**QUT** Education

# Queensland University of Technology
# Faculty of Education

# Deliverable 1
# The existing Inclusive Education Policy and Inclusive Education Strategic Plan in the Republic of Maldives: Review and recommendations

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This report documents an analysis and review of the current Inclusive Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2013) and Strategic Plan (Ministry of Education, 2015) in the Republic of Maldives. The analysis will consider these current inclusive education initiatives under the following headings: definition of the problem; determination of the evaluation criteria; consideration of the discourse of inclusive education and special education; international inclusive education policy; and, identification of the strengths, gaps, and weaknesses. Recommendations for future improvements in inclusive education goals and endeavours in the Republic of Maldives are also provided.

## 1. Definition of the problem

Since the development and widespread ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations, 2006), education systems around the world are reconsidering the ways in which students with disabilities have been traditionally served. The focus on inclusive education in the CRPD has led many countries to review their education policies and systemic efforts to make schooling more inclusive for students with disability and also other marginalised students. Educational reform in the Republic of Maldives has mirrored this trend; current efforts regarding inclusive education sit well with international reforms and build on the Republic of Maldives' own history of educational transformation (e.g., the achievement of universal primary education (MDG-2) in 2002) (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 39). Critical to the progress of continued transformation is consideration of the unique geography and culture of the Republic of Maldives which poses both opportunities and challenges to the inclusive education reform process. The multi-island nature of the country and associated population distribution means that provision of inclusive education reforms might be more difficult to deliver and monitor consistently, but also offers the potential for strong community belonging which is a critical component of inclusive education (Carrington, Tangen, & Beutel, 2019).

The unique nature of the Republic of Maldives has been considered in this analysis, in terms of both immediate and long-term aspirational goals for achieving inclusion in education, and in terms of both international and local understanding of what it means to be included. In this way, the review report aims to build on existing inclusive education endeavours in the Republic of Maldives and to consider the feasibility of recommendations in the Maldivian context, while keeping firmly grounded in the UN CRPD description of what inclusive education means (United Nations, 2016) and what it might take to achieve inclusive education.

In our analysis, we draw on Cranston and Kimber's definition of policy as: "a deliberate strategy, determined at a government or system level, to guide decisions and actions, to commit resources in support of a preferred set of values and ideologies in order to achieve particular outcomes" (2010, p. 16). We also heed Considine's words that "(p)olicy is a deceptively simple term which conceals some very complex activities" (1994, p. 2). To assist in addressing the complexity of this policy analysis, we have applied the thinking of Kozleski, Artiles, and Waitoller (2014) who widen their focus from the identification of students with disability and other marginalised groups to the "local context, history, and cultures" (p. 235), and the broader structural inequalities that advantage "some children" and disadvantage others. We, too, have broadened our focus from particular groups of students who are "in need of intervention" (p. 242) to considering "power and privilege" (p. 239) and the dominant culture of the education system as a whole. This focus aligns with UNESCO (2017, p. 13) who call on governments to see individual differences "not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities for democratising and enriching learning".

**2. Determination of the evaluation criteria**

In this review of the Inclusive Education Policy and Strategic Plan on Inclusive Education, we have used the UNESCO guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education (UNESCO, 2017). This guide has been developed to support countries to embed inclusion in policy and, specifically, for policy review. We have utilised the assessment framework to identify the strengths, gaps, and weaknesses in the current Inclusive Education Policy and associated Strategic Plans of the Republic of Maldives. This guide is useful to consider how well equity and inclusion are represented in the documents and support our recommendations about improvement. Our review has been divided into the four dimensions: concepts; policy statements; structures and systems; and, practices.

**3. Consideration of the discourse of inclusive education and special education**

For decades, the medical model of disability has dominated the identification and educational support of students with disabilities worldwide. The key assumption in this model is that students with a disability represent a deviation from the norm and require treatment from medical and education professionals to fit into society and in schools (Carrington & MacArthur, 2012). This model considers that disability is caused by an impairment (Thomas, 2004) which means that it is placed within the person, who experiences a tragedy as a consequence of their disability (Cologon, 2014). A significant implication of this view of disability is that the role of the social environment and social relationships is undermined and therefore teachers' work is viewed as least influential on students' learning. Education in segregated and special settings has been the most important consequence of the medical model dominance. Supporting students with a disability in special schools or classrooms has been a long-standing paradigm in education, underpinned by the beliefs and assumptions of the medical model of disability (Hansen, Carrington, Jensen, Molbaek, & Schmidt, under review).

