



# SPECIAL NEEDS - EXCEPTIONAL ABILITIES

## The Special Education Connection

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**This issue continues the conversation on Inclusion which we began in Vol 1 Issue 2.**

Inclusion occurs 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.



**The Pursuit of an Inclusive School  
Environment: Savanna-La-Mar Inclusive  
Infant Academy**



# A FAMILY'S JOURNEY TO INCLUSION

When this conversation took place in early 2019, Nicardo Harriott, who has mild autism, was a 12 year old student at a high school in Region 6 of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MoEYI). The team from the MoEYI Region 6 Special Needs Unit visited the school after receiving an email from one of the school's Guidance Counselors. The school felt that they could not adequately address Nicardo's needs and was seeking to have him find alternative placement. The Region 6 Special Needs team carried out a number of activities aimed at presenting inclusion as an alternative to exclusion for this young man. The interviewer in this article was a part of the team and shares some of her conversation with Mrs. Shauniece Harriott, Nicardo's mother.

**Interviewer:** Mrs. Harriott when did you first realize that your son was 'different'?

**Mrs. Harriott:** When he was about 3 years old going on to 4 years old.

**Interviewer:** What was 'different' about him when compared to other children his age?

**Mrs. Harriott:** He spoke in one word. For example, "Mom, water". He spoke 'proper English' and persons could not understand him. They always ask me to explain what he is saying. At first I could not understand him myself.

**Interviewer:** Didn't he do well in basic school?

**Mrs. Harriott:** Yes Miss he did! I was surprised! Although he wouldn't talk to the teacher, when the work was placed on the board he did it.

**Interviewer:** So what was his learning experience like at primary school?

**Mrs. Harriott:** Miss, I had to move him from one school to another. He was at \*\*\*\*\*Primary School at first. It was a terrible experience not only for him but for me! He was blamed for everything, called a trouble maker, given names. They called him mad man!

"Show empathy; how would you feel if it was your child that has autism?"

Mother  
MRS. SHAUNIECE  
HARRIOTT



Contact the  
Special Education Unit  
876-967-2312  
[specialedu@moey.gov.jm](mailto:specialedu@moey.gov.jm)



# A FAMILY'S JOURNEY TO INCLUSION

**Interviewer:** So what pushed you to move Nicardo to another primary school?

**Mrs. Harriott:** It was near time for him to move on to Grade 4 and that classroom was upstairs. Unfortunately Nicardo is afraid of heights so I asked the principal if his class could be moved downstairs. Miss, she said, "I can't be bothered with this bothersome child, I'll give him a transfer!" For the sake of my child's education, I transferred him to another primary school.

**Interviewer:** So tell me about his time there.

**Mrs. Harriott:** I did not get any complaints about him and the Grade 4 teacher encouraged me to get him assessed.

**Interviewer:** So now he is in high school!

**Mrs. Harriott:** Yes Miss. Some persons in his community were saying he wouldn't pass his PEP.

**Interviewer:** What kinds of feelings did you experience when he went off to high school the first day?

**Mrs. Harriott:** Miss I felt like my heart was going to drop out! I was so afraid for him!

**Interviewer:** I can just imagine, but what exactly were you afraid of?

**Mrs. Harriott:** I was afraid the children would pick on him, beat him up or he would get lost!

**Interviewer:** How soon after did you get a call from the school about Nicardo?

**Mrs. Harriott:** It was around November 2019, when the Guidance Counsellor told me that he was disruptive and talkative and encouraged me to move him to another school that was suitable for him.

**Interviewer:** So what happened after that?

**Mrs. Harriott:** My husband and I were invited to a meeting at the school with the Special Needs Coordinator and the Educational Psychologist from the Ministry of Education at the Old Harbour office. They also had a meeting with the VP, APSE Coach, Grade Supervisors, and Guidance Counsellors to talk about how the school can help Nicardo. They also had a meeting with Nicardo's classmates to talk about his disability. Miss Barnett, the Educational Psychologist had sessions with him too. They even did a workshop with Nicardo's subject teachers to help them deal with him. The APSE coaches also reached out so I could talk about any situation regarding Nicardo. Since Covid, the persons from the Region's Special Needs Unit make sure to watch Nicardo in his online class.

**Interviewer:** How is he now compared to the time before the Special Needs Unit's intervention?

**Mrs. Harriott:** I have not received any more calls about his behaviour and before Covid he was staying in his class more and was less boisterous.

