put them into practice in inclusive and special school classes. If personal motivation to commit oneself to this new task of special needs education is to be positively influenced, it will be necessary to respond to the current problems of teachers with IEP work. The current teacher employment law will have to be adapted to the innovations emerging due to the work with IEP.

(e) Research and Development

Further research and development is to be done in the field of IEP. Focuses are the development of standards for the design of and work with IEP and the field of support diagnosis. Also Hauer and Feyerer (2006, pg. 145 et seq.) formulated recommendations on the sustainable encompassment of support planning. As for the individual proposals elaborated for the diverse fields, they indicated that they first had to be differentiated and evaluated with regard to their feasibility. The paramount fields are: formal criteria of IEP, participation/cooperation, pedagogic implementation of IEP, quality assurance, initial, further and in-service training, supporting networks, definitions of decrees and “added value” for teachers.

A school location matrix of support diagnosis in Austria – quite similar to the matrix created in Switzerland of the Basisstufe (primary level) by Brunner, Fluri & Stadler (2006), complemented by a commented catalogue of diagnostic procedures - could be the starting point for further development in the field of process-oriented, pedagogically effective support diagnosis that can at the same time be put into practice by teachers during their educational work.

Finally, the postulate should be assessed that by means of targeted preventive support – be it through applying IEP or support agreements - the extent of formally identified SEN can be reduced (see pg. 60). The school start period would serve perfectly as an observation field for this purpose. In the field of (special needs) education in the school start period the necessity of specific support measures must be identified as soon as possible to support the affected children adequately. In case of a threatening disability or short or medium-term conditions of a child (special needs in terms of Level 2 of the support concept, see pg. 63) necessary individual or structural prevention or support measures must be implemented. The consequences of diagnosis-oriented, targeted provisions for children with special needs could also be analysed and evaluated under the aspect of the prevention of SEN in the area of the school start period, where individualisation of education and flexibility in terms of time is to be approached for all pupils.

5.3 A Flexible System for Support at School

In this section, the Work Groups 3 and 4, having dealt with the topics “Making Resource Allocation for Special Needs Support More Flexible” and “Objective Procedure to Identify Special Educational Needs”, present a joint proposal for the
reorganisation of support provisions within the school system.

5.3.1 Overview of the Proposal for a Flexible Support System

The promotion of pupils in the Austrian education system is based upon two legally encompassed systems: the principle of differentiation and individualisation of educational work included in the curricula, and the support of children with special educational needs.

In the Ministry for Education’s circular 11/2005 with the title “Besser Fördern” (“Better Support,” translator’s note), low threshold measures are described that every school can implement to improve the learning climate and to promote individual pupils with learning difficulties, insufficient command of the language of education or special talents.

Article 8 of the Compulsory School Act permits – via the identification of special educational needs – the promotion of pupils in the general school system who, without this higher threshold measure, would not be able to comply with the objectives of the curriculum of the respective school type due to their disability.

The QSP work groups argued in favour of the establishment of a low threshold intermediate level in case of a special need, and of preventive support. In these cases the SEN identification procedure with all its implications for the child's school career would be too profound a step which, furthermore, could not be carried out fast and flexibly enough to launch preventive measures. On the other hand, the short- and medium-term personnel resources necessary for this kind of support are not available within the general support provisions at school.

Thus, flexible resources must be made available for this field which can be allocated to schools on the basis of time-bound support agreements. These support agreements between a school and the competent school authority, are to be regarded as binding process standards which describe assessable support goals and provisions to reach these goals. Support provisions can be allocated to individual pupils, but also to classes and schools, if systemic support is required. Support agreements are made on the level of prevention and special support requests, and on the level of support in case of special educational needs. In the latter case they form part of the Individual Education Plan.

A Regional Support Centre, which acts on behalf of the District School Board to increase the general support competence of the school system, is entitled to allocate resources to assist in the design of education plans and to provide counselling for their implementation.

This work groups’ proposal is described in detail as follows.
5.3.2 Point of Departure, Reference to the Results of the Expert Interviews

5.3.2.1 Allocation of Support Resources Is Input-Oriented

Even after years of efforts towards increased school autonomy, resource management within the Austrian education system is still carried out centrally and explicitly in an input-oriented way (see Altrichter 1999). Personnel resources are allocated to schools of compulsory education according to the employment guidelines of the Ministry for Education following federal quotas (based on statistical parameters such as number of pupils in the different compulsory school types, class separation numbers, school type and curriculum schedules). These guidelines also contain the scheduled appointments in the field of special needs education (for pupils in special schools and in inclusive classes of primary school, Secondary Level 1 and prevocational school). These resources are also allocated according to a uniform scheme which is based upon the assumption that 2.7 percent of the pupil population require special needs support. This strategy of resource allocation suffers from considerable deficits in its system management function and with regard to the quality of special needs support:

- it does not respond to the actual demand of support, which varies from pupil to pupil;
- it is static – allocation is made on the basis of the compulsory school teacher posts arranged for a period of 5 years within the budget – while the actual demand increases or decreases;
- output criteria, such as support efficiency, play no, or even a “counterproductive”, role in resource allocation because resources are drawn off when support has been very successful;
- it hardly allows preventive low threshold support because no resources are allocated without the official issuing of SEN;
- its effect is focused on the support of individual pupils and not on the overall improvement of the support competences of the school system;

The proposal for a reorganisation of resource allocation elaborated during the work group phase of the QSP-project and presented here aims at creating and maintaining a support system which is compact, assessable and efficient, complies with the respective individual and systemic demands, allows preventive support and thus guarantees all pupils their required support.

5.3.2.2 Available Resources Do Not Correspond to the Actual Demand

The problems addressed before are reflected in the QSP expert interviews. Experts criticise that a quota-ruled allocation of resources does not meet the actual support requirements. An example: “The school authorities should bindingly arrange for the necessary framework conditions of inclusion. In the course of this, the required
resources must be individually adapted to the pupils. This means concretely that we cannot say any more that there are at the most only x lessons available for each pupil. It must become possible to deploy enough personnel.” This claim for a demand-oriented allocation of resources, which has often been made, has its roots firstly in the fact that the real percentage of children with SEN of 3.43% in the year 2003 (data from the school statistics) – tendency still rising – is clearly above the calculation base of 2.7%, and thus means an objective lack of resources. Secondly, it is hard to understand that a child with severe disabilities who needs comprehensive support principally gets the same resources as a child who needs individual support in some areas of learning. This “uniform distribution” is seen as problematic, especially in inclusive classes or classes with assistant teachers, because the small number of pupils requiring special support does not allow for precisely the quantity of support the individual child requires.

5.3.2.3 Resources Are Allocated Too Late – Prevention Is Hardly Possible

Even if available resources were to be qualified to be sufficient and were allocated according to the actual support demands, the basic problem would still remain that, first of all, special educational needs must be identified before comprehensive support can be launched. This system deficit has become quite apparent in the expert interviews. Apart from objections based on inclusive pedagogy, such as the stigmatisation due to the SEN identification, or the limitation of the process-oriented support diagnosis to a status identification due to the formal act, criticism was most often aimed at the deficient preventive focus of the system. While scientific studies have shown already quite well that support is more effective the earlier it is started, in Austria qualified special needs provisions may only be launched after all the other systems of support have failed, and thus have already accustomed the child to the “negative circle of failures at school” (Specht et al. 2006, pg. 57) The fact that special needs support is not prevention-oriented in the Austrian school system is evident from the analysis of the school statistics: in 2003, for example, at primary school the share of pupils with SEN amounted to 2.85%, while on the level of secondary school, their share was 3.99%, which is almost double. The prevention deficit becomes even more apparent when we take a look at individual grades. The share of pupils with SEN attending preschool level and the first grade of primary school was about 2%, whereas in the last two years of secondary education (7th and 8th grade) it amounted to more than 4%. Therefore, many experts call for the decoupling of the identification of SEN from the possibility for giving special needs support – especially for children whose school careers have already been marked by risk factors and problems, but not yet resulted in a SEN.

5.3.2.4 Support Provisions Are Barely Cross-Linked within the System

Parallel to explicit special needs support due to an identified SEN, parallel systems exist with the aim of assisting pupils with special needs in their education. The expert interviews named mostly speech therapy and work with children with
behavioural difficulties. Although support in these fields is mainly given by special
needs teachers, and the resources of their activities come from the quota covering
support of children with SEN, the identification of SEN is - except for some isolated
cases - not necessary. Preventive, short- or medium-term interventions can thus be
launched in these fields on a low threshold level. Therefore, experts have asked the
critical question why this is not also possible in other areas of support, and, to what
extent the usage of (already scarce) resources reserved for pupils with SEN puts the
guaranteed support of this group at risk. Moreover, the school system comprises
further institutions for differentiation and individualisation such as remedial
education, support in case of reading and writing difficulties or dyscalculia, the
promotion of gifted pupils - generally speaking - the provisions of the school
location-related support concept. Since these institutions work in overlapping areas
in an uncoordinated and parallel way, the expert interviews reflected the wish to
develop a systemic approach to coordinate and streamline the “means and tools of
education that have become incoherent” (Seguin, cite in Feuser 1995) to form a
comprehensive system of support.