The social model of disability places emphasis on the social context and the impact of society on individuals. This perspective takes into account the ways that the environment (physical and social) is constructed and responds to the individuals with an impairment. This model represents a shift in our thinking and understanding of difference, as it asks us to reconsider how our societal norms, beliefs, values, and behaviours can create a disability or a problem within individuals. In essence, a disability is viewed as a social construct rather than as a personal tragedy that needs to be fixed or cured (Cologon, 2014). The social model view has guided the development of inclusive school communities, where difference is regarded as a natural part of human diversity and is respected and celebrated. A critical implication of this model is that all students, irrespective of their level of (dis)ability, belong and will be educated in the same inclusive educational context and it is the responsibility of educators to ensure that all students will have access to the same learning opportunities by removing any barriers encountered by students with disabilities.

The definition of inclusive education in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) is clearly underpinned by the social model of disability: inclusive education is to be understood as "the result of a process of continuing and pro-active commitment to eliminate barriers impeding the right to education, together with changes to culture, policy and practice of regular schools to accommodate and effectively include all students" (United Nations, 2016, p. 4).

The socio-cultural model of disability places heavy emphasis on the influence of the socio-cultural context on the meanings and the implications of a disability (Waldschmidt, 2017). There is great variability in the conceptualisation and response to disability across the world and this perspective acknowledges that disability is both a social *and* a cultural construct. Disability is conceptualised as

an individual and collective process or experience which evolves in a cultural context and is placed at the centre and not the periphery of society and culture; as such, disability is placed at the intersection between "normality" and "disability" in specific socio-cultural contexts (Waldschmidt, 2017). Emerging research in South-East Asia has revealed that teachers in Bhutan may hold conflicting beliefs about disability and inclusive education which can explain the gap between inclusive policy and practice (Kamenopoulou & Dukpa, 2018). Therefore, the socio-cultural model of disability can contribute to our understanding of the Inclusive Education Policy, the stakeholders' views about the policy, and the strategic steps required for a better alignment between inclusive policy and practice.

## 4. International inclusive education policy

An important component of policy analysis is to consider how inclusive policy has been developed in other contexts. The Salamanca statement (UNESCO, 1994) had an influence on the development of inclusive education in 92 countries that were signatory to the statement; however, it has been acknowledged that there was much confusion about the definition of inclusive education (Ainscow & César, 2006). Since the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UN, 2006) was published and ratified by 177 countries (de Bruin, 2019), inclusive education has become an obligation for signatory countries under Article 24. The CRPD has also provided an internationally recognised definition of inclusion. These key international affirmed instruments ensure governments around the world have an obligation to "respect, protect and fulfil the right of *all* learners to education" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 12).

We acknowledge that context is important in shaping inclusive education policies and strategic plans. When we consider context, we need to acknowledge geography, history (colonisation, aid, domestic, etc.), policies (local, national, regional, international), culture, and religion. It can mean a country, a region, a locality, or an organisation (Banks, Zuurmond, Monteath-Van Dok, Gaillinetti, & Singal, 2019; Begum, Perveen, Chakma, Dewan, Alforze, & Tangen, 2019; Beutel, Tangen, & Carrington, 2019; Harris & Jones, 2018; Kozleski et al., 2014; Lingard, 2010; Lingard & Lewis, 2017; Sharma, Armstrong, Merumeru, Simi, & Yared, 2019; Sharma, Loreman, & Macanawai, 2016; Subba et al., 2019).

In our process of policy and strategic plan analysis, we have taken into consideration some important understandings. The first point is that people's understandings of the policy impact on its implementation. Policy is made in practice by implementing the policy (Cranston & Kimber, 2010). The second point is that people's values mediate thoughts and actions, and attitudes impact experience (Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2006; Cranston & Kimber, 2010; Ehrich, Kimber, Millwater, & Cranston, 2011). The third point is that international instruments that inform the development of inclusive education should impact the beliefs and values inherent in the policies and strategic plans. The final point is that we must also acknowledge donor understandings and views and the influence that these have on the recipient countries (Carrington et al., 2019; Maudslay, 2014).

Recent work in developing inclusive education policy and initiatives in international contexts in South-West Asia (Carrington et al., 2019; Duke, Pillay, Tones, Nickerson, Carrington, & Ioelu, 2016) highlights the need to respect the social and cultural values of countries that are receiving support. Often policy developers in developing countries are under pressure to adopt or borrow policy from other countries (Duke et al., 2016) and are influenced by global initiatives and aid organisations. Previous reviews and discussion of international policy work emphasise the need to

harness the shared commitment and respectful relationships between individuals and communities to support quality education for all children (Carrington et al., 2019). The important consideration in our review and analysis is that we need to acknowledge the local cultural, historical, economic, geographical, and political contexts that underpin the understanding and development of inclusive education in the Republic of Maldives.

