



MINISTRY of EDUCATION  
YOUTH & INFORMATION

## **SPECIAL NEEDS - EXCEPTIONAL ABILITIES**






**VOLUME 1**

ISSUE 2




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### *The Special Education Connection*

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#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

There should never be a one size fits all approach to inclusion; it is not homogenous. There is great diversity amongst persons with disabilities and inclusion should look just as different to suit the identified needs.

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## Inclusive Education: Access, Equity, Quality

**“Inclusion on the other hand is where students with special needs spend their entire school day in the general education classroom while receiving whatever support is needed in the same classroom.”**

Mona High School has over the last decade distinguished itself as a leader in several areas and is now a major contender as a 'school of choice' in Kingston and St Andrew. While this institution has excelled in areas where others have also excelled, the institution is uncontested in an area where few dare to even imagine. On a typical day at Mona High School, the footsteps of teenagers along the busy corridors is interspersed with the sounds of wheelchairs rolling alongside the bustling feet. Being the only public high school in Region 1 (Kingston and St. Andrew) that was built with all classrooms on one level, Mona High School, in addition to its several other accolades, has become the school of choice for students with physical disabilities. The school currently has eleven (11) students who are wheelchair users across various grade levels. These students are supported by nine (9) Shadow/Caregivers assigned to the school through the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information. In addition to students with physical disabilities, the school is also home to a number of students with other disabilities such as ADHD. Mona High School therefore presents a model of inclusive education where students with disabilities are educated alongside their peers in the general education classroom and receive support as needed within this setting.

According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), inclusion is broadly defined as a process of meeting the diverse needs of all learners by making adaptations and modifications in content, pedagogy, environment, and systems. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), however, uses the term inclusion specifically to describe the model where all children and youth with special needs are served, wherever possible in general education classrooms in their neighbourhood

schools, while receiving support from trained professionals (CEC, 2009).

Inclusion is not the same as mainstreaming, which is sometimes referred to as partial inclusion. Mainstreaming is placing students with special needs in the general classroom for a part of the school day and withdrawing them to provide additional support in a resource room at particular periods. An example of mainstreaming in the Jamaican context is having Special Education Units attached to primary schools, such as in the case of Catherine Hall Primary in St James, Ocho Rios Primary in St Ann and Hazard Primary in Clarendon. Students in these Units participate in a two-year intervention programme, after which they are reintegrated into the mainstream school setting. Another form of mainstreaming can be seen where students are pulled out of their regular classes for intervention sessions within a Resource Room setting and return to the general education classroom at the end of each session.

Inclusion on the other hand is where students with special needs spend their entire school day in the general education classroom while receiving whatever support is needed in the same classroom. Inclusion however is more than just placing students with special education needs in the general education classroom. According to Friend and Bursuck (2009) not only are students with disabilities educated in the same classroom as their peers but they are socially integrated within this community and are instructed using the same curriculum as other students but with adaptations based on their needs.

While several schools in Jamaica have included students with disabilities some schools are inclusive by design. Two examples are McCam Child Development Centre in St Andrew and Savannah-la-mar Infant Inclusive Academy (SIIA) in Westmoreland.

Both of these schools have an established enrolment ratio of children with and without disabilities; McCam has a 2:1 ratio while SIIA has a 3:5 ratio. That is, for every two (2) typically developing students enrolled at McCam, the school enrolls one (1) child with disabilities. Similarly at SIIA, three (3) out of every five (5) students enrolled has disabilities.

There is sound rationale for inclusive education as a rights-based approach to educating students with disabilities. Firstly, inclusion is grounded in the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) which Jamaica has signed and ratified. The national Disability Act of 2014, also promotes inclusion and indicates that persons with disabilities should not be denied access to an educational institution on the basis of a disability but should be provided with reasonable arrangements to ensure the achievement of their full potential. Additionally, inclusion has academic, social and economic benefits. From an educational perspective, inclusion is academically beneficial to all students, with and without disabilities, since all students can benefit from the strategies, materials, and additional personnel in the classroom needed to support students with disabilities. There is also social merit, since by educating all children together, students have an opportunity to develop an understanding and appreciation of individual differences which could bring about a change of attitude towards persons with disabilities in the wider society. Inclusion also has economic benefits, as it is less costly to educate all students in the same school rather than building separate schools with specialized equipment for students with special needs (UNESCO, 2009).