**Interviewer:** What lessons have you learnt that you would like to share with other parents of children with autism?

**Mrs. Harriott:** Show interest in your child, let them feel free to communicate with you, help them with their homework. Teach them how to be respectful, not because they have a disability means they must be disrespectful. Teach them how to be independent.



# A FAMILY'S JOURNEY TO INCLUSION

**Interviewer:** At this point what do you want to say to Nicardo's high school?

**Mrs. Harriott:** I give them a lot of credit for their efforts. Thanks to the teachers, the female security guard who helped him to board the taxi in the evenings before Covid, ancillary staff who also protected him from bullies on the corridor and particularly to that individual who made him a cup of tea when he was not feeling well. I also want to ask them to continue to look out for Nicardo and the teachers not to limit him because he has a disability. Children on the spectrum are capable as long as you guide them.



**Interviewer:** What do you want to say to teachers in general and any word for the Special Needs Unit/MoEYI?

**Mrs. Harriott:** Show empathy; how would you feel if your child has autism? And the Unit to just continue to do the work that you are doing and continue to reach out to help us as we help our children.



## How to help your child get emotional support at school

Learn how to help your child with a learning disability get emotional support at school.

[How to Help Child Get Emotional Support at School | Support Network - Understood.org](#)

- **Bullying isn't the only reason your child might need emotional support at school.**
- **Helping your child ask for support is a multi-step process.**
- **Asking for help can be hard for kids, but it helps build self-advocacy skills.**

**(Click on the picture or the link below the picture to read more)**



## INCLUDING THE CHILD WITH A SPECIFIC LEARNING DISORDER WITH IMPAIRMENT IN READING

A Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) with Impairment in Reading involves difficulties with learning to read and interpret words, letters, and symbols (Understood, n.d.). Formerly known as dyslexia, this diagnosis will prove to have a crucial impact on a child's school life. If a child is unable to, or is struggling with reading, he/she will have difficulty keeping up with schoolwork and learning as quickly as other students. Varying levels of support from teachers and parents will be necessary to ensure that the child has little or no added pressure when taking on reading tasks which are already challenging for them. The following are some ways in which these children can be supported and made to feel included:

- **Take turns reading with them:** It helps them to hear fluent reading and makes the task more manageable as the load is shared. Plus, when other people read for them, they usually don't have a challenge understanding the text.
- **Give choices:** As much as possible let them choose their reading materials and/or the format in which it is presented.
- **Use a ruler/finger/cut out index card:** These can be used to cover words they are not reading. It helps them keep track of which line they are on.
- **Be their cheerleader:** Remind them of their past successes, motivate them, praise their efforts, and let them know that you believe in their abilities.
- **Use the available technology:** It helps to accomplish more in shorter periods of time e. g. text-to-speech software, audio books, screen readers
- **Play to their strengths:** Everyone is good at some things and not so good at others. Figuring out what they are good at can help to improve their future.



### References:

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- Rawe, J. (n.d.). 4 reasons kids get anxious about reading – and how to help. [https://www.understood.org/articles/en/reading-anxiety-causes-help?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=newsletter-en&utm\\_campaign=evergreen-oct21-edu&utm\\_content=send](https://www.understood.org/articles/en/reading-anxiety-causes-help?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter-en&utm_campaign=evergreen-oct21-edu&utm_content=send)
- Understood. (n.d.). What is Dyslexia? [https://www.understood.org/articles/en/what-is-dyslexia?\\_sp=57204728-4b37-4446-94f7-58520ec41e53.1636397133661](https://www.understood.org/articles/en/what-is-dyslexia?_sp=57204728-4b37-4446-94f7-58520ec41e53.1636397133661)
- Viestra, G. (n.d.). Understanding why kids struggle with reading. [https://www.understood.org/articles/en/child-trouble-reading?\\_sp=57204728-4b37-4446-94f7-58520ec41e53.1636474122651](https://www.understood.org/articles/en/child-trouble-reading?_sp=57204728-4b37-4446-94f7-58520ec41e53.1636474122651)



# THE PURSUIT OF AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

With increasing attempts to provide an inclusive education for students with disabilities at all levels across Jamaica, there are many institutions which are already ahead of the curve. While these institutions may not have all taken the same path to the provision of an inclusive environment, they have each been able to implement the necessary mechanisms, strategies & infrastructure to meet the needs of their students with disabilities.