## 5. Identification of the strengths, gaps, and weaknesses

Our rationale for using the UNESCO policy review framework (2017) is that it has been developed to assist government education policy-makers and development partners to ensure that equity and inclusion are incorporated in educational policy. The intent behind the use of this model is to strengthen the national education system of the Republic of Maldives and that it responds to every student in alignment with the key principle of the Education 2030 Framework for Action that "*every* learner matters and matters *equally*" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 13).

**6. Application of UNESCO's Policy Review Framework (2017) for the Republic of Maldives IE Policy**

*Dimension 1: Concepts*

1.1. Inclusion and equity are overarching principles that guide all educational policies, plans, and practices

| How far are the principles of inclusion and equity understood and defined within the inclusive education policies? | Strengths: |
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| | Principle 3 (a): Provide equal opportunities for all children within the formal education system as every child has the right to learn. This principle in the policy reflects the principles of inclusion and equity. |
| | Gaps: |
| | Now that inclusive education has been clearly defined, the policy should be guided by the nine principles adapted from the United Nations' core features for inclusive education (United Nations, 2016, pp. 4–6): system-wide approach; committed leaders; whole of school; collaboration with students, families and the community; respecting and valuing diversity; confident, skilled and capable workforce (there is some focus on special teachers and technical staff (p. 4)); accessible learning environment (similar to purpose f and g (p. 4)); effective transitions; monitoring and evaluation. Some of these points are covered in the current policy. |
| | Weaknesses: |
| | The Republic of Maldives Inclusive Education Policy refers to many categories of children and uses the dated language of special needs. The term "special needs" has been widely criticised and a recent study found that persons are viewed more negatively when they are described as having special needs than when they are described as having a disability (Gernsbacher, Raimond, Balinghasay, & Boston, 2016). The special needs label reinforces the medical model of disability as it implies that educators need to treat and care for special needs. The focus with an inclusive approach to education is to respond to the learning and social needs of all learners. The second implication is that if a person has special needs then they require special teaching in special places and this perpetuates segregation and special education teaching. |
| | Recommendation: |

| | Reinforcing the principles of inclusion and equity would require use of the language of student diversity and education for all learners. We also suggest using a term like "Students with Complex Learning Profiles". This would include students described as having a combination of impairments affecting communication, mobility, cognition, social emotional learning, emotional regulation, sensory processing and/or behaviour. |
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| To what extent are inclusion and equity embedded as core principles in all policies and plans? | Strengths: |
| | The Maldives Strategy for Inclusive Education, 2016–2018 was informed by a participatory one-day workshop involving 20 stakeholders. The policy-makers and National Institute of Education (NIE) have clearly prioritised inclusive education with the aim to support presence, participation, and achievement of all learners in schools in the Republic of Maldives regardless of their context and personal characteristics. It is clear that there has been significant work on embedding equity and inclusive ways of teaching across the Republic of Maldives with a focus on teaching strategies and additional trained teachers to strengthen inclusive education. |
| | Weaknesses: |
| | Students with "special needs" are supported in SEN (special education needs) classes and by SEN teachers. The terminology that is used to describe the programs and teaching staff needs to be changed for the same reasons as discussed previously. Using terminology like "cater to learners' individual needs" may reinforce the notion of special education needs. |
| | Recommendations: |
| | Suggested new terms could be support classes, inclusion classes, inclusion teachers. Suggest use of terms and frame ways of thinking in a different way that is more aligned with inclusion and equity. |
| | Students with complex learning profiles include students described as having a combination of impairments affecting communication, mobility, cognition, social emotional learning, emotional regulation, sensory processing and/or behaviour. |

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| To what extent are all national educational policies and plans informed by the principles of inclusion and equity? | Strengths:<br><br>There has been significant investment in supporting professional development about the concept of inclusive education and various inclusive pedagogies such as UDL, differentiating instruction, and the use of technology to support learning.<br><br>Gaps:<br><br>Collecting, collating, and evaluating evidence on children's barriers to education access. There is mention of listening and acknowledging student voice but the evidence of this is not clear.<br><br>Weaknesses:<br><br>The key issue to note is that there is a need to move beyond dated and medical model terms and understandings that are represented in the constructs and terms such as "special education needs".<br><br>Recommendation:<br><br>"Rather than have SEN teachers support children with SEN to catch up with missed learning, improve children's participation in mainstream classes …" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 8), the focus should shift to a co-teaching model. A co-teaching model (Friend & Cook, 1996) can follow a number of structures: one teach, one observe; one teach, one assist; station teaching; alternative teaching; team teaching. It is important to emphasise that in this model all teachers have equal status and share responsibility for the learning of all students. |
| To what extent are education practices guided by the principles of inclusion and equity? | Strengths:<br><br>The Maldives Strategy for Inclusive Education, 2016–2018 promotes teacher recognition and awards for mainstream and SEN teachers who are promoting inclusive practice (p. 7).<br><br>Gaps: |

| | There is a complex issue of admitting children who have disabilities to schools and this could be addressed better in the Maldives Strategy for Inclusive Education.