Based on the most recent schools' census data, there are over 6000 identified students with disabilities in the general education system in Jamaica. However, based on global estimates there is no doubt that there are many who have not yet been diagnosed. Therefore, as we position ourselves for the enforcement of the Disabilities Act and work towards the Sustainable Development Goals, it is

incumbent that all schools are prepared to provide inclusive, accessible, quality education for all students. This includes access on an equal basis as well as reasonable supports which allow students with disabilities to participate without being placed at a disadvantage. The MoEYI is committed to creating "an education system in which all learners are given the opportunity to achieve their potential in an innovative, inclusive and enabling environment; thereby, creating socially conscious and productive Jamaicans".

A more inclusive education system is paramount in realizing the Vision 2030 goal to fully integrate persons with disabilities within the society, having access to appropriate support services and being recognized as valuable members of society. Inclusive schools produce inclusive societies and inclusive societies produce inclusive schools.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Inclusion has at its heart the principles of equity and social justice. Through the removal of barriers to inclusion persons with disabilities can participate in communities and schools, and become valued and respected members of society.

## Inclusion: Dispelling the Myths

### Inclusion is not... Only for persons with disabilities

- ✦ It accepts the fact that each student is a unique individual with varying backgrounds, needs, learning styles, interests and abilities to be catered for.
- ✦ The teacher plans lessons using a variety of strategies, techniques and practices that provide opportunities for learning to the diverse learner population to achieve a variety of learning outcomes... every student should know something at the end of the lesson.
- ✦ It sends the message “if and when I need support, I will get it”.
- ✦ It provides opportunities for learning life lessons, both for typical students and students with Special Needs, which would otherwise be missed.
- ✦ It fosters interdependence as each learner is able to contribute to the achievement of others.
- ✦ It fosters ‘membership in the peer group’ as the children will be able to participate in activities with their peers with differing abilities that give them a sense of belonging.

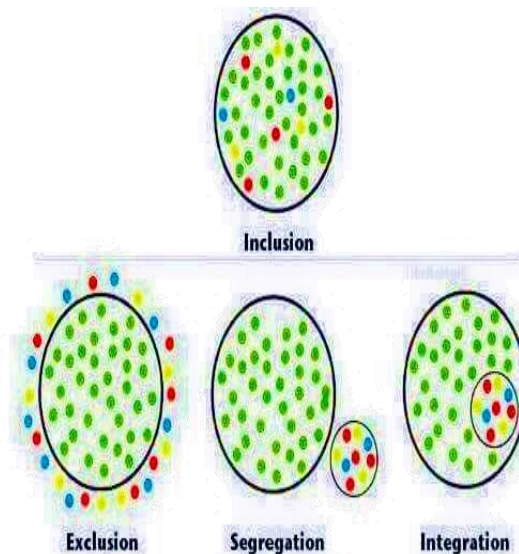
### Inclusion is not... Easy

- ✦ It is not. It requires ‘hard working, well trained, well supported and committed teachers, school administrators, support staff and parents’
- ✦ ‘Sometimes it may seem to create more problems than it solves’... we must remain flexible as the needs change overtime.
- ✦ It may require collaboration with other professional to fill the gaps that lead to success.