5.3.2.5 Special Educational Needs and Resource Management

If we regard the support institutions at school from a systemic point of view, the
question arises what significance is given to SEN, its identification, assignment and
function for resource allocation. Many experts are in favour of the complete abolition
of the SEN procedure: “Only the system needs SEN. Children need teachers who are
capable of performing analyses of their learning state and process, and sufficient staff
to provide each child with adequate learning offers.” Experts prefer – conforming to
a study of the European Agency (Meijer 1999) – resource allocation to the system of
support institutions, and not to the individual child: “Do away with the child-related
resource distributions and start system-related allocations” (Specht et al. 2006, pg.
57). Others criticised the definition of SEN which opens broad scopes of action –
though not always for the child’s benefit but rather for personnel-political measures
–, the inconsistent, often selective and partly opaque SEN identification procedure,
the inconsistent qualification of experts and sometimes the lack of parent
involvement. It is apparent that SEN identification is handled differently in different
regions. In 2003 the share of pupils with SEN in Tyrol amounted to about 2.8%, and
in Vienna to 4.7%. One might attempt to explain this discrepancy by citing the
diverging population structure in rural and urban regions; however, this thesis is
confuted by the high 3.9% in Vorarlberg and the low 3.0% in Burgenland. Thus, clear
differences in the interpretation and handling of the SEN instrument become
apparent when we assume that support requirements are equally distributed over
the pupil population of all Austrian provinces. This made experts call for a
discussion on the necessity and sensibility of SEN, but at least, for minimum
standards in the identification procedure.
5.3.2.6  Special Education Centres as Hubs for Resource Allocation and Quality Agencies

In the expert interviews it was often claimed that the paradigm shift from special schooling to inclusive education in the general school system has been formally completed to an extent varying from region to region, but that the further development of educational work and administration necessary for a successful implementation has not been promoted yet. With regard to a demand-oriented resource distribution, a key role has been attributed to the Special Education Centre. It has the task of coordinating the work of special needs teachers in its area of responsibility and to monitor the efficient usage of resources. To be able to comply with this task, however, they lack a clear mandate, respective competences and the required personnel resources. In addition, discrepancies and role conflicts turn up due to the double function of special school administration and regional support of schools of inclusive education. On the whole it can be said that there is no adequate quality assuring monitoring of the support provisions of the Austrian school system, the allocated resources and the successful achievements. Moreover, the mesh of federal and provincial competences, and the regional management autonomies make it difficult to disclose the complete amount of applied resources. Many experts are therefore in favour of a new definition of the role, tasks and functions of Special Education Centres.

5.3.3  Recommendations of the Study: Central Issues

The findings of the expert interview were incorporated in the central issues of the QSP core team and formulated in the form of development necessities (see Section 0, pg. 17 et seq.). A brief outline of the central issues which are important for resource management is given as follows (see Specht et al. 2006, pg. 51 et seq.), even if the focuses of the work group phase have partly changed:

Making resource allocation for special needs support more flexible

“The fact that personnel resources are allocated only after SEN has been identified leads to the situation that - especially in doubtful cases - special support is provided late and therefore preventive measures are normally not possible. What would be desirable is a regionally coordinated distribution of support resources which is oriented towards the demands of the schools. The schools should then decide the application of the resources autonomously. Via binding accountability procedures and output-monitoring (Individual Education Plans!) the quality of these measures should be assured.”

Special Education Centres as hubs for resource distribution and as quality agencies

„In order to implement a demand-oriented support strategy that works largely autonomously, it is necessary to establish regional agencies which plan, allocate and evaluate the optimal application of material and personnel resources within the respective region. The institution of Special Education Centres seems to be perfectly suitable for these tasks. However, their tasks as quality agencies must be decoupled in all dimensions from their school management tasks.”
**Objective procedures to identify special educational needs**

“Instead of the identification of SEN (whose central function of resource allocation will be at least limited) a diagnostic procedure should be designed, which is better suited to objectively identifying special needs and to making them assessable. The results of this procedure should provide teachers with the diagnostic bases for individual education planning. The guidelines for such a procedure should be uniform in all over Austria and the participation of all involved and the qualification of all persons active in this field must be guaranteed.”

**Individual education plans - process standards for special needs support**

“The SEN identification procedure must yield education plans which control teachers’ pedagogic actions and make it possible to evaluate the success of support provisions. Individual Education Plans should become binding in their function as process standards of special needs support. They should not be limited to the character of a documentation, but must be subject to ongoing evaluation and be adapted to the respective requirements.”

### 5.3.4 Focuses of the Group Phase of the QSP-Project

#### 5.3.4.1 Common Topics: Reorganising the SEN Procedure and Making Resource Allocation More Flexible

Following the presentation of the study results and the central issues, work groups were formed from the ranks of the interviewed experts. At the beginning of the group phase of the QSP-project, the participants defined the areas of work they would like to deal with on the basis of the central issues. During the elaboration it turned out that Work Group 3 “Reorganisation of the SEN Procedure” and Work Group 4 “Making Resource Allocation More Flexible” had thematic overlappings in essential spheres. It was not possible to discuss flexible resource allocation without having clarified the significance of the SEN procedure and its key function in resource allocation. On the other hand, the SEN identification procedure could not be treated independently of its position within resource allocation. As a consequence, both work groups elaborated and presented many aspects of their topic together. In what follows, the results are illustrated in their context without labelling the contributions of the work groups.

#### 5.3.4.2 Special Education Centres as Hubs for Resource Distribution and as Emerging Quality Agencies

The focus of “Special Education Centres as Hubs for Resource Distribution and as Quality Agencies” could not be dealt with in the work group phase. However, the central significance of the reorganisation of Special Education Centres with the above mentioned functions has become apparent insofar as all work groups composed contributions as by-products on a new definition of the tasks of Special Education
Centres, which were more or less important for their own topics. This is especially true for Work Group 4 which dealt with resource distribution. In Section 0, pg. 70 et seq. a summary of these contributions is attempted.

5.3.4.3 Individual Education Plans in Their Function as Process Standards

Even if the topic „Individual Education Plans“ was reserved for Work Group 2, overlappings emerged in the context of assessability of resource application and quality assurance, which could not be completely covered by Work Group 2 because its members rather dealt with educational aspects and not so much with administrative/management aspects of the topic (see Section 0, pg. 40 et seqq.). This is especially true of the function of education plans as instruments to establish process standards in special needs support. Since this function is important in the context of resource management, Section 0, pg. 68 et seq. attempts to illustrate requirements placed upon education plans from this point of view.

5.3.5 Required Expansions of the Support System at School

The Austrian school system already comprises a broad variety of support provisions. The discussion phase in the work groups has shown that only few are aware of the whole range of these provisions, that they are accessible and used differently depending on the region, and that they are hardly homogeneous and have no superordinate management.

5.3.5.1 Existing Low and Higher Threshold Support Provisions

Basically speaking, there are two main components upon which support provisions within the school system rest. The first component is low threshold support, which comprises the general mandate for individual support of pupils, specified in the 2005 circular „Better Support,“ which obliges schools to design a location-related support concept. The second component is higher threshold support, provided according to the identified SEN.

(a) „Better Support“: The Ministry for Education’s circular No. 11/2005 „Better Support“ discussed individualised and differentiated education design, remedial education in individual subjects, language lessons for pupils with mother tongues other than German, promotion of gifted children, provisions at the interfaces between school types, the creation of a beneficial learning climate on the school and class level, and the negative assessment early warning system. These provisions are to be elaborated on a regional level and integrated into a location-related support concept. Their implementation is to be evaluated by the schools themselves. Special support models, such as the treatment of reading and writing difficulties at school on the legal basis of the decree GZ 33.543/26-V/4(V/8)/2001, speech therapy, courses according to Art. 25 of the School Organisation Act (therapeutic and functional exercises and courses to assess
SEN), and support by advisory teachers, are also to be placed within this low threshold level of support.

(b) Identification of Special Educational Needs: Support provisions for an identified SEN are based on Art. 8 of the Compulsory School Act, which defines SEN and the underlying identification procedure and the parents’ right to decide on the school type where their child with SEN is to be instructed. These support provisions generally comprise the placement in the curriculum of special school, at least in one subject, and at least partial support by a special needs teacher. The identification of SEN generally entails a change in the school career of a child, for example, concerning his or her finally attained level of education. It is possible to suspend SEN; this is, however, seldom done. The identification of SEN is therefore to be regarded as a higher threshold, long-term measure.