Weaknesses:

The Maldives Strategy for Inclusive Education, 2016–2018 indicates that there needs to be some redevelopment of teacher incentives for taking on extra responsibility in SEN teaching. This type of strategy may perpetuate the differences between mainstream teachers and specialist teachers and may reinforce that this teaching is special. It also may suggest that it is a burden to teach children who have a disability.

Recommendation:

All teachers are on the same award and promotion/level scheme as inclusive education is everyone's business. A co-teaching model (Friend & Cook, 1996) could support specialist teachers to work with mainstream teachers. A co-teaching team works in the mainstream classroom for the majority of time. |
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| How far are the principles of inclusion and equity understood and defined within the inclusive education policies? | Strengths:

Principle 3 (a): Provide equal opportunities for all children within the formal education system as every child has the right to learn. This principle in the policy reflects the principles of inclusion and equity.

Gaps:

Now that inclusive education has been clearly defined, the policy should be guided by the nine principles adapted from the United Nations' core features for inclusive education (United Nations, 2006, pp. 4–6): system-wide approach; committed leaders; whole of school; collaboration with students, families and the community; respecting and valuing diversity; confident, skilled and capable workforce (there is some focus on special teachers and technical staff (p. 4)); accessible learning environment (similar to purpose f and g (p. 4)); effective transitions; monitoring and evaluation. Some of these points are covered in the current policy.

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The Maldives Inclusive Education Policy refers to many categories of children and uses the dated language of special needs. The term "special needs" has been widely criticised and a recent study found that persons are |

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| | Recommendation: |
| | Reinforcing the principles of inclusion and equity would require use of the language of student diversity and education for all learners. We also suggest using a term like "Students with Complex Learning Profiles". This would include students described as having a combination of impairments affecting communication, mobility, cognition, social emotional learning, emotional regulation, sensory processing and/or behaviour. |
| To what extent are inclusion and equity embedded as core principles in all policies and plans? | Strengths: |
| | The Maldives Strategy for Inclusive Education, 2016–2018 was informed by a participatory one-day workshop involving 20 stakeholders. The policy-makers and NIE have clearly prioritised inclusive education with the aim to support presence, participation, and achievement of all learners in schools in the Republic of Maldives regardless of their context and personal characteristics. It is clear that there has been significant work on embedding equity and inclusive ways of teaching across the Republic of Maldives with a focus on teaching strategies and additional trained teachers to strengthen inclusive education. |
| | Weaknesses: |
| | Students with "special needs" are supported in SEN classes and by SEN teachers. The terminology that is used to describe the programs and teaching staff needs to be changed for the same reasons as discussed previously. Using terminology like "cater to learners' individual needs" may reinforce the notion of special education needs. |
| | Recommendations: |

| | Suggested new terms could be support classes, inclusion classes, inclusion teachers. Suggest use terms and frame ways of thinking in a different way that is more aligned with inclusion and equity.<br><br>Students with complex learning profiles include students described as having a combination of impairments affecting communication, mobility, cognition, social emotional learning, emotional regulation, sensory processing and/or behaviour. |
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| To what extent are all national educational policies and plans informed by the principles of inclusion and equity? | Strengths:<br><br>There has been significant investment in supporting professional development about the concept of inclusive education and various inclusive pedagogies such as UDL, differentiating instruction, and use of technology to support learning.<br><br>Gaps:<br><br>Collecting, collating, and evaluating evidence on children's barriers to education access. There is mention of listening and acknowledging student voice but the evidence of this is not clear.<br><br>Weaknesses:<br><br>The key issue to note is that there is a need to move beyond dated and medical model terms and understandings that are represented in the constructs and terms such as special education needs.<br><br>Recommendation:<br><br>"Rather than have SEN teachers support children with SEN to catch up with missed learning, improve children's participation in mainstream classes …" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 8), the focus should shift to a co-teaching model. A co-teaching model (Friend & Cook, 1996) can follow a number of structures: one teach, one observe; one teach, one assist; station teaching; alternative teaching; team teaching. It is important to emphasise that in this model all teachers have equal status and share responsibility for the learning of all students. |