### Inclusion is not... An unrealistic idea that will soon pass

- ✦ It is being practiced by many schools both in Jamaica and around the world. So, if some schools do it, why not others?
- ✦ It is here to stay. It is a philosophy rooted in the belief that students with and without disabilities have an equal human right to a meaningful education as supported by the UN convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

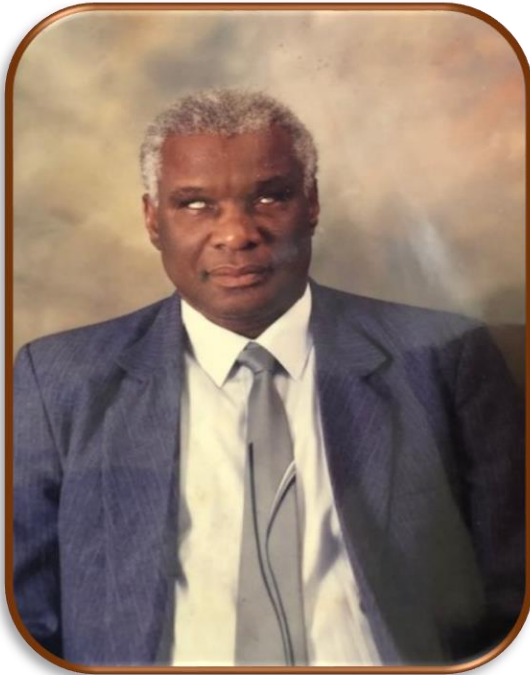
**Reference:** Catalyst for Inclusive Education. (n.d). Retrieved February 28, 2021 from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5980c988f14aa1e9bb9e2b19/t/599d904d3e00bec7b8106c41/1503498318600/CIE+-+FAQ+2017+final+may+2017.pdf>





## Wilbert Williams – Extraordinary Pioneer for Inclusion

“Wilbert Williams, the pioneer who helped to shape the course of history for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream schools.”



‘Most of life’s big steps require a certain muddling through, a trusting that no one really knows the magical formula; and while the end is uncertain, there only can be worthwhile gains.’ For Wilbert Williams, this was a stark reality for him in 1959. He was about to embark on a journey which would change the course of history and see him becoming a pioneer for persons with disabilities in Jamaica.

Wilbert Williams was born blind, which led to him attending the Salvation Army School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. He attended until 1959 when he was at the age to begin attending high school. However, there were no high schools for students who were blind which meant he would have to attend a mainstream school. At the time, there was an arrangement between Excelsior High School and the administration of the School for the Blind, which allowed him to become a student there. This situation became the catalyst for Wilbert to begin his pioneering journey of inclusion. He was now one of the first two students from the Salvation Army School for the Blind to be

included in the mainstream high school system of Jamaica. Thus it was that, at the age of 12 years old, Wilbert began his life as a high school student at the Excelsior High School.

Describing his experience at Excelsior as “life changing”, Wilbert reminisced fondly about that period of his life. Admitting that he found his new surroundings unfamiliar, he was appreciative of how lucky he was as he found that many of his fellow students were of great help in making him comfortable.

“Initially, they were very curious. They were eager to help, in fact they were very helpful. Some of them studied with me in the evenings. The teachers gave me extra attention.”

He also credited his achievements and major support system to a very dedicated group of volunteers. “They would read and record several chapters of books and some of them found creative ways of describing diagrams. I will never forget the quarterly reporting meeting with the principal and his words of encouragement. Those meetings helped to strengthen my resolve to work hard.”

While at Excelsior High School, Wilbert was determined to immerse himself in the culture of the institution and defy what was expected of a person with disability. “I sang in the school choir and participated in the drama club. One year I came second in the all island speech and drama festival.”

After completing Excelsior High, Wilbert successfully sat the Cambridge School Certificate Examination and was awarded a government scholarship to study physiotherapy in England at the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) School of Physiotherapy. The school is no longer in operation but Wilbert describes the experience when he attended as both ‘good and challenging’. He said the course prepared him to work with different personalities and ultimately shaped his career and what he subsequently accomplished.

“I returned to Jamaica, worked in the government system and rose to the level of Acting Assistant Chief Physiotherapist in the service. I also worked at Sir John Golding Centre, K.P.H. (Kingston Public Hospital) and the University Hospital of the West Indies. Later, I became manager of the Abilities Foundation.”

