

# ITALY RESPONDS TO...

## DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Italy has a lengthily and strong tradition in responding to disabilities and special needs by mainstreaming and positive action. All special and separate classes were in fact abolished in 1977 [Law 517/1977]. **Full integration of all handicapped children and children with severe as well as secondary disabilities and learning problems** is made possible by specialized teachers within classrooms, curricula differentiation and long term personal support actions. This approach includes both compulsory education (ages 6-16) and pre and post- compulsory education (ages 3-6 and 16-18).

On the bases of over 30 years of experience, in 2010, **new national Guidelines** have evermore stressed flexible teaching strategies, appropriate class size, cooperative support teams, parental and Community participation.

Recent cuts in national and local budgets are partially jeopardizing this successful approach.

## DROPPING OUT

**Dropping out** of both Italian e non Italian students, during adolescents, is **Italy's main educational flaw and critical urgency**. Despite intense preventive work and reaching - out policies brought forth by schools, educational and social workers, about 20% of all adolescents and young people between ages 16-25 are early school leavers.

There is consistent direct correspondence between drop out rates and the concentration of poverty, especially in all suburban and inner-city ghettos and in Southern regions.

In response to this situation a **vast number of private and volunteer experiences and vocational study programmes based on work + school** have developed. New legislation, referred to ages 16-18, is now favouring this trend.

A number of **second chance public schools** have also arisen: Progetti Ponte in the Trentino province, Sam in Torino, Chance in Napoli, Icaro in Verona and in the Emilia region, etc.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DISADVANTAGE

**Recent immigrant students** are always entitled to attend intensive language courses based on **special projects and extra activities also designed to expand the general educational offer**. Special individual and/or group activities, cultural mediation with students and their families are also available as well as assistant teachers for catching up activities.

There have been many special programmes for extra activities and individual educational support, coming from national and local welfare and private institutions such as banks and foundations. Through the years these have concentrated efforts in sustaining schools and other educational activities within poor districts or towards special need groups such as Rom/Roma children or intensely poor urban ghetto children. Nevertheless no special zone schooling system such as the French "prioritaire" system has been developed.

Special support for **single learning difficulties** not referable to disabilities is also available in many schools but recent budget cuts and an **excess of standardized teaching** leaves a lot of the work to the single teacher.

## SPECIALLY GIFTED

**The Italian mainstreaming system still shows little attention towards the very talented**. Some measures are nevertheless available for gifted students such as **scholarships, promotion through national and international competitions** (i. e. in Math or Science), **possibility of skipping** a class and ending high school in advance.

## WEAK POINT OF THE ITALIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Within specialized literature as well as public debate there is general consense on acknowledging the quite evident weak points of the Italian educational system:

- **low organisational flexibility** also referable to time and space use
- **lack of active teaching methods** and difficulty in coping with diversity and non **standardized teaching**, mainly in high schools
- **excess of contents** centred teaching approaches vs. learning skills
- **limited effective empowering, decision making and participation opportunities given to students despite formal "student democracy"**
- **lack of tutors** for students and students at risk
- **lack of support to teaching empowerment and team work**, especially after primary school

## THE ROLE OF THE INSPECTORATE

At the moment we are in a **process of change** in the task and functions of the **Inspectorates**. In the past inspectors fulfilled a function of technical and administrative consultants and counsellors for central and local school administrations and they were responsible for disciplinary actions in the schools.

In 2008 has been announced a competition for 145 new inspectors ("Dirigente tecnico") with the following main tasks:

- in-service training of teachers and management training for principals
- giving advice for innovation, curriculum development, curriculum review
- giving support to schools also for self evaluation and learning outcomes evaluation
- specific inspections of teachers or principals in case of disciplinary actions.

**At the moment there are no investigations in the schools on the issue of "pupils at risk of underachieving"**.

**The control about it is carried out by the school principal**, when and if there are the best possible conditions (small schools, cooperative staff, investment in the innovation of the didactic and teaching methods...).

## AUTONOMOUS PROVINCE TRENINO STRONG POINTS

### More attention and measures for pupils with disadvantages and with ICD

The Provincial Law (n. 5/2006) of the Educational System in Trentino provides further support and integration measures if compared to the general Italian situation. More time, human and financial resources are available for handicapped pupils but also for:

- **students with DSA** (ICD-10 - World Health Organization)
- **students with disadvantages that result in educational underperformance**

Thus, more and better personalized educational programs, well trained assistant teachers, further organizational arrangements and appropriate supports, curriculum counseling for drop outs and alternate school-work actions are available.

So, the drop out rate in Trentino is, in percentage, half of the national average rate!

**Furthermore there is a high level of integration of recent immigrant pupils**, mainly in the preschool and primary school. Currently the percentage of non-Italian students in all level of schools in Trentino is higher than in other Italian Regions (i.e. in primary school 10,6% Trentino - 8,3% Italy).

There are also more investments in financial and human resources (specialized teachers, cultural mediators, etc.), broader range of organizational arrangements between different welfare measures and vast support for parental and Community participation.

### Excellent performance of the Vocational Education

Trentino has a very inclusive Vocational Education system. It attracts a considerable number of students at risk because of their socio-economic background and effectively absorbs the dropping out phenomena. Thus, placing Trentino within the Lisbon agenda benchmark with regard to reducing early school leavers under 10%.