5.3.5.2 Preventive Support and “Special Need”

There is a gap between the above mentioned approaches. SEN is a slow instrument which can only be applied in time in case of apparent disabilities. In most cases where the provisions according to the support decree are not sufficient, it is neither possible nor advisable to issue SEN immediately. The work groups have set themselves the target of establishing a short- and medium-term, low threshold, but intensive and qualified support with the important objective of prevention. Highly gifted pupils or children/adolescents with mother tongues other than German, who also require more comprehensive and specially qualified support, are fostered via this intermediate level of support provisions at school, just as pupils in danger of developing disabilities, or with short- or medium-term learning and behavioural problems.

5.3.5.3 Systemic Encompassment of Support

Apart from the above described intention to install a well-equipped and pedagogically assured preventive support channel, it seems to be necessary for the improvement of the quality of support provisions to combine currently separated elements of the school system which serve the promotion of pupils in different ways, to form a compact and transparent system that helps to achieve the following goals:

- **Clarity and transparency of the available support provisions for pupils, parents and teachers:** only the systematic compilation of the complete variety of support provisions at school facilitates the application of adequate provisions to the individual case.
- **Austria-wide standardisation of the range of services of the system school with respect to support provisions:**
- **Similar to the circular “Better Support,”** which attempted to bring the regional

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19 The Ministry for Education has taken up the proposal of the QSP work groups and is currently elaborating a new model for resource allocation for this intermediate level of support in case of “special need for support” (Lucie Bauer, on the telephone, 18.05.07)
differences of support provisions onto a uniform line, this draft will establish an even more comprehensive model obligatory for all provinces.

- **Gradual, demand-oriented support system with low and higher threshold components:** Through low threshold access to comprehensive support – while maintaining the existing low threshold support as the general principle of the Austrian school system and the guaranteed higher threshold support of pupils with disabilities – adequate and demand-oriented response of the system should be made possible in case of risk factors, short- and medium-term learning and behavioural problems, but also for gifted pupils.

- **Reducing the response time of the system to meet identified support needs:** Through the elimination of the SEN identification procedure and through largely regional autonomous management in the area of preventive measures, the system can quickly and dynamically respond to support needs without binding resources indefinitely.

- **Establishing effective preventive support as an essential system component that has hitherto hardly been implemented:** Preventive measures are currently limited to the creation of a beneficial learning climate, measures of differentiation and individualisation, remedial education and the design of a location-related support concept. Even if this basis is really important, it is not enough for comprehensive prevention. Especially the school start period requires more preventive options.

- **Decreasing the number of pupils with SEN:** It is assumed that through early intervention and temporary support provisions, which do not require an expert opinion, the number of pupils with SEN can be reduced.

- **Assuring demand-oriented support of children with disabilities:** It is the task of school to guarantee that pupils with disabilities receive the support they need for their individual period of time.

5.3.5.4  *The Model “Support Guarantee within the System of School”*

**Level 1 “Individual Support”**

The basic level of the support system contains all measures described in the circular “Better Support”. These measures are applied when transitional learning difficulties, deficits or special abilities and talents have to be dealt with individually. The required resources remain those which have already been destined to remedial education. Going beyond that purpose, the promotion of pupils is a fundamental educational mandate of the Austrian school system and an elementary principle of any education. Unlike current handling, more provisions should be outsourced from this field by means of units, organised as courses, such as speech therapy, support in case of dyslexia and dyscalculia, support by advisory teachers, German lessons for pupils with mother tongues other than German, and the promotion of gifted pupils. These pupils are currently promoted too – but mostly in the framework of regional resource shifting. However, we assign these support

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20 To be able to identify the individual levels during their elaboration, the work groups gave them names. These names are to be understood as preliminary working concepts.
provisions, due to their medium-term character, to Level 2 of the support system, which is to be newly created.
### Support Guarantee within the School System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Pupils</th>
<th>Target Group</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Support Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3) Special Educational Need (SEN)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children with psychological and/or physical disability acc. to Art. 8 SchPfLG</td>
<td>Identification procedure, issuing of an official decision</td>
<td>Monitoring period, curriculum allocation, decision on the school location</td>
<td>SEN resources</td>
<td>Individual Education Plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| <strong>2) Educational Support for Prevention</strong> (&quot;Special Need&quot;) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Group</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Support Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children with learning difficulties; reading, writing or calculating difficulties; behavioural or language disorders; gifted children; children with mother tongues other than German</td>
<td>No procedure, but &quot;Report on Support Diagnosis&quot;</td>
<td>Support provisions during a certain period of time</td>
<td>Resource distribution on the basis of the available support resources</td>
<td>&quot;Support Agreements&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| <strong>1) Individual Support</strong> (bmbwk-Circular 11/2005 &quot;Better Support&quot;) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Group</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Support Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children with transitory learning difficulties</td>
<td>Assessing their current state of learning</td>
<td>Remedial education, Individualisation, Differentiation</td>
<td>as before</td>
<td>obligatory school-related support concept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Level 2 “Educational Support for Prevention”:** This level is applied when additional short- or medium-term support measures are required to cope with a “special need”. In this model, no SEN identification procedure is required to get preventive support. The basis for promotion is a support agreement which is made for a defined period of time. Resources of special needs education, which are allocated according to demand by the competent Special Education Centre, can be applied. In this context it is the task of the Special Education Centre to provide counselling and support. It provides mobile experts who assist in designing the support agreement and who are responsible for more comprehensive (special) educational provisions. The procedure required to make use of “special support” is described in detail in the following section.

**Level 3 “Special Educational Needs“:** At the upper end of the scale of measures is still the Special Educational Need. As defined in Art. 8 of the Compulsory School Act, SEN is to be identified when a pupil cannot comply with the educational goals of mainstream school put down in the curriculum without getting additional special needs support because he or she is restricted in his or her developmental or educational opportunities due to a physical or psychological disability. The basis for the identification of SEN is the legally prescribed procedure for which minimum standards are defined below. Under the assumption that measures of Level 2 are sufficient in many cases, the number of pupils with SEN should be reduced or not go beyond 2.7%.

An essential element of this model is the **Support Guarantee**. In the context of resource allocation, it means that in case of a proven existing special need, the required support resources and measures are also to be provided for individual support. Support is given on the basis of binding support agreements which have been made in the course of a specified procedure in a transparent way and are subject to quality assurance which is externally documented. Thus can the significance of support provisions be conveyed to parents and pupils; teachers obtain a clear definition of tasks and professional continuity, and a hitherto missing component of system management and monitoring can be installed.

### 5.3.6 A Model for Flexible Resource Allocation

Support resources can only be used efficiently when the local conditions, the individual and systemic requirements and the available resources are clear. Resource allocation according to a static distribution principle can hardly reflect the support requirements of individual schools or children. It is absolutely necessary to know the

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21 In the work groups a complete abolishment of the SEN identification procedure combined with resource allocation to the school and not to the child was discussed at first. The decision to retain the procedure was made because on the one hand continuity and stability of the resources must be granted for children with comprehensive disabilities, and on the other hand because SEN identification has such a strong impact on the school career of the child that a formal procedure with the parents’ right to object must be given.
respective system well. Therefore, the global, input-oriented top-down allocation of resources must at least partly be replaced with bottom-up and output-oriented procedures for the allocation of necessary resources. The strategy described as follows is immediately necessary in particular for the areas of “preventive support” and “special needs” which must be newly established, but also comprises the areas of the currently existing individual support and SEN.

An analysis of the current system of resource allocation has shown that

- as said before, resource allocation is completely input-oriented: resources are allocated according to data such as the number of pupils or the time table, but not to the actual demand;
- the parallel systems of special school and inclusion are unequally supplied with resources because only special school classes receive resources according to curriculum requirements and time tables, but not all inclusive classes;
- measures for more flexible allocation - such as the usage of SEN resources for the support of the whole system, and not only for individual pupils - are legally possible, but seldom applied;
- an effective approach to making resource management more flexible, comprising all available support resources (special educational resources based on SEN identification, resources for remedial education, programmes such as German for children with other mother tongues etc.), must be considered at both special and mainstream schools and included into resource management.

5.3.6.1 Establishing Regional Expert Teams

In order to implement flexible resource management which takes into account regional, location-specific and individual conditions, a regional team of experts must be formed that performs, evaluates and - if necessary - modifies this resource management.22

This team of experts is defined as follows:

- In terms of organisation the team is assigned to the competent regional Special Education Centre. New regulations of teacher employment law are required in this respect.
- The team advises and accompanies schools in the planning and implementation of support provisions.

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22 The study “Individual Education Plans for Pupils Instructed according to the Curriculum of General Special School” (see Hauer & Feyerer 2006, 30 et seq.) shows as a result of international comparisons of working with education plans, that at schools where teams are committed to planning and reflecting upon support provisions, education plans are used for supportive purposes. This entails that the opportunity of exchange and counselling apparently be accepted and considered helpful in the accompanying support of pupils. At the same time, the conclusion can be drawn that a higher degree of obligation emerges for the provisions if they have been agreed upon and evaluated by the team.
• The team can flexibly allocate resources to individual schools or classes for a certain time, depending on the need for support.