While helping to shape the lives of others, Mr. Williams has achieved many accolades. Along with those already listed, he has also been a part-time lecturer in the School of Physiotherapy and the National Coordinator of the International Year for the Disabled (IYD) in 1981.

Mr. Williams has left an indelible mark in the lives of many persons during his long and illustrious career. Suzanne Harris-Henry, head of the Physiotherapy Unit at the Sir John Golding Rehabilitation Centre is one such person.

“I first heard of Wilbert when he treated my grandfather at the Mona Rehabilitation Centre. My grandfather had lost a leg in the mid-1970s. However, I met Wilbert in 1992 when I came to work as a Physiotherapy student at Mona Rehabilitation Centre, now known as Sir John Golding Rehabilitation Centre. I admired how he worked with his patients, using his sense of touch to treat them. Another thing I admired about Wilbert is that once he met you he could pick up your voice and know who you are; so even to this day when I see Wilbert and I go up to him and say “hello”, he knows it is Suzanne speaking with him.”

Damion Rose, one of his former students at the Abilities Foundation, said Williams has influenced the lives of persons with disabilities.

“He has touched the lives of many disabled persons and he was very instrumental in a lot of our life achievements and the adults we have become. He has touched my life in so many ways. When I met him in 1996, he was the director at the Abilities Foundation. From then, it struck me that he could speak about everything relating to disability.” Rose said Williams introduced him to the computer in 1996, as before he had no idea what it was.

For Rose, Williams’ humility and willingness to learn are qualities, which shine brightly and have enabled him to seamlessly fit in with the younger generation. “It is humbling to me now that with the current technology, for example podcasts, he is trying to get stories out there. For him the teacher, to reach out to me as a student to say, ‘listen I need your help with this or I need you to analyze this’ really shows the other side of the man that he does not have an ego and he is not afraid to reach out to students for information.”

Now retired, the octogenarian shows no signs of slowing down as, while not formally employed, he has a big appetite for the use of modern technology. In fact, he is at the forefront of promoting innovative technology for blind and visually impaired persons. When not imparting his knowledge to others, he spends his days as only he can.

“I listen to EBooks, [I am also] producing and presenting a weekly podcast, hosting and producing a music programme on an internet radio station (United Vision Connect - UVC Radio) as well as co-hosting a talk show on that same station.”

While admitting satisfaction with his life’s journey and accomplishments, Wilbert Williams, in his own words, seeks perfection as he strives to get better at the things he does.

Contributed by Jason Ricketts  
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### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Schools are a reflection of society. Schools, like society, will always have diverse populations with different talents and needs. By removing barriers to inclusion each member of a community is accommodated and can lead productive and fulfilling lives.

# FYI

## Supporting Inclusion with Technology

In today's society technology is one of the most important and influential elements in our daily lives. It is constantly evolving to match our needs and our desires. Technology offers an opportunity to achieve new and sometimes unimaginable feats, especially for those persons with a disability. If knowledge is power then today's technology offers a wealth of information with value beyond just information communication. Technology has the potential to not only shape how we think about inclusion but to also open our eyes to the beauty and practicality of inclusion. The e-resources and apps featured here are a few examples of technology which is changing how persons with disabilities live and are included in society.



**Think Inclusive** - [www.thinkinclusive.us/](http://www.thinkinclusive.us/)

Think Inclusive hosts a blog with information from a number of experts in the field of special needs. The writers offer creative, practical and insightful information on how to make schools and communities more inclusive.



**Ollibean** - [ollibean.com/](http://ollibean.com/)

Ollibean's mission: "to make sure that the world's a place where ALL people are valued, included and have access to a quality education" encapsulates its goals for providing awareness and advocacy for persons with disabilities.



**The Inclusive Class** - [www.theinclusiveclass.com/](http://www.theinclusiveclass.com/)

As the name suggests the inclusive class provides tips and strategies on how to make a classroom and school inclusive.