Savanna-La-Mar Inclusive Infant Academy, Hope Valley Experimental and The McCam Childcare and Development Centre were established as schools geared towards providing an inclusive environment. On the other hand, Bamboo Primary and the Belair High School were 'regular' schools which made the decision to include students with varying disabilities in their school population.



Children at Savanna-La-Mar Inclusive Infant Academy enjoy their play area.



McCam then



McCam now

For Sav Inclusive, meeting the needs of their students required the building of appropriate infrastructure. A sensory room was built which was underwritten by UNICEF Jamaica. Along with specially outfitted physiotherapy and speech therapy rooms, this allowed access to therapy during the school day for those students who required it. The school has continued to provide both speech therapy and physiotherapy during the pandemic, initially on a one to one basis and recently transitioning to teletherapy.

McCam's curriculum encompass a combination of the Early Childhood Commission (ECC), MoEYI and McCam curricula. The curriculum uses a developmental approach to learning which involves the use of a Developmental Checklist.

Article information was collated by guest contributor, Jason Ricketts, Research Assistant, Centre for Disability Studies University of the West Indies. The information was taken from interviews conducted with five educational institutions which seek to provide an inclusive environment for students with special needs who are enrolled there.



# THE PURSUIT OF AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Belair High School has made general modifications to the physical plant to accommodate students with special needs. Over the past year they have installed several ramps for three (3) students who are wheelchair users. As is the case for other students, these students now have full access to main areas of the campus such as bathrooms, the business office, and learning areas. At Bamboo Primary, students with special needs are included in the mainstream classrooms as well as in a special education class. Individual intervention plans and differentiated instructions are the main ways in which they are catered to in the mainstream classroom. Consistent effort is put into creating an inclusive environment as is evidenced through establishment of an inclusive school reform team, developing an inclusive action plan, providing training for teachers, procurement of resources for the inclusive school programme and improvement of the physical environment.



As a part of being fully integrated into the life of the school, students' all-round development is paramount for educators. At Hope Valley, students are given the opportunity to participate in all school-based activities as far as their disability allows. These activities include physical education classes and all sporting events, especially the annual sports day, and various national or cultural competitions which the school may enter. Students also take part in clubs and societies and are part of the teams representing the school at inter-school competitions such as debating, JCDC and 4-H competitions. Inclusion in the cohort of student leaders (form monitors, prefects, head boy or head girl etc.) is not unusual and they are selected based on their own merit.

At McCam, the programme is organised around each child's particular special need and allows consideration for his/her strengths and weaknesses. Along these lines, students are encouraged to participate in sports days, concerts, field trips and so on. Some children may require a 'shadow' who will assist the child during teaching and learning and that she/he understands what is expected and can be as fully integrated as possible into the various activities.

It has been seen where students within an inclusive environment have consistently performed close to or on par with their peers. At Hope Valley Experimental, learners within the special education unit who have made academic gains after the required two year period of remediation, are eligible to be placed in a regular class. Sav Inclusive has seen where students with physical disabilities have made significant progress following rehabilitation. Students have shown improved posture, gait and mobility and the strengthening of muscles, allowing many to make incremental progress in fine motor skills.



# THE PURSUIT OF AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Each school has been able to cultivate an ethos of support which is expressed not only by the staff but students as well. They embrace protecting and assisting their school-mates with special needs where and whenever possible. Comments from Savanna La Mar say it best, "Children work well with others especially when they are made to understand that they have more in common than they are different. They simply need to be taught how to respond in certain situations". McCam points us to the fact that innocence is a big contributor in why the students get along with each other. "Young children do not know about differences. They do not have prejudices. Over the 35 years we have found that children accept each other without prejudice. They want to play and have fun. The natural instinct is to help each other and to be empathetic. They are further taught to be respectful and tolerant of each other"



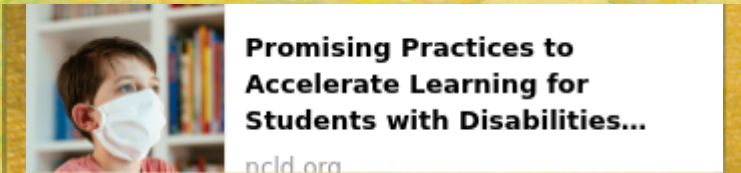
**Children and Staff at Savanna-La-Mar Inclusive Infant Academy**

It goes without saying that having an inclusive environment has had an overwhelmingly positive impact on the various institutions. For McCam, "It is how we began and that will never change. The Centre has done much over the years to advocate and to educate on the topic of inclusion of students with special needs in schools. The first conference on Inclusion was held by McCam in 1990." For Hope Valley Experimental, the benefits have been wide-ranging. Apart from receiving sponsorship from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOS), there has been a sustained partnership with the Sir John Golding Rehabilitation Centre through the University Hospital of the West Indies. For Belair High School, "Our students have added to our school's diversity and we have had many successful cases where our students have surpassed the expectations of their parents in our care. We also believe that the inclusion of students with special needs has aided our school community by teaching our young ones about the need for inclusivity and understanding of individual differences and kindness."