• Together with schools and teachers the team evaluates the agreed provisions.

• It counsels parents on possible school careers and appropriate support provisions. This task is currently fulfilled by the School Inspector (Art. 8a (2) Compulsory School Act); a new legal regulation is required.

• In case the measures performed in the framework of a special need or prevention do not prove successful within a certain period of time, the team launches a procedure to identify SEN.

• The core team comprises the following members: District School Inspector (team leader), head and staff of Special Education Centre, school psychologist. The main task of the core team is to identify the demands and to coordinate support provisions.

• The extended team, being summoned by the core team when required, consists of the headmaster and teachers of the schools and classes where support provisions are to be applied, the parents (or parent representatives), pupil representatives, experts to be called in for specific issues (for example, speech therapists, advisory teachers, physicians, Youth Welfare etc.).

• The team members cooperate on the basis of clear public service regulations that give them the appropriate status in their field of activity. New legislation is required in this context, too.

Due to its proximity to school and immediate counselling and help in the different contexts of school, such a team can increase the effectiveness and sustainability of the applied provisions. In addition, the employment of expert teams who closely cooperate with schools, a different culture of resource requests and allocation is possible which aims at reducing the initially necessary high quantity of support – especially in the area of prevention – step by step to improve local support through the transfer of competences and individual responsibility. Only through permanent assistance and evaluation can it be assured that allocated resources are also released.

5.3.6.2 Resource Allocation by the Regional Expert Team

How can a school or class receive extended support and provisions in the area of prevention and "special needs"?

• First the school files an application for counselling and assistance of pupils to the regional expert team. The application lists all already procured measures based on the location-related support concept, the successes already had, and the problems that still remain.

• Together with the class teacher, a member of the expert team makes a diagnosis of the status quo, taking into account the local conditions. The diagnosis contains the description of the organisation framework, the quality of support of the entire
school, and the quality of the available methodical-didactical surroundings and provisions with regard to the support goals; it describes the current development stage of the child/adolescent and his or her situation.

- On the basis of the description of the status quo together with the teacher supportive measures are developed and put down in a support agreement. In the support agreement, not only interventions with regard to the individual pupil are to be described, but also measures which aim at changing the organisational, methodical and didactical framework conditions. Parents and the headmaster are integrated in the procedure prior to signature of the support agreement. It is a binding agreement between the school, the regional expert team and the superior authority (District School Board).

- If necessary, further experts can be called in the extended team. Parents have the opportunity to form part of the extended team, too.

- If resources are required which go beyond the counselling of the expert team and are not available to the school, the regional expert team decides on the extent and duration of an allocation.

- The expert team counsels the school and the teachers during the time the support provision is applied.

- The evaluation of the success of the applied provision is made by the competent expert team. The expert team decides on further support – if required – on the basis of the evaluation.

5.3.6.3 Multi-Level Permeable Support Model

The result of the process described above will vary, as the case arises:

- If measures of differentiation and individualisation, the improvement of the learning climate, targeted remedial education and specific further training for teachers are generally considered to be sufficient, no resources are allocated and support is provided in the framework of individual support (Level 1 of the support model), containing additional pedagogic counselling if required.

- Before allocating additional resources to a special need, it must be assured that already on the level of individual support all options have been exploited which are available to the school, for example, remedial education or the location-related support concept. If, however, a special need is given, a support agreement is made and the school receives further demand-oriented resources for a certain period of time (Level 2 of the support model).

- If it turns out meanwhile that the support requirements are so comprehensive that the identification of SEN seems to be appropriate, a SEN procedure is to be

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23 “To exploit” in this context does not mean, as currently common, to set at first low threshold measures, although it is quite obvious that they will fail. If more comprehensive measures are required, they should be applied promptly for the sake of prevention.
5.3.7 Requirements Placed upon the SEN Identification Procedure

In the above drafted strategy of a dynamic allocation of resources, the SEN identification procedure, which still plays a key role in comprehensive special needs support, especially in education according to other curricula, is subject to change with regard to its handling, but also to its position in the context of the “Support Guarantee within the School System.”

First of all, the circle of persons involved in the procedure changes. Due to its composition and the qualification of its members, the regional expert team – if required in its expanded form – seems to be best qualified to perform this procedure on behalf of the District School Board. The expert interviews indicate that in regions where already now such a team performs this task, satisfaction with the procedure appears to be great.

The position of the procedure within the support system changes insofar as the result is no more explicitly a decision – as is currently the case – which assigns SEN to a child. The result of the procedure can also be a support agreement – as described above – without assigning SEN, if the expert team comes to the conclusion that support provisions on this level are sufficient. In any case, the result must also contain the bases for an education plan and a support agreement: Concrete and assessable individual and system-related support goals and provisions must be described, and criteria and time limits for attaining these goals must be set.

From this point of view further requirements placed upon the SEN identification procedure emerge which mainly coincide with the conclusions drawn from the QSP expert interviews. In order to meet the demands of a support guarantee, these requirements must be formulated in the form of minimum standards which can be applied in all over Austria.

- **Support diagnosis** must be oriented directly towards the needs of the child according to his or her holistic situation. Support diagnosis assesses and influences long-term processes of learning and education; an orientation towards short-term assessment of the current status and selective assessment products are insufficient for this purpose. In order to reach a qualified appraisal which also opens perspectives for support, a broad range of monitoring results is required, introducing also experiences from other environments of the child. Therefore, it is always necessary to involve persons who deal with the child, in particular his or her parents. Support diagnosis is a process which always involves communication and cooperation. In this context, selective testing procedures have at best supplementary functions.

- In order to capture the complete status quo of learning and development, and parameters of personality and socialisation, a *comprehensive child-environment-analysis* (Sanders 1993) is to be carried out, taking into account at least the fields of
perception, language and communication skills, cognitive skills, learning
development and status quo, social and emotional behaviour, self-conception,
learning and working behaviour, the environment in and outside school, and
physical and motor development. The main channel for the evaluation of these
profiles is structured monitoring, oriented towards didactical structures and
scales of development.

- This procedure requires *high qualification* and long-term experience of the experts.
  This can only be guaranteed through *permanent further and in-service training* of the
  team members, and through the involvement of external experts – if required – in
  the expanded regional team. The quality of the procedure must be constantly
  assured through internal evaluation and through the evaluation of the achieved
goals of the proposed support provisions.

- In order to meet the demands of support diagnosis, taking stock of the status quo
  of development and learning must be the starting point for the design of
  education plans. For this reason, *close cooperation between the experts and the teachers*
  responsible for the design of the education plans – if necessary supported by the
  expert team – is to be sought.

- *Permanent adaptation of the provisions* to the child’s development and learning
  progress is crucial for successful support. This is only possible when diagnosis is
  not limited to a single expert opinion. Existing diagnoses ought rather be
  regularly updated and used for the modification of education plans. This task
  should be fulfilled by the regional expert team in cooperation with the experts
  who issue opinions and the teachers.

- Monitoring in this context is not simply related to the child who needs explicit
  support, but always to the *complete system* within which the child lives and learns.
  Naturally, this applies not only to inclusive classes, but also to special schools.
  Thus, for example, changes of the didactics, modifications of the methodical
  implementation, proposals for changes in the learning climate, the social
  environment, and explicit further training measures for teachers are at least as
  important as the provisions directly addressed to the child.

### 5.3.8 Education Plans, Support Agreements and Quality Assurance

The preceding sections often dealt with tools and instruments for the administrative,
organisational and educational handling of support needs on the three levels of the
support system: expert opinions with support diagnosis, Individual Education Plans
and support agreements. In this chapter, these instruments are placed in the context
of support guarantee, resource management, evaluation and quality assurance.

The double principle of the presented model for a flexible allocation of resources
means that, if necessary, resources can be allocated in the framework of the
procedure described above, and that these resourced are then available under
guarantee. Demand, however, is not a static factor of this model, which is put down
by input-oriented structural components. Demand depends on the support
requirements of a pupil, a school and a class, of the support goals and the applied provisions. Demand defined in such a way is subject to changes which are subject to the achievement or non-achievement of support goals, changes within the system, development boosts, great learning leaps or delays, or newly emerging needs.

(a) Education Plans: To be able to capture these changes systematically and to adapt the consequential support provisions and methods accordingly, an instrument is required that is obligatory for all persons involved, and which is applied in the framework of a standardised procedure. This instrument is the Individual Education Plan which is integrated in the existing class and location-related support concept. However, the current practice of education plan usage (cf. Hauer & Feyerer 2006) does not meet the demands made here. While education plans currently have rather a documentary character, and are therefore mainly experienced as a merely additive (and thus little helpful) element which has no function that is immanent within the system, the Individual Education Plan and the support agreement play a central role in the presented model. Without explicitly defined, achievable and assessable support goals on the level of the individual and the system no resources are allocated. Regular evaluation and readjusting of the support goals and the related provisions are carried out on the basis of the education plan, too (see Section §, pg. 44 et seq.).