| To what extent are education practices guided by the principles of inclusion and equity? | Strengths:<br><br>The Maldives Strategy for Inclusive Education, 2016–2018 promotes teacher recognition and awards for mainstream and SEN teachers who are promoting inclusive practice (p. 7).<br><br>Gaps:<br><br>There is a complex issue of admitting children who have disabilities to schools and this could be addressed better in the Maldives Strategy for Inclusive Education.<br><br>Weaknesses:<br><br>The Maldives Strategy for Inclusive Education, 2016–2018 indicates that there needs to be some redevelopment of teacher incentives for taking on extra responsibility in SEN teaching. This type of strategy may perpetuate the differences between mainstream teachers and specialist teachers and may reinforce that this teaching is special. It also may suggest that it is a burden to teach children who have a disability.<br><br>Recommendation:<br><br>All teachers are on the same award and promotion/level scheme as inclusive education is everyone's business. A co- teaching model (Friend & Cook, 1996) could support specialist teachers to work with mainstream teachers. A co-teaching team works in the mainstream classroom for the majority of time. |
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1.2 The national curriculum and its associated assessment systems are designed to respond effectively to all learners

We have not specifically addressed this feature. We agreed that this would draw on the work on the National Curriculum: Inclusive Education Guidelines and Adaptations to Support the Implementation of the National Curriculum.

1.3 All partners who work with learners and their families understand and support the national policy goals for promoting inclusion and equity in education

| To what extent is there a widespread commitment/agreement among all professionals who work with children, youth, and adults to act according to the principles of inclusion and equity? | Strengths: It is a strength that the Maldives Strategy for Inclusive Education, 2016–2018 sets a target for mainstream teachers to be implementing differentiated teaching strategies. This expectation for mainstream teachers to respond to diversity through differentiating their teaching is good. It is also a strength that the Ministry of Education and NIE are working closely with teacher training institutions to support inclusive practice. It is good that SEN teachers have provided coaching to mainstream teachers. There is evidence of genuine commitment to progressing inclusive education in the Republic of Maldives.<br><br>Gaps:<br><br>How do parents understand and support inclusive education? This often emerges as a key barrier for countries to move forward with implementation of an inclusive education policy.<br><br>Weaknesses:<br><br>There may not be agreement about how to implement an inclusive education approach in the Republic of Maldives. This idea is aligned with the previous comments about the remaining strong evidence of a special education approach and focus on SEN etc.<br><br>Recommendation:<br><br>There is now a need to move forward with new terminology, roles, and responsibilities for mainstream and specialist teachers and to support capacity building for a co-teaching model (Friend & Cook, 1996) as discussed above. |
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1.4 Systems are in place to monitor the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners within the education system

| How effective are the systems for collecting data (qualitative and quantitative) regarding the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners? | Strengths:<br><br>It is good to see that the SEN Unit has been upgraded into a new department in the name of the Inclusive Education Department (IED).<br><br>Education Sector Analysis (ESA) (Ministry of Education, 2019) provides a solid summary of key findings related to inclusive education (4.19).<br><br>The registry of enrolled students with disabilities (SEN) on page 18 is a strength in the Inclusive Education Policy and identification of students not attending school is also a strength.<br><br>There is also significant data on enrolment, (MEMIS) attendance, absenteeism, grade completion, out of school children, risk assessment for children to make progress. Also, OOSC data from atolls by category of disability is included.<br><br>Gaps:<br><br>Details of data, for example in academic achievement, can be further broken down to include reference to at-risk groups. This would support future planning.<br><br>Weaknesses:<br><br>The focus on categories of children (16 types of students from 3 distinct categories) is a topic that could be discussed. This categorical way of grouping children is not considered an inclusive approach, but this may be necessary to support collecting data (qualitative and quantitative) regarding the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners.<br><br>Recommendation:<br><br>We suggest using a term like "Students with Complex Learning Profiles". This would include students described as having a combination of impairments affecting communication, mobility, cognition, social emotional |

| | learning, emotional regulation, sensory processing and/or behaviour. As an alternative, we have also provided a visual diagram that could be used in future policy revision. Please see Section 8. |
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| To what extent are data analysed in order to determine the impact of efforts to foster greater inclusion and equity? | Strengths:<br><br>There is a range of good data reported in the Education Sector Analysis Maldives, February, 2019. In the Inclusive Education Policy under Monitoring and Evaluation (p. 20), Point 2 indicates that there will be monitoring of the percentages of children and students being included in the SEN unit and research and monitoring of the students who complete education, their results, and their life proceedings.<br><br>Gaps:<br><br>There is missing clear data to complete a report on Point 2: monitor the percentages of children and students being included in the SEN unit and research and monitor the students who complete education, their results, and their life proceedings.<br><br>Weaknesses:<br><br>There is missing clear data to complete a report on Point 2: monitor the percentages of children and students being included in the SEN unit and research and monitor the students who complete education, their results, and their life proceedings.<br><br>Recommendation:<br><br>Develop monitoring tools to support gathering data about percentages of children and students being included in the SEN unit and research and monitor the students who complete education, their results, and their life proceedings. |