# FYI ARTICLES AND LINKS

The conversation on inclusive education is as diverse as the concept itself. What does an inclusive school environment look like in the new dynamic of a pandemic? Should an inclusive environment even be considered? What resources would be needed for one to succeed? Here are a few articles and links to consider as you engage in your own discussions. **Click on a picture or link, or type the title into your URL bar to access each article.**

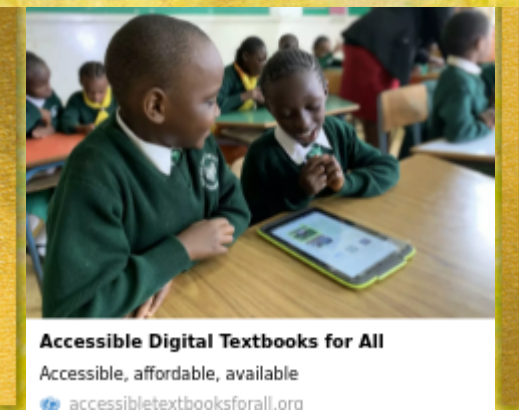


**OUR RESEARCH - February 19th, 2021 - While instructional loss will affect most students, it could have a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities...**

**Microsoft Educator Center - The diversity of learning needs demands school systems provide inclusive, accessible learning environments that inspire confidence and encourage independence differently for each student.**



**Special education and accessibility resources for remote learning**  
Special education: For special educators, diversity demands they provide inclusive, accessible learning environments that inspire confidence and encoura



**UNICEF - Accessible Digital Textbooks for All Initiative Making digital textbooks accessible, affordable and available for all children**

**Understood - Dec 16, 2020 · 5 min read**  
**As we begin 2021, Understood is predicting changes ahead for people with learning and thinking differences and disabilities. This is part two of a four-part expert series on our 2021 predictions. (Read part one here.)**



**Schools for all: Why 2021 is the year for inclusive learning**  
In 2021, we have the chance to redefine learning. What will learning look like when it's accessible to —



**<https://www.bookfusion.com/libraries/bookstartja>**  
**<https://www.bookfusion.com/>**



# REFLECTIONS ON THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAMME

As Jamaica positions itself for the enactment of the Disabilities Act in February 2022, it is incumbent that schools are prepared to provide inclusive, accessible, quality education for all. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MoEYI) has made significant strides in transforming the education system to improve access for students with special education needs. Despite the progress made however, there is still a far way to go in meeting this goal as there are attitudinal and systemic barriers which impact inclusion and the educational achievement of persons with disabilities.

The Inclusive School Leadership Training Programme (ISLTP) was designed to equip school leaders with the knowledge, skills and expertise needed to design, create and sustain learning environments that are grounded in the philosophy of inclusion. The programme focuses on guiding school leaders to develop and implement an Inclusive Action Plan for their school based on the principles of Inclusive School Reform. The course was designed by the Special Education Unit of the MoEYI through a partnership with the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) and is offered through the National College of Educational Leadership (NCEL).

Two of the participants reflect on their time in the programme.

**Sandra Knight Edwards**  
**Vice Principal of Foga Road**  
**High School**

Each academic year, Foga Road High School receives students who have been diagnosed with learning and intellectual disabilities as well as those with behaviour disorders. In addition, students with physical disabilities are usually accommodated due to the school's unique layout, as there are no stairs for accessing the buildings and classrooms. The Inclusive School Leadership Training (ISLT) programme organized by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the National College for Educational Leadership provided us with a timely response to the growing need for reform in the education system in order to respond to the needs of all learners.

Upon completing the ISLT programme I acknowledged the need to further raise awareness for inclusion and advocate on behalf of the students. I led a small team comprising the Dean of Discipline, Guidance Counsellors and Literacy and Numeracy Specialists in assessing the needs of the institution and organizing activities to be undertaken in order to prepare the school for inclusionary practices. An action plan was developed in alignment with the School Improvement Plan (SIP) in order to address the needs identified and to ensure a seamless integration of the implementation.