**SoundingBoard** -

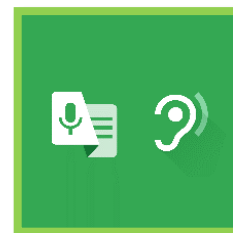
<https://www.ablenetinc.com/soundingboard/>

A free mobile augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) app designed for children who are unable to speak (or who have limited speech) to help them communicate.



**KNEFB Reader**

A mobile app for persons with visual impairment which converts text to speech or text to Braille.



**Google Live Transcribe**

is an app which offers transcription of speech into text in real time which can be useful for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

## Inclusion – The Next Generation

### Kimani's Story

“As a visually impaired student I am not treated differently from any student. I am encouraged by members of staff to reach for my goals and aspirations.”

An upper sixth form student at Calabar High School, Kimani Nunis has the unique perspective of a teenager with a disability attending a mainstream high school. He shares with us his experiences as a high school student with who is visually impaired.



*Interviewer:* Tell us about your experience attending Calabar High School.

*Kimani:* My experience at Calabar High School has been a great one. Things I learnt at this institution have taught me life lessons. It also helped me to develop socially. Before entering Calabar I rarely socialized. However, I am now able to socialize with my peers because of involvement in various activities and the relationship we share among staff and fellow students.

*Interviewer:* How are students with special needs included at your school and how are you accommodated by staff?

*Kimani:* As a student, I am included in all activities at Calabar High School, no one discriminates. The Calabar family embraces inclusivity. All members ensure that I am treated as a normal human being, and in case there might be special occasions that I need assistance it is quickly and effectively provided by members of staff and students from any grade level. This inclusivity enables me to have leadership roles and responsibilities within and outside of the school's environment. For example I now hold the position of Assistant PRO in ISCF. As a visually impaired student I am not treated differently from any student. I am encouraged by members of staff to reach for my goals and aspirations. They ensure that I achieve excellent grades by accommodating me as any other student. I am clearly not treated any different. That's one thing I appreciate from the staff at Calabar High School.

*Interviewer:* How do you and other students with special needs get along with classmates or peers who are not diagnosed with special needs?

*Kimani:* We get along well with other students. We are included in their conversations, we are sometimes asked for advice on various issues. We are just a part of any normal teen's life. We are never left out from the action.



*Interviewer:* Has the school had to make any changes to accommodate students with disabilities like yourself?

*Kimani:* Yes the school has made changes during examination, where I am allowed to use a reader/writer both for internal and external examinations. There were little or no changes to the physical space, as this was already friendly to the visually impaired student.



**Kimani holds a braille machine which he donated to a student at the Salvation Army School for the Blind.**

(Read the story in the Jan 16, 2020 online edition of the Star newspaper)

*Interviewer:* Since being at Calabar, how would you assess your performance?

*Kimani:* My performance has been an excellent one. I achieved the Principal's Honour Roll for three consecutive years. This was also reflected in my CSEC and CAPE passes, where I was ranked eighth in the Caribbean for Religious Education and first in the institution. I also received a scholarship from the Old Boys' Association, England Chapter.

*Interviewer:* What would you say are the factors that contribute to this performance?

*Kimani:* My dedicated counsellor, Mrs. Jarrett, who believes in me all the way, and provides the necessary psychological and physical resources. She has built my self-esteem that allows me the capacity to achieve anything that I believe.

Also, the assistance of my teachers, who see me as an achiever and not a stumbling block. My friend forever Joel Taylor has contributed to my success tremendously, as he assist me in getting to school on time, and ensures that my assignments are completed on time. My parents contribute to my success as well, as they provide me with the necessary resources, and encourage me to keep on the right path, and take my education seriously.

*Interviewer:* Do you think that Calabar has benefited any from having students with special needs?

*Kimani:* Calabar has benefitted, as they have a long history of being a traditional school which provides education for the visually challenged. They benefit as they can safely say that they extend themselves to effectively teach students with visual impairment, without formal training. Hence the teachers extend themselves to ensure that a blended approach is taken.