***Dimension 2: Policy statements***

2.1 The important national educational policy documents strongly emphasise inclusion and equity

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| To what extent do all major educational policy documents reflect the principles of inclusion and equity?<br><br>To what degree are policy priorities informed by the principles of inclusion and equity? | See comments in Dimension 1.1: Inclusion and equity are overarching principles that guide all educational policies, plans, and practices.<br><br>Strengths:<br><br>The inclusion of the two years of pre-primary education into the formal education system (public schools) is a strength.<br><br>The pre-primary integration policy has been discussed which would support early identification and learning/play programs for very young children and their families. The focus on holistic early childhood development and early learning and on identifying health issues is noted in the Education Sector Analysis (p. 12).<br><br>Recommendations:<br><br>Develop a policy to support early assessment and learning for 0–3 years (ECCE program) that is initiated by MoE and discussed with MoH.<br><br>Consider MoE led outreach support for families and very young children that would facilitate greater collaboration (MoE and MoH) in pre-primary health screening and early learning and play stimulation programs. The focus should be on family-centred, culturally responsive practice, and strengths-based practice (https://www.ecia.org.au/). Research indicates that children with developmental disabilities can yield significant improvements in cognitive, academic, and social outcomes if they receive early intervention. |

2.2 Senior staff at the national, district, and school levels provide leadership on inclusion and equity in education

| To what extent do national policy-makers show clear and sustainable leadership to promote the principles of inclusion and equity?<br><br>To what extent do local administrators provide clear and sustainable leadership regarding inclusive education?<br><br>To what extent are educational leaders (local authorities, senior staff, school principals) trained regarding their responsibilities for enhancing inclusion and removing barriers?<br><br>To what extent do education leaders at the local level encourage the development of inclusive and equitable cultures? | Strengths:<br><br>National policy-makers have shown leadership in promoting foundational inclusive principles to underpin the 2013 Inclusive Education Policy (e.g., 3a: "provide equal learning opportunities for all children within the formal education system as every child has the right to learn")<br><br>The Education Sector Analysis highlights strong political commitment of the Ministry leadership as a key factor in the success of the inclusive education program (p. 187).<br><br>National policy-makers have demonstrated leadership and ongoing commitment to inclusive education reform through: 1] the commissioning of the current policy review; 2] development of a strategic plan (2019–2023) (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Higher Education, 2019) which includes actions regarding inclusive education (e.g., development of a monitoring framework for IE); 3] support for staff capacity building to follow this policy review, including training in curriculum and assessment, and capacity building for inclusion coaches; and, 4] increase in SEN teachers.<br><br>Clear guidelines regarding the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education are articulated in the Inclusive Education Policy. With some review of responsibilities (as per this analysis), clear articulation of the responsibilities of the Ministry is a helpful strategy for sustaining the leadership role of policy-makers.<br><br>Allocation of funding to facilitate the inclusive education reform process is an example of leadership by policy-makers.<br><br>There is evidence of actions in the Strategic Plan to strengthen leadership capacity of the IED (although not articulated as "leadership" specifically).<br><br>The leadership responsibilities of senior staff at the school level are also articulated in the policy document (e.g., to support mainstream teachers). With some modification of responsibilities regarding inclusive education, this is a method of sustaining leadership at this level. |
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| | The Education Sector Analysis describes the interest and innovation demonstrated by SEN teachers in their implementation of the inclusive education program (even with very limited training) (p. 187). |
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| | Establishment of IED is an act of leadership. |
| | Establishment of an advisory committee is an act of leadership and also establishes the mechanism for leadership. |
| | Similarly, the establishment of a Working Committee on Inclusive Education, as referenced in the Education Sector Plan (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Higher Education, 2019, p. 18), indicates a focus on leadership. |
| | NB: It is difficult to analyse the extent to which leaders (other than national policy-makers) encourage the development of inclusive and equitable cultures. We only have what is documented in the policy regarding the expected responsibilities of those in roles such as teachers and coordinators. |
| | Gaps: |
| | A values statement to underpin the inclusive education work. |
| | Definition of inclusive education is missing. |
| | The Education Sector Analysis refers to the CRPD as the "strong legal framework" for children with disability (p. 184) but the CRPD is not clearly articulated in the policy. How the CRPD guides inclusive education policy is not explicit. |
| | The establishment of a Disability Act is referenced in the ESA (p. 187) but how this underpins education for students with disability is not articulated. |
| | The ESA refer to inclusive education as a human right (p. 191) but how does this belief explicitly underpin policy? |