(b) Support Agreements: Also on Level 2 (“Special Need”), the application of Individual Education Plans would frequently be useful, apart from the optimization of class and school-related support concepts (see Section 0, pg. 42 et seq.). In this context, however, it must be taken into account that there is currently no legal basis for applying IEP to pupils without SEN. (On Level 2 we mainly find those pupils who are individually promoted by speech therapists, advisory and support teachers etc.) On Level 2 a support agreement must be made in any case, containing at least the following elements:

- Description of the measures already provided by the school: Which goals have been defined, and which measures have been set in what form? What successes has been had? What problems still persist?

- Clarification of the status quo of the pupil’s individual competences, the existing learning arrangements and systemic parameters such as class composition;

- Clear-cut support goals indicating the time horizon and the indicators of the achievements of goals and sub-goals;

- Planned measures on a methodical-didactical level, by means of personnel support, on the school level, school partnerships, with the parents ...

- Specifications on the evaluation of the sub-goals and the achievement of the overall goal.

Such a support agreement, concluded between the expert team and the school, opens access to resources for the approved period of time. The support agreement
can be inspected by all members of the expanded team, in particular by the child’s parents as well.

Under the aspect of the support guarantee, Individual Education Plans and support agreements assure that support is always target-oriented and transparent for all persons involved, and that the required resources are available at the schools.

Thus, under the aspect of quality assurance, a process standard has become feasible which contains tangible elements in its central features, and thus permits better system management and control.

5.3.9 Overview of Available Resources - A Desideratum

The presented three-level model of “Support Guarantee in the School System” is based on the assumption that a calculable quota of support resources is available that can be regionally managed and applied to support needs. These resources are composed of the available means for the support of children with SEN (Level 3), the resources for remedial education and additional lessons for pupils with mother tongues other than German (Level 1) and the resources for prevention and special needs (Level 2), which have already been used but not yet clearly labelled. Due to the regional, federalist structure of the Austrian school system, this overview is currently not available and could not be produced by the work group. Stock taking in this respect should be carried out by the Ministry for Education. Only on this basis can justified claims for increased quotas be made. A more flexible resource allocation must, in any case, also include the resources allocated to special schools.

It can, however, be assumed that the costs of the three-level model surpass the costs of the current support system, because already now – as stated above – the quota assigned to support in case of identified SEN is lower than the actual percentage. Even if it can be expected that through preventive support the percentage of higher threshold support due to SEN decreases, this will probably only lead to the situation that the currently available resources do not have to be raised. Preventive support, which is currently hardly accounted for, must be calculated separately and added in each individual case.

5.3.10 Special Education Centres as Centres of Support

The Special Education Centres play a key role in the identification of support needs and the flexible allocation of resources. This topic has not been explicitly dealt with by any work group. Nonetheless, we can find requirements in the work groups’ results for the reorganisation of the Special Education Centres to enable them to comply with their new tasks. The parameters that must be taken into account for the reorganisation are briefly described as follows:

- A central point is the claim that the double function of the head of a Special
Education Centre - being head of the special school and having the responsibility of supporting schools with inclusive education – defined in the law will be abandoned. On the one hand, the new tasks of coordination, resource management and evaluation appear to be too broad to manage while leading a school, and on the other hand, a conflict of interests can arise from the fact that the special school should have no special status with regard to resource allocation and is to be treated along the same objective criteria as all other schools in the catchment area of the Special Education Centre.

- A task that Special Education Centres have already performed – namely counselling and support of the schools in their catchment area – is considered to be much broader in the proposed model. The Special Education Centre provides expert teams who support schools directly in identifying support needs, designing measures and assuring their quality. Arranging and permanently maintaining these teams and their required qualifications, assuring their contacts to other experts by means of networking with supraregional Special Education Centres and institutions outside school will be a main function of Special Education Centres as networking and quality agencies.

- A new, or at least significantly expanded, function is that of a hub for resource allocation. The Special Education Centre coordinates resource allocation on the basis of support agreements or Individual Education Plans, allocates personnel and material resources to schools, assesses and evaluates efficient resource application together with the schools and redistributes resources when the support requirements change. This function is currently carried out by the District School Inspector and should in the future be taken over by the interdisciplinary expert team.

- The task of quality assurance is linked to resource allocation, too. Regular evaluation and adaptation to the new situation is decisive for the functioning of dynamic resource allocation. This is the only way to release resources and make them available for other tasks – and thus establish a new culture of resource management which does not permanently request more than required and never releases once allocated resources.

- Moreover, it must become the task of the Special Education Centre to develop the support competence of the whole region further. This task comprises measures of further and in-service training, collaboration in the further development of schools towards inclusion, the establishing of schools with certain focuses, and team building at these schools, the installation and supervision of mobile services and the establishing of cooperation with other institutions of support. All these tasks are covered by the Special Education Centre today, too, but to a far less extent.

What is problematic is the name of this institution. The name *Special Education Centre* should be replaced with *Support Centre* because support provisions coordinated there are not explicitly of a special educational nature. In particular the fields of promotion of gifted pupils, but also the support of pupils with mother tongues other than German, and even more counselling in methodical-didactical strategies and remedial
education are only marginally related to special needs education. A Support Centre could – provided that its contextual work changes accordingly – be far better accepted by schools, teachers and parents than the current Special Education Centres.

Support Centres newly defined on this basis have a key role in the promotion of the performance of the school system in their dealing with special needs.

5.3.11 Summary

The Work Groups 3 and 4 propose a three-level model of support within the school system. Level 1 comprises support measures which any school can set, from remedial education to school development towards inclusion. Level 2 is to be seen as a new system component: it will be applied to pupils who require more comprehensive support than possible on Level 1. In particular, the introduction of this level should make possible preventive measures which are currently only possible (due to their scope and resource requirements) after the identification of SEN. Level 3 comprises – as before – support due to special educational needs, assuming that SEN will be required more seldom due to the improved possibilities of preventive measures on Level 2. Resource allocation is carried out by an expert team from the Special Education Centre according to the catalogue of goals and provisions explicitly defined in the support agreements and education plans and for a certain limited period of time. The achievement of support goals is assured through evaluation. In addition, the results of the work phase describe requirements placed upon the SEN identification procedure, the handling of education plans and support agreements, and criteria for the redefinition of Support Centres which shall encompass a broader definition of tasks and replace Special Education Centres.

Even if the proposals are to be further elaborated and specified, we believe that the implementation of this proposal would significantly improve the performance of the support system within the school system.
5.4 MEASURES TO CHANGE THE PROFESSIONAL SELF-CONCEPTION OF TEACHERS

Both the analysis of the expert interviews and the analysis of the results of the work group minutes of the QSP symposium in Mai of 2006 have shown that the issue of quality in special needs education in most diverse contexts always concerned also the professional self-conception of teachers.

5.4.1 Results of the Expert Interviews

This was especially apparent in the answers of the experts to the question on process standards and personnel resources in special needs education: classic teaching by means of lecturing cannot adequately respond to the complexity of the processes taking place in a heterogeneous learning environment. Individualisation, internal differentiation and open, pupil-centred forms of learning are required. Working with Individual Education Plans, professional diagnostics and a resource-oriented approach are demanded. The importance of cooperative team work is emphasised. The teachers’ ability to work in teams, communicative infrastructures at the schools, continuity of the team members and clear definitions of areas of responsibility are described as prerequisites.

Teaching children with SEN should become a natural part of the professional portfolio of teachers at all school types, although still “ignorance, uncertainties, inexperience and fears” prevail. Inclusive cultures of school and education should be established. Inclusion should be made an issue at the schools, and a common understanding how inclusion can work should be developed. Intensive information and awareness campaigns are necessary to illustrate the “positive aspects of inclusion and, in particular, to emphasise the advantages for the other pupils.”

The promotion of personal competences through measures of initial, further and in-service training is seen by quite a great part of the interviewees as a quality-assuring measure of special needs education. They demand that inclusive education be taken up in the standard or basic curriculum of teacher training. Some interviewees could also imagine training in special needs education for all students at teacher training institutions.

Moreover, they call for better acceptance of special educational work by society and education politics – both in the context of school (better appreciation of special needs teachers) and society (positive presentation of the occupation of teachers by means of public relations). Assistance systems for teachers could be provided through professional supervision and visiting colleagues sitting in on classes, and aim at the improvement of the teacher’s individual competences. On the other hand, the interviewees also thought of external counselling and expert delegations to improve assistance systems.
5.4.2 “Changes in the Professional Self-Conception” as a Work Group Topic

The analysis of the work group results of the QSP symposium has also shown that all work groups dealt with issues of occupational profiles. In particular, they dealt with different qualifications and teacher employment regulations concerning primary, lower secondary and special school teachers, the specific occupational profile of special school teachers and their position within the system, and the perceived requirements for change with respect to initial, further and in-service training. Therefore, the field “Measures to Change the Professional Self-Conception of (Special Needs) Teachers” was installed as a new, separate topic (Work Group 5). The considerations of Work Group 5, which mainly consisted of members of staff at teacher training institutions, focused on the following areas: development and presentation of an expanded occupational profile of teachers at all types of compulsory schools (primary, lower secondary, special and pre-vocational school) taking into account the specific tasks of special school teachers, measures in teacher training and accompanying and supportive measures for active teachers.