*Interviewer:* What challenges (if any) have you encountered while at Calabar? How have you addressed these challenges, or sought to have them addressed?

*Kimani:* The main challenge I faced was learning to find the various facilities, but the students answered the call and I was ably assisted. Also, the reading of my braille scripts, and so I had to resort to reader writer.

### **Did You Know?**

Integration is not inclusion. While integration, like inclusion, brings students with disabilities into mainstream classroom, inclusion goes further by removing barriers to accessing education and acknowledging that each student learns differently.

## FAQ

## Students with Special Needs and Accommodations for PEP

- ✚ A student is reading well below their grade level, do they still have to do PEP?
  - Doing PEP provides the opportunity to see the student's full achievement profile. The information from this profile will also be useful in determining the intervention needed at the secondary level.
- ✚ If a student has a specific learning disability in the area of writing can he still sit the examination?
  - Yes. Once documentation from an appropriate assessment has been submitted to the Student Assessment Unit the student may be granted a scribe (writer) who is appropriately trained to support them in the examination.
- ✚ Can a student who is blind or who has low vision sit the examination?
  - Yes. Students who are blind may do the examination in Braille. Those who have low vision may receive large print as well as a reader if needed. Appropriate documentation must be submitted to the Student Assessment Unit in either case.
- ✚ What do I do if I think a student is not ready academically for PEP?
  - Contact your Regional Special Needs Coordinator, the Special Education Unit or the Student Assessment Unit to discuss the situation.
- ✚ What will happen to a student who has achieved below expected levels on PEP?
  - They will be appropriately placed through the Alternative Pathways to Secondary Education (APSE) programme.
- ✚ If a student has been diagnosed with autism or ADHD and is not likely to stay on task during the exam, what accommodations might be appropriate?
  - Recommendations may be given for a prompter to be assigned to keep the student on task. Appropriate documentation must be submitted to the Student Assessment Unit.
- ✚ A student has broken their arm, what accommodations can they receive when doing PEP?
  - Once a medical document is submitted to the Student Assessment Unit stating this information, the student may receive a scribe (writer) who will write the answers for the student.
- ✚ Can students with a special educational need who are in a private school be granted accommodations for PEP?
  - Yes. An application must be made through the Student Assessment Unit.
- ✚ A student's native language is not English; are there any special provisions for them to sit PEP?
  - Yes. Documentation should be provided to the Student Assessment Unit for arrangements to be made for such provisions.

**DON'T MISS THE NEXT ISSUE  
WHERE WE CONTINUE TO  
EXPLORE MATTERS ON  
INCLUSION**

✚ **Reflections on the Inclusive School Leadership Training Programme**

✚ **A Family's Journey to Inclusion**

✚ **The Pursuit of an Inclusive School Environment**

## Resources and Services

**Do you or someone you know have a child with special needs? Contact your Regional Student Support Team or Special Needs Coordinator**

The Special Education Student Support Team (SST) of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, provides support to children with physical, intellectual and learning disabilities, and those who have medical conditions which may prevent their full participation in the general education setting. We offer a wide range of services designed to help children with special needs maximise their potential. Services include full-battery assessments, screening, consultations and other activities. Services are provided at no cost to the public with the goal of early identification, early intervention, and support for children with special needs. The Student Support Team (SST) also provides capacity building services to parents and teachers.

The SST consists of a coordinating officer, clinical and educational psychologists and educational diagnosticians. Services are available all year round, during the opening hours of the MoEYI.

If you are interested in making an appointment, or want to learn more about the services provided by the SST, reach out to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information's regional office closest to you.

*Please note that, given Covid-19 restrictions, services are now offered online. Please call the Regional Office of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information closest to you to get further information.*



We hope you enjoyed reading this issue of **SPECIAL NEEDS – EXCEPTIONAL ABILITIES: The Special Education Connection**. Your feedback is welcome. Share your thoughts with the Special Education Unit by sending an email to [specialedu@moey.gov.jm](mailto:specialedu@moey.gov.jm).

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