| | Weaknesses: |
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| | Policy-makers' responsibilities regarding inclusive education, as articulated in the policy document, are highly focused on managerial matters as opposed to leadership, safeguarding, foundational principles, etc. |
| | Similarly, the responsibilities of other key positions that are identified in the policy document focus on managerial/administrative matters. |
| | Potential for leadership can be strengthened by some attention to vision building; shared understandings of inclusive education reform and strategies for change, etc. |
| | Recommendation: |
| | We recommend the clear and consistent articulation of the framework and values that underpin inclusive education policies. These can be used as a measure for decision-making and planning, and also used for consistency of implementation across all levels of the education system, and for sustainability of inclusive education reforms as leadership changes. |

2.3 Leaders at all levels articulate consistent policy goals to develop inclusive and equitable educational practices

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| To what extent do national policy-makers encourage the development of inclusive and equitable practices?<br><br>To what extent do local district administrators take action to encourage the development of inclusive and equitable practices?<br><br>To what extent do school principals and those who manage other centres of learning take action to encourage the development of inclusive and equitable practices? | The scope of this analysis does not allow for comment on the extent to which local and school leaders take action to encourage the development of inclusive and equitable practices, but comment can be made on the extent to which policy enables/facilitates this.<br><br>Strengths:<br><br>National policy-makers have demonstrated a clear focus on developing inclusive and equitable practices and have instigated specific actions to that end (see notes in Dimension 2.2).<br><br>The Education Sector Analysis describes the lack of a special school system in the Republic of Maldives (p. 189), and the commitment to educating children with disability in mainstream schools. This can be seen as a strength; however, it is not clear whether special schools have been avoided as an intentional strategy regarding inclusive education or whether this is circumstantial.<br><br>The responsibilities of Coordinators outlined in the 2013 Inclusive Education Policy (pp. 17/18) include a number of actions that could develop inclusive and equitable practices: for example, the facilitation of collaboration between mainstream and "special education needs" teachers; the identification of students who do not attend schools; ensuring a mechanism for the early identification of students at risk. There is clear recognition that some students are excluded from school/learning and that this is inequitable.<br><br>The Education Sector Plan 2019–2023 includes leadership enhancement on page 52 and includes in its description of leadership (p. 122) reference to developing student-centred teaching and learning. While inclusive education is not referred to explicitly, this is a recognised inclusive practice.<br><br>The establishment of a special unit within the NIE for the "SEN program" (Education Sector Analysis, p. 186), and the provision of programs (and assistance) for inclusive education by this unit is an example of how policy-makers are encouraging inclusive and equitable practices (Education Sector Analysis, p. 342). |

| | The Upgrade of the SEN unit to the Inclusive Education Department (IED) (p. 190) signals to all in the education system the value the Ministry places on developing inclusive and equitable practices. |
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| | Gaps: |
| | The role of principals in the development of inclusive practices. The ESA acknowledges that school management needs to work towards inclusive education policy implementation (p. 191) but seems silent on the roles and leadership development of principals regarding inclusive education reforms. |
| | Weaknesses: |
| | Although inclusive education ambassadors have been appointed in each school (Education Sector Analysis, p. 186), their role/leadership capacity is not clear. |
| | In the responsibilities outlined in the 2013 Inclusive Education Policy, the focus is on administrative rather than leadership roles; however, the Education Sector Plan 2019–2023 does recognise this and under enhancement of leadership skills in Lead Teachers (p. 122), recognises that the work of leaders is not just managerial tasks but support for teachers. Inclusive and equitable practices are not mentioned explicitly but would fall into this work. |
| | Some responsibilities described in the 2013 Inclusive Education Policy may not in fact encourage inclusive and equitable practice: for example, identification of categories of special needs (p. 19); the classifying of children into those who can be mainstreamed and those who can't (p. 17). |
| | Recommendations: |
| | Work on clarity at all levels about what inclusive and equitable practices mean. |
| | A strategy to develop inclusive education leadership at all levels (perhaps incorporated into "Lead Teacher" role or Inclusion Coach role referred to in the Strategic Plan, or as part of the role of the Teacher Resource centres in each atoll) (Education Sector Analysis, p. 188). |

| | An opportunity exists in the Leadership and Management Recommendation of the Education Sector Analysis (p. 222). There is potential here to include a focus on school development planning in inclusive and equitable practices. |
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2.4 Leaders at all levels challenge non-inclusive, discriminatory, and inequitable educational practices