5.4.3 Development and Presentation of an Occupational Profile for Compulsory School Teachers

5.4.3.1 New Challenges for the Profession

The challenges of teaching have changed over the last years. In all school types, teachers are confronted with an ever increasing heterogeneity of their pupils. This fact requires an elaborate culture of support and according competences, for example in the area of support diagnostics. Teamwork, teaching in classes with children of different age groups and schools with full-day programmes, close or broader work with the children’s environments, assistance at transition interfaces, but also the prevention of problematic developments of children and adolescents are new tasks for teachers. On the level of school, teachers must deal with issues of documentation, evaluation and quality development of education and participate in school development processes more than ever before. Many requirements placed upon school that are not clearly defined entail a stressful situation and unfavourable impacts on the image of the whole teacher community.

With the legal introduction of inclusion in Austria, the occupational field of special school teachers has been clearly expanded. The occupational field of special school has been complemented by the field of inclusive education. The requirements are accordingly manifold: Special school teachers work as class or special support teachers (for children with visual or auditory disabilities, for example) at special schools or as support or assistance teachers in inclusive classes at primary or lower secondary schools, at pre-vocational schools or schools of general higher or vocational education. They also work in the field of job orientation, provide counselling and write expert opinions for Special Education Centres.
Thus, for compulsory school teachers in Austria, the following general claim arises: generally, all teachers should deal effectively with heterogeneity. The teacher of the respective school type should mainly be responsible for the field of “classic” remedial education, and the special teacher mainly for working with children with disabilities and for special educational support. For pupils who need special provisions to be supported in their learning process, cooperation by means of counselling, competence transfer and care coordinated between a primary or lower secondary school teacher and a special school teacher should be arranged.

This requires teachers of all school types to develop a “competence in inclusive education,” comprising the following elements:

- general willingness to engage in inclusive education and to deal with heterogeneity;
- willingness to engage in teamwork (also between school types) by means of joint planning, implementation, evaluation of and reflection on education;
- the ability to design education in a diversified way, situation and addressee-centred and to implement measures of differentiation and individualisation;
- competences in the fields of monitoring, learning state diagnostics, support pedagogy;
- collaboration and responsibility in the production of Individual Education Plans;
- willingness to cooperate with institutions of counselling and support within and outside school, and to establish a network of all persons dealing with the pupils;
- planning and putting into practice measures of quality development for joint education of all pupils; and
- willingness to supervise joint activities and to engage in further and in-service training.

Special school teachers are required to cover the following additional tasks:

- carrying out support diagnoses, producing Individual Education Plans, putting into practice support measures by means of individual assistance in learning processes;
- implementing subject-specific didactics and methods in the area of learning disabilities;
- implementing subject-specific didactics and methods for the required types of disability;
- organising and applying therapeutic tools;
- producing expert opinions and giving support counselling;
- engaging in differentiated and demand-oriented job orientation and preparation;
- engaging in networking, counselling, coordinating and integrating support provisions and interventions within the competent team.
Furthermore, special school teachers are also expected to have a high willingness to acquire and maintain flexibility due to their diverse scope of work. Permanent work on their professional self-conception by means of reflection and cooperation are as important as the willingness to undergo further and in-service training in the according types of disability.

5.4.3.2 Occupational Profile of Teachers

Taking into account the current and future tasks of school, the requirements placed upon teachers should be reformulated, fields of activity defined and the required competences mapped. The discussion on the occupational profile of teachers should be held on a broad basis and involve all levels (for example, school authorities, school inspectorates, the economy, unions, teacher training institutions). This shall include existing attempts made in various contexts to define the requirements of the occupational profile of teachers. Possible examples:

- teacher profiles, such as the profile elaborated by the Conference of German Ministers of Education and the Education and Teacher Union (2000) or the Umbrella Association of Swiss Teachers (1999),
- rules of professional conduct, as for example issued by the Umbrella Association of Swiss Teachers (1999),
- catalogues of competences, such as the “Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications” by the European Commission (n.d.),
- standards, such as the INTASC Standards, Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (2003)
- or the domain approach by the work group EPIK (Development of Professional Conduct in the International Context, Schratz et al. 2007) which is currently discussed in Austria.

The goal would be a consensus among relevant groups about teachers’ general professional requirements and concrete technical, didactical, pedagogical, staff-related and social competences in the spirit of the above mapped professional self-conception.

Along classic strategies of dissemination, such an occupational profile would have to be propagated first on diverse levels, for example, by educational authorities (e.g. by including it in the employment contract, propagation by means of a decree, in the curriculum), unions, teacher associations, employee representatives, school, and/or in the context of teacher training. In addition, the expanded occupational profile could be a basis for the (further) development of standards and curricula for a concept-oriented initial, further and in-service training of teachers, and to serve as an orientation for the career choice of young people.
5.4.4 Measures within Teacher Training

The expansion of the occupational field of special school teachers due to the introduction of inclusion in Austria, the related redefinition of the role of all teachers and the requirements of the occupational profile must be taken into account in the design of the courses at the future Teacher Training Colleges. In basic modules reaching across study programmes, basic knowledge and competences of inclusive education should be acquired. Niedermair, Tuschel & Feyerer (2006, pg. 23), for example, proposed to include the following contents in a “basic study programme of inclusive education”:

- paradigm shifts
- critical discussion and reflection of one's own attitudes towards and concepts of disability
- legal foundations
- overview of the different types of disability and the resulting methodical consequences for education
- foundations of the educational support of children and adolescents with learning and behavioural difficulties (e.g. reading and writing difficulties, dyscalculia, ADHD)
- differentiation and individualisation
- support diagnosis, Individual Education Plan
- Identification of Special Educational Needs
- Special Education Centres
- social learning
- intercultural learning
- gender pedagogy
- school development and quality management

These contents should also be taken into account in the transitory curricula for students who change from diploma studies to bachelor studies. Apart from curricula design, the new occupational profile should also be reflected by an according organisation of the study programme. Students should get the opportunity to undertake practical training in schools with inclusive education by means of team teaching organised across study programmes.

In order to have an impact on the students’ attitudes and their future occupation, teacher training itself must be oriented towards the principles of inclusive pedagogy. In as many seminars and projects as possible, students should get the opportunity to pursue their own interests, experience different ways of learning, contribute in different ways to larger projects, and document, reflect and evaluate this process. Thus, members of staff at Teacher Training Colleges are required to have excellent competences in the methodology of their courses. The modularisation scheduled in
the University Act, which serves the attainment of subordinate competences that can be certified, provides a beneficial structural framework condition. Topic-oriented modules across study programmes and subjects require team work by lecturers, make possible overviews and cooperation between subjects with regard to the required areas of competence and promote the students’ abilities of interconnected thinking and cooperative action. Putting together the modules in greater temporal units permits intensive project and case-oriented, investigative dealing in the team with contents which are relevant to the occupation as a teacher. What is particularly important in this context is the joint assumption of responsibility for group processes.

If team teaching should function between primary (or lower secondary) and special school teachers, both groups must have clearly defined knowledge and different competences. Apart from knowledge of fundamental contents of human sciences, natural sciences, specialised didactics and the related competences, prospective special school teachers also need specialised training (cf. Niedermair, Tuschel & Feyerer 2006, pp. 19-20).

Teaching staff at Teacher Training Colleges and supervising teachers should become multipliers of the new occupational self-conception. Framework conditions for research which deals with issues of inclusive pedagogy and the related modified occupational self-conception of teachers should be established, and processes of school and academic development should be promoted. During their own studies at a Teacher Training College, students could experience transformative action in the field of school development. The development of Teacher Training Colleges to open institutions where most diverse activities, projects and (international) events take place in cooperation with the local environment, partner institutions and active student involvement, could contribute to a climate of inclusive education tangible for students.

Nonetheless, teacher training institutions should be evaluated for their contribution to the development of an according occupational self-conception of prospective teachers. Apart from the classic course evaluation, the focus should be laid more strongly on the holistic conception of teacher training and its effect on the development of students’ competences with regard to attitudes, postures, knowledge, skills and abilities.

### 5.4.5 Measures for Active Teachers

The new occupational conception of teachers and the related visions, attitudes, topical, didactical, pedagogical, personal and social competences are to be further developed by means of further and in-service training to continue professional approaches. Apart from provisions to support teachers when they start their professional life (for example, reflection on practical experiences during their first years), particularly active teachers of all school types are to be provided with learning opportunities. The traditional system of further training courses should be
further developed by means of long-term provisions with target-setting, learning partnerships and coaching to make it more effective and sustainable. Further and in-service training should be included in teacher employment law according to criteria of effectiveness, and should be supported by a system of incentives (cf. Grossenbacher & Oberdorfer 2006, pg. 41). They should aim at professional approaches to develop an occupational conception which on the one hand becomes noticeable in taking responsibility conscientiously, but also defines the limits of one’s own competence.