Unfortunately, the plan could not be fully executed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the team was successful in constructing two wheelchair ramps and a parking lot for persons with disabilities as well as retrofitting a multisensory room for specialized instructions.



# REFLECTIONS ON THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAMME

Ongoing sensitization for parents and members of the school community as well as staff professional development are also a key part of the process of improvement. With these features now in place the school is better able to serve staff, students and its wider stakeholders.

In any situation, the principal must ensure that students are provided with the best opportunities to reach their full potential as this is an important aspect of organizational success. Through participating in the ISLTP, I have realized that leaders of educational institutions who require change must demonstrate that they possess the knowledge to think and plan strategically and to act decisively in the interest of all learners and the wider community they serve.

**Mrs. Paula Plummer  
Principal of Rock Hall Primary**

I started my journey in the Jamaican education workforce as a special educator. I burned with such passion and care then, to ensure children with special needs were not left behind in the teaching learning process. Twenty-four years later, the additional duties of a regular school administrator brought with it several distractors from my original guiding objective. That objective has been again illuminated by the courses in the Inclusive School Leadership Training Programme.

Admittedly, I have realised that my perspective on inclusion has been altered as a result of this programme. Prior to the Inclusive Leadership Training Programme, my concern was only with getting academic results with additional time, care and attention.

I realize now that, though my intentions were good, I suffered from tunnel vision and did not consider my students as a whole. Not enough thought was being given to the complete learning environment: bathrooms, lighting, text, print, water fountains, play areas, walkways, driveways, doorways etc. I have learnt in a roundabout way that inclusive educational environments take the “special” out of special education. By that I mean that, as a school administrator, efforts to manage my school environment should benefit all stakeholders in one effort rather than two separate efforts i.e. one for the regular students and then another effort for students with special needs.

The timing of this course was excellent. There has been a global paradigm shift in education. I feel rejuvenated and encouraged to do more for Jamaica’s children. In the time I have left in the system I am determined to create a learning space that is of such quality that the school’s location and size will be of no significance to prospective stakeholders.

**Contact the  
Special Education Unit  
876-967-2312 [specialedu@moey.gov.jm](mailto:specialedu@moey.gov.jm)**



# FYI

## RESOURCES AND SERVICES

**Do you or someone you know have a child with special needs? Do they need to be assessed? Contact your Regional Special Needs Coordinator or Student Support Team.**

### **Region 1 – Kingston & St. Andrew**

**Mrs. Denise Bryan**

2 – 4 National Heroes Circle, Kgn 4

**Tel:** 876-922-1400

**Ext:** 2201/2203/2310/2306

**Email:** denise.bryan@moey.gov.jm

### **Region 2 – Portland, St. Mary & St. Thomas**

**Mrs. Avarine Bradshaw**

Passley Gardens Portland

**Tel:** 876-922-1400 ext 4200

**Email:** avarine.bradshaw@moey.gov.jm

### **Region 3 – St. Ann & Trelawny**

**Mrs. Renéa Blake**

1 Huntley Avenue

Brown's Town P.O. St Ann

**Tel:** 876-917-8440

**Email:** renea.mblake@moey.gov.jm

### **Region 4 – St. James, Westmoreland & Hanover**

**Mrs. Tashikia Sinclair**

Alice Eldemire Drive, Montego Bay, St. James

**Tel:** 876-953-6929-30 ext: 4415

**Cell:** 876-867-8687

**Email:** tashikia.sinclair@moey.gov.jm

### **Region 5 – Manchester & St. Elizabeth**

**Mrs. Toween Campbell-Wilson**

17 South Race Course Rd, Mandeville, Manchester

**Tel:** (876) 962-7098/962-1753

**Email:** toween.cwilson@moey.gov.jm

### **Region 6 – St. Catherine**

Mrs. Sancia Colquhoun-Headley

6 Poinciana Close, Marlie Acres

Old Harbour, St. Catherine

**Tel:** 876-318-4952

**Email:** sancia.cheadley@moey.gov.jm

### **Region 7 – Clarendon**

**Email:** region7@moey.gov.jm

#### **Social Media:**

<https://www.facebook.com/TeamRegion7>

<https://www.instagram.com/moeyiregion7/>

### **The Special Education Student**

**Support Team (SST)** 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. 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.

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.

**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).**