

## How Inclusive Education Practiced in a Sri Lankan School



### **Nethmi re-admitted to grade-1**

At the beginning of each year, a ceremony is held in schools in Sri Lanka to admit students to Grade 1. Nethmi was welcomed to the first grade with a bouquet handed to her by the Grade 2 students at the Grade 1 enrollment ceremony of this school located on the Colombo City outskirts. In fact, we can say that Nethmi was re-admitted. Why do we say so? For a few years, Nethmi has been studying in the special education unit of the same school. She is a girl with Down syndrome.

“After Nethmi's practical skills were developed and when she was ready to follow the syllabus of Grade 1 to a certain extent, we transferred her to the Grade 1 class of the school,” the teacher in charge of the special education unit told us. “Before that, we made aware of the Grade 1 class teacher well. We aim to allow Nethmi to live and learn with other students.”

“Neither the other children nor the parents noticed any difference in Nethmi as the admission was done as usual. Everyone accepted her to the class,” said Nethmi's class teacher. “Slowly, she continues to work with the other students. Some activities are quite difficult for her. I design learning aids, especially for her.”

Inclusive education is an effective way to provide fair opportunities for all children to attend school and learn and develop the skills they need to thrive. Inclusive education is a conceptual framework that all children learn together most probably in the same school, in the same classrooms, or sometimes at home if the child can not move at all or at a specialized school if the child wishes to learn through a particular language such as sign language.

Nethmi has been assured fair educational opportunities at this school. Not only Nethmi, but many other children also get that opportunity there.

We met a boy with special educational needs who had been called to the special education unit in advance to develop the student's abilities and prepare him for inclusive education. The teacher said that he was identified while processing applications for admission to Grade 1 in the coming academic year.

### **Sasindu and Samadhi need special attention**

Sasindu is a boy with Attention Deficiency Hyperactive Disorder child (ADHD), studying with other Grade 5 students in the school. The special education teacher has made aware of the other teachers of his behavioural specialities.

"This is my friend," Sasindu, with a broad smile, said pointing to Sayumi, a girl sitting next to him. "She helps me often."

"I have assigned Sayumi to help Sasindu," said the teacher-in-charge. "Sasindu's attention sometimes slips. The school has informed us to identify children like him and act with empathy."

"Sasindu works together with me. He is good," Sayumi said.

Samadhi is a girl with intellectual disabilities in Grade 3.

"From Grade 1, Samadhi has been learning with the other students. We have been advised not to leave her behind, but to move her forward together with the group. She loves the company of friends," Samadhi's class teacher said. "She gets bored of studying after a while. At that time she asks for permission to go to the toilet or to drink water. Special attention is needed for holding her concentration in education."

This school is oriented toward inclusive education. Both the teachers and the students understand the need for all students to study together. The school's principal, deputy principals, senior teachers and all the staff contribute to creating that understanding.

Empathy is vital to building and developing the quality of inclusive education in a school. Identifying children with special needs and giving them special attention is crucial for providing fair opportunities in education.

### **A road for Gagana' wheelchair**



Gagana studies in Grade 8. He is a wheelchair-bound boy. He has been provided with a desk suitable for his wheelchair. It is slightly larger than other desks. This enables him to participate in class activities from his wheelchair. "I keep the wheelchair in the class and go home by a three-wheeler. I have another wheelchair for use at home," Gagana said.

"I have seen friends help him a lot," the teacher who was teaching in Gagana's class told us. "These children are given every opportunity in our school. Gagana even participated in the annual educational journey. He was allowed to participate in it with his father."

Gagana's best friend is Chathura. "We've been friends since preschool. I take Gagana in the wheelchair to the library and the IT room. I am happy to help him."

The buildings of this school lacked disability access. However, the school has made efforts to improve accessibility so that a student with mobility impairments can move in a wheelchair.

"The allocation we received for that was not enough, so we also got help from the School Development Society," said the principal. Now Gagana can move not only to the toilet but also to the yard, the library and the IT room in a wheelchair.

"This school has a commode toilet. It is very convenient for my son," Gagana's mother told us. Friends push Gagana's wheelchair when he needs to go out. The school decided to get help from Gagana's family to stay on the school premises to help with Gagana's needs because the mother can spend time with him.

### **Inclusive education**



"This school has students with speech, mobility and intellectual impairments who study in the special education unit as well as in regular classrooms," said the principal of the school. "Also, we have a system to identify students with special needs. The school provides the necessary facilities for them. Teachers have been informed about them. It is essential to inform other students as well as their parents. When they are aware, it becomes easier to provide equal opportunities to all students. We have created an environment where no student is left behind due to disabilities."

The special feature of this school is that it focuses on educating teachers about inclusive education. A counseling teacher has been appointed as inclusive education coordinator. She said: "Training in inclusive education is essential for all teachers who teach primary, aesthetic, sports and other subjects. It makes identifying students with disabilities and special educational needs easier and then we can provide them with equal opportunities. "

The principal pointed out that more attention should be paid to inclusive education in the teacher training of all teachers.