Special school teachers would further need more offers dealing with topics of special needs education and inclusion. The study carried out by Hauer & Feyerer (2006) indicates that the development of education plans and the diagnosis and implementation of support provisions should receive greater priority. Special Education Centres should become – more than it is currently the case – hubs for support in technical and socio-emotional fields. Professional exchange could also be promoted through platforms and topical forums (for example, regional and supraregional work groups, congresses, virtual platforms, media for publications).

Headmasters and school inspectors should also be provided with further and in-service training. Both groups are expected to become multipliers for the changed occupational conception by initiating and supporting relevant provisions for teachers. The necessary framework conditions should be established at schools, development processes be initiated and accompanied, and established measures be documented and evaluated. Evaluation by external experts should also be possible. Last but not least, the changed occupational profile should be permanently elaborated through reflection and cooperation.

5.4.6 Changes in the Self-Conception of Teachers – A Mandate on All Levels

Changes in the occupational self-conception of teachers concern primarily the teachers themselves and the fields of initial, further and in-service training. In the preceding chapters, priority was given to these fields. Still, both approaches harbour the danger of applying changes only to persons. However, system structures are also required that promote changes in the occupational self-conception of teachers. In other words: the development of professional approaches requires – apart from individual learning processes – also development processes of the complete system on a “higher level” (Schratz et al. 2007, pg. 71).

Important structural issues that could not have been dealt with by the work groups due to time constraints are:

- the claim for new official occupational/service titles (see also Niedermair, Tuschel & Feyerer 2006, pp. 14-15),
- the equalisation of teachers within teacher employment law with respect to full/partial employment, financial compensation etc.
- the issue of employment strategies (for example, the employment of qualified
teachers according to their qualifications obtained during their training, the employment of teachers with disabilities or a migratory background).

The position paper of the Commission on Education of the Umbrella Association of Swiss Teachers on dealing successfully with heterogeneity describes interesting additional measures on the level of school and the education system, comprising:

- an institutionalised cycle of development and evaluation,
- a greater scope of action for schools with regard to the composition of learning groups or the temporal organisation of school, which requires global budgets and secure terms of employment of teachers,
- resource pools and time resources for professional learning communities (colleges, specialist groups, project groups),
- definition of individual and collective further training by means of location and perspective-related discussions.

On the level of the education system, clear goal setting of education politics, school (structure) development, system resources, quality development and support for schools, monitoring and target-oriented cooperation with other political fields are demanded. It would be necessary to specify measures on these levels also for the Austrian school system.

6 Summary

The QSP Project

In many aspects, the QSP project was an experiment, combining very diverse elements in a rather unconventional way:

- *Research and Development*: The project consistently followed a development-oriented philosophy of evaluation. An empirical stocktaking of strengths and weaknesses of the sector of special needs education formed the point of departure for deliberations and proposals on the improvement of the current situation.

- *Pedagogy and Politics*: The work of the QSP core team and the work groups was consistently oriented towards educational questions. In the foreground was explicitly the perspective of improving the situation of children with special needs in our school system, and the question of how the principle of support could be generally enhanced as opposed to the principle of selection. In spite of this, the statements and proposals were not straightforwardly directed to practice, but rather to the levels of management. The aim was to reveal how the (politically formable) framework conditions can be changed for better (special needs) education.
• Statistics and Practical Experience: In the QSP project we tried to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches in such a way as to complement statistically firm data with practical descriptions and the subjective views of practical experts. Doing so, the empirical phase brought about a multi-facetted and ecologically valid profile of the strengths and weaknesses of special needs education in Austria, which provided a solid basis for the elaboration of strategies for improvement and optimization.

• Science and Practice: The QSP project profited from a fruitful cooperation of persons with diverse professional backgrounds. In the core team, scholars of a classic evaluation institute cooperated with scholarly oriented persons from a teacher training institution. This constellation was expanded in the second phase through the cooperation of representatives of school practice, educational administration, school inspectorates, teacher training and work with disabled persons. In an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation the persons from these diverse backgrounds could contribute their knowledge and experiences and enrich the working process and its results. The result was formed through intensive reflection, but always with the “feet on the ground,” by persons who are always committed to achieve what is concretely feasible.

• Conflicts and Cooperation: Approaches to fundamental changes are naturally not always met with approval and enthusiasm, but are also subject to critical questions and opponent positions by those who have reasons to defend existing conditions. The far-reaching consequences the QSP core team has drawn from the results of the empirical phase (Central Issues) met – at least in areas where conventional structures of special needs education at school were challenged – strong, if not to say passionate, resistance by representatives of special institutions, who naturally defended the positive aspects of their own approaches. In the course of time, though, this antagonistic conflict situation became a rather pragmatic relationship of cooperation in pedagogically relevant issues which were specified with regard to the unsolvable structural debates.

Confinements of the Project Goals

The diversity of the perspectives and persons involved in the project – especially in its second phase – eventually resulted in certain confinements of the proposals on problem solving strategies, because due to the close time frame of the work group phase it was not possible to solve the problems of coordination completely. At the beginning of the process stood an ambitious system analysis and a relatively loose network of ideas and concepts on how to improve the efficiency and support potential of special needs education. The aim was to elaborate on and specify the seven central issues of the first project report through practice and policy-oriented work groups, and to approach the stage at which decisions can be made.

This could have been achieved only for two of the originally envisaged issues:
Quality Standards for Inclusive Education

In Section 0 we tried to formulate quality standards for inclusive education which could – if implemented – stop the danger of a gradual deterioration of educational quality norms in joint education. This development threatens to disavow the Austrian model of inclusion of pupils with disabilities, which has been successful for a long time. The requirements concerning the qualification of teachers, the composition of teacher teams, support and quality assurance by the school community, and supervision and evaluation by the school inspectorates and Special Education Centres should restore the quality of inclusive education to achieve the level which had made it an internationally renowned success model in the nineties. Many studies of this time have shown that joint education of pupils with and without disabilities in the spirit of good support of all children can be very successful if a minimum level of qualification and commitment of class teachers and decision makers at school is given. The quality standards should assure these minimum prerequisites and define the institutions responsible for their compliance.

The basic principles behind these quality standards are:

• only teachers who are sufficiently qualified in special needs education may give instruction in inclusive classes;
• through as small a teacher team as possible, high social consistency and educational continuity should be guaranteed also at lower secondary schools to promote the relationship between teachers and pupils;
• the school community assumes shared responsibility (by taking over functions of quality assurance) for a good design of joint education;
• external monitoring of the compliance with these quality standards should be given by school inspectorates and Special Education Centres.

What is important in this context is that standards shall not be “prescribed” schematically, but that location-related deviations can be tolerated if the local conditions do not permit a complete implementation. It is, however, required that such deviations be justified.

A Flexible System of Support at School

A second concrete proposal on the improvement of the current situation of special needs support emerged from a situational diagnosis of the expert interviews: the central, input-oriented management of resources of special needs education according to fixed quotas, which requires the official identification of SEN,

• does not respond to the actual demand of support, which varies from pupil to pupil;
• is too static, and is given on the basis of long-term planning while the actual demand is permanently varying;
• is little oriented towards efficiency and may “punish” support success by withdrawing resources from the school;
hardly allows preventive support because resources are only allocated after the official issuing of SEN;

is focused explicitly on the support of individual pupils and not on the overall improvement of the support competences of the complete school system.

To improve the current situation, the work groups suggested a model for a “support guarantee within the school system” which shall replace the current form of resource allocation based on schematic quotas or official SEN identification. The backbone of this model is a three-level classification scheme for determining need and intensity of support:

**Level 1 “Individual Support:”** The basic level of the support system contains all measures described in the circular “Better Support”. They are applied when transitional learning difficulties, deficits or special abilities and talents have to be considered individually. The required resources remain the same which have hitherto been allotted to remedial education.

**Level 2 “Educational Support for Prevention:”** The second level is applied when additional short or medium-term support measures are required to cope with a “special need”. In this model, no SEN identification procedure is required to get preventive support. The basis for promotion on this level is a support agreement which is concluded for a defined period of time. Resources of special needs education, which are allocated according to the demands by the competent Special Education Centre, can be applied.

**Level 3 “Special Educational Needs:“** At the upper end of the scale of measures is – still – the Special Educational Need. The basis for the identification of SEN is the legally prescribed procedure for which binding and federally uniform minimum standards are now to be defined.

What is important is that resources for Level 2 and 3 are not allocated schematically according to central allocation rules, but demand-oriented along the support agreements between the school and the competent Special Education Centre. The concrete demand is determined by an expert group; resource usage and implementation is regularly evaluated according to results.

As for this proposal, in particular three aspects are new:

- First, support resources are adapted to concrete individual cases, taking not only dyadic relations between teacher and child as their basis, but the whole systemic environment.
- Second, support needs are not only addressed through resources, but provisions and their effects are evaluated and the resources are adapted to the evaluation results.
- One of the most important aspects is, third, that the professional responsibility of the teachers and headmasters for their children and adolescents entrusted to their care is taken seriously. What support children require is first assessed in practice and then reconciled with the available resources.
The proposals for a more flexible allocation of resources for special needs education could become a milestone in the development of special needs education in Austria if we succeed in establishing and promoting the following elements within the system:

- The principle of individual support planning which makes possible not only systematic support based on professional planning, but also continual assessment and evaluation of educational support provisions.
- The institutionalising of Education Centres with competences of support and evaluation with regard to effective support mechanisms.
- Effective education controlling close to school which helps to create an awareness of the significance of individualised and systemic support, but also of cost-consciousness within the whole system.
- Agreements and standardised procedures for all provinces which could lead to more justice and comparability with respect to the applied support resources.

These developments require others which have also been dealt with during the QSP project but not yet reached a generally satisfying level of implementability. The reasons for that are diverse. One of the most important reasons is that many of the required changes cannot simply be “put into practice” because they first have to take place in the minds of the affected persons, and cannot simply be effected through education-political measures. On the other side, attempts of systemic changes sometimes require that the “pure teaching” of the ideal pedagogy be curtailed because they cannot be transformed to universal and assessable rules. This difficult balance between what is education-politically feasible and what is desired in terms of pedagogy often turned up in the work of all groups.

**Binding Character of Individual Support Planning**

Section 0, for example, deals with the position of individual support planning as the central element of a support-oriented school system. There, the most important educational principles are described which should regulate working with education plans to achieve as high a support success as possible.

How compelling the pedagogic argumentation of the work group responsible for this chapter might be, eventually the question which is decisive in this context remains open: how could IEP become a binding element of special needs support in Austria for all teachers of children with special needs? In particular there, the chasm between possible legal and administrative regulations and what can be reached through them, is especially precarious:

- Individual support is dealt with by the authors as a particularly open process which cannot be ruled by a scheme or standard, but only follows the lines that are given by the developmental dynamics of the individual pupils. This rather idiosyncratic process character of individual education planning, which is presumably more pertinent to the actual pedagogic situations than a reception-oriented approach, brings about problems in the realisation of the second aspect of IEP, though being subordinate to the first one, but still of great significance, for
example, in the concept of flexible allocation of support resources: This concept requires a central mechanism of evaluation or accountability on the application of resources, for which the assessment of the process and the success of individual education planning is presumably the most appropriate approach. If IEP is to comply with its evaluating function, it will require a stronger degree of standardisation itself, especially with regard to permanent assessment of the relation between resource application and support success (by means of output orientation).

• However, especially the latter claim is still conflicting with another aspect which was particularly highlighted in the study by Hauer & Feyerer (2006): a great share of the teachers have a reserved attitude towards or are critical of the requirement to keep education plans for children with special needs and to continually assess and adapt their own support efforts. The increased efforts, they suspect, are opposed to relatively small professional yields. Teachers often believe that systematic planning and evaluative feedback loops hamper intuitive interactions with children. They rather consider education plans as “technical” or bureaucratic requirements, which hinder spontaneous action when dealing with children. Also for this situation, the “process character” of individual support which cannot be planned and formalised in the long term is emphasised.

A concept where IEP play a central role will have to overcome the teachers’ resistance and opposing attitudes in this respect. This can only be achieved by making the advantages of practical individual education planning more transparent for teachers. And this, in turn, requires that teacher training not only convey the pedagogic principles of these fields, but rather provide the “average” teacher with simple procedural patterns for diagnosis-oriented support and evidence-based evaluation of his or her own actions. To this end, cooperation beyond the provinces is required to standardise requirements in these fields.

Changes in the Teachers’ Professional Self-Conception

The problems of Chapter 0 “Measures to Change the Professional Self-Conception of Teachers” are quite similar to those of the field of IEP. When the work groups started, there was a broad agreement that an important prerequisite for an improvement of special needs care for pupils were changes in the teachers’ professional self-conception. In the whole area of compulsory school and beyond, the awareness must be established that working with heterogeneous learning groups and thus children with or threatened by disabilities is a constitutive part of the occupational profile of a teacher which he or she must not elude. Moreover, the position of special needs teachers as experts in the support of children with disabilities must be strengthened, and their professional identity be promoted especially in the context of inclusive education.

The work group dealing with this issue succeeded in presenting a convincing analysis of the current situation that should be changed, and in giving the most important key data on these changes by elaborating an updated task profile for teachers highlighting explicitly the role of special needs teachers within this concept.
When asked how to these new occupational profiles could be put into practice, the work group members encountered similar problems to those encountered by the group dealing with IEP: How could the new requirements placed upon the teaching occupation be made binding in practice, given that the awareness of their significance and condition of being necessary is still underdeveloped or at least very divergent among its members? How can roles and professional qualification profiles be convincingly communicated and equipped with a certain binding character if there are hardly any traditions for that within the occupation?

The work group gave two answers to these questions: first, they described an approach via new forms and contents of initial and further teacher training, and second, via communication by means of public relations by teacher training institutions, official channels and professional associations. The main question, however, how professional associations, unions, teacher associations etc. could be won over for new occupational profiles also entailing more commitments and obligations, remained largely unanswered in the group’s report. Although possible approaches via new teacher employment regulations are indicated in the report, the proposals rather have an appellative character. Another possible way – via a consistent change of the school system towards a common school for all, which would require working with pupils with different talents and social environments in any case – was not further pursued by the work group, presumably due to different opinions within the group itself.

However, all this does not belittle the effort of paving the way for authentic changes in the occupational field of teachers by means of changing their competences and their awareness. Still, the above mentioned problems of reconciling educational goals and structural measures become very evident in this context.

Outlook

In the end, this paper provides two types of conclusions: one in terms of contents, and the other in terms of methods.

As regards content, it will become necessary in the post-QSP process to elaborate on two issues which are outstandingly important for the complete concept of “Quality in Special Needs Education”. Both issues deal with the problems of basing the concept of flexible support guarantees as dealt with in Section 0 of this paper even stronger on evaluation, and thus minimising resource abuse and uncontrolled resource allocation.

- The concept of individual education planning must be further differentiated to be applicable all over Austria without creating the dominant impression that teachers are subject to additional strain and unilateral workload. Eventually, the concept must be pragmatically organised in such a way as to make it understood as an aid in everyday educational work, and especially, to make teachers experience that transparent accountability is the prerequisite for any demand-oriented resource allocation.

- The second central point is the further development of the concept of Special
Education Centres as places of support, resource administration and controlling. From a current point of view, the Special Education Centre concept could be thought of as an institution where all types of educationally (and not only special educationally) relevant resources which are not permanently available at schools can be regionally managed and allocated. In the framework of a concept of a Common School for 6 to 14-year-olds these resources would not only comprise support resources for inclusive education, but also material and personnel support for tasks beyond the schools’ responsibility, such as (inter)cultural education, social work at school, psychological counselling, violence prevention, political education, health education etc.

As regards methodical aspects, some insights can be gained from the QSP process that should be considered in future projects dealing with similar issues:

- The sequence of empirical-scientific evaluation, reform-political conclusions and the elaboration of practical-political implementation concepts has in principle proved sensible and very fertile, even if it naturally depends on good cooperation both in the scientific and the practice-oriented team – which was absolutely given in either case.

- An important constrictive factor of the process was, as usual, the relation between the tasks to be dealt with and the available time. In particular the process of elaborating practical implementation proposals (the work group phase) was indeed insufficiently dimensioned. Given the complex issues, three intensive meetings of two days each were insufficient to create reasonably coherent and exigent texts which could outline an acceptable structure for an implementation process. Moreover, the coordination and orchestration of four to five work groups is a complex process which could not be fully accomplished to everybody’s satisfaction. As it has already often been the case, a little less (content) would have probably been a little more (quality of elaboration).

- One final important point is the composition of the work groups. In principle, the idea of a close collaboration between scholars, practical experts and members of the educational administration to develop reform strategies has proved to be very fertile. This cooperation of various professions can also help avoiding the feeling of getting superimposed changes in the system possibly derived from the QSP process. Still, some specific fields of competences which would have been required to achieve reform concepts aimed at system management were clearly underrepresented in the work groups. Such a lack of available competences could be noticeably felt especially when dealing with legal, economic and political issues. In projects such as QSP a lack of such competences cannot be bridged by temporary counselling, as was the case during the work group process. A firm integration of jurists and economists (apart from teachers and education scholars) in such projects is indispensable and should absolutely be realised in the future.
7 Literature