| To what extent do systems for supporting schools and other centres of learning identify, challenge, and remove non-inclusive, discriminatory, and inequitable practices? | It is difficult to assess this criterion based on an analysis of policy documents. This may be an area for future research by the Ministry. The comments below are based on the potential for challenging exclusionary practices that is offered through features of the Inclusive Education Policies. |
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| Where non-inclusive, discriminatory, and inequitable practices are found to exist, to what extent are they challenged? | Strengths: |
| | The Inclusive Policy identifies children at risk of exclusion for a variety of reasons (p. 3, p. 7) and outlines strategies for removing non-inclusive practices throughout the policy. |
| | The Education Sector Analysis has identified that, although greater attention has been paid to students with "special educational needs" since the implementation of the 2013 Inclusive Education Policy, some elements of a more holistic inclusive system are still lacking (p. 185). |
| | The Education Sector Analysis identifies that "children with disabilities continue to have inadequate access to educational opportunities" (p. 186) so there is political awareness of inequity in the education system. |
| | The Education Sector Analysis shows evidence of efforts by policy-makers to redress exclusion and inequity (e.g., provision of education for students with disability in a greater number of schools across the country, p. 186). |
| | The responsibilities of the various stakeholders identified in the 2013 Inclusive Education Policy include those that facilitate the identification of exclusion (e.g., screening processes, p. 12), and those that facilitate the removal of inequitable practices (e.g., capacity building for teachers, p. 13). |

| | The Education Sector Analysis indicates awareness of the potential for discrimination and exclusion that is associated with disability labels (p. 189). Steps have been taken to minimise this impact through focusing on functional ability rather than clinical diagnosis.

The 2016–2018 Strategy for Inclusive Education indicates awareness of how a national focus on improving educational outcomes can compete with the provision of differentiated teaching methods (p. 2) thereby putting students with disability at risk of inequitable educational opportunities.

The 2016–2018 Strategy for Inclusive Education reports on research findings regarding the education of students with disability (p. 3), so there is awareness of the rates of exclusion of students with disability and the need to track exclusion. There is also awareness of attitudinal exclusion: for example, principals directing students with disability to other schools (and a lack of awareness by principals of inclusive education policy).

The 2016–2018 Strategy for Inclusive Education acknowledges the increased risk of exclusion in secondary schooling (p. 5).

A process for monitoring the progress of inclusive education has been established as an objective in the 2016–2018 Strategic Plan (p. 8). Criteria for evaluating progress with inclusive education reforms have been developed.

Gaps:

Is there a process through which parents/students can complain if they feel their child/they are experiencing educational exclusion or inequity?

Are principals made accountable for their implementation of the national Inclusive Education Policy? (This gap is noted in the 2016–2018 Strategy for Inclusive Education, p. 5).

Weaknesses:

The Education Sector Analysis (p. 188) has identified the emerging nature of the system's identification process. We note that, while identification of students at risk of exclusion and |
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| | inequity is vital, a focus on diagnoses and disability labels reflects a medical model of disability which does not fit with an inclusive education approach. This is a complex issue referred to in various sections of this analysis and needs careful thought.

Recommendations:

Further consideration of the approaches used to identify students who are excluded or are at risk of exclusion. How can this be done in order to promote inclusion rather than perpetuate a deficit approach to education?

The development of an external complaints mechanism for parents and students.

The establishment of an accountability process for principals. |
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***Dimension 3: Structures and systems***

3.1 There is high quality support for vulnerable learners

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| How effective are the systems for identifying vulnerable learners? | Strengths: |
| | A screening process for the identification of students with a disability (special needs as in the policy) is in place before enrolment in pre-schools. There is a system of conducting developmental assessments of each student before they enter school ("Growth Monitoring Card") with the purpose to identify any students with disabilities (3rd Part, para 9). |
| | Also, schools are required to have set up a formal mechanism for the early identification of students with disabilities (5th Part, Article 18, para f). |
| | Weaknesses: |
| | However, it is not specified how the identification of children with additional learning support needs (i.e., gifts and talents, social/emotional issues) and children under special circumstances will be conducted at that early stage of their education to foster their attendance, participation, and achievement of all learners. |
| | Recommendation: |
| | All children who are experiencing challenges for a variety of reasons should be entitled to have their learning needs assessed so that they are catered for from a very young age. There needs to be consideration and provision of flexible supports. |
| To what extent are there flexible arrangements for ensuring that support is available to individuals as and when necessary? | Strengths: |
| | The establishment of a special class or a support unit for students with disabilities in each mainstream school indicates that these students will not be educated in a segregated setting away from mainstream education (3rd Part, para9(a)). |

| | The government, schools, and teachers are required to provide flexible arrangements (i.e., use of Braille, access to therapists at school, physical access, specialised equipment and materials) to students with disabilities. |
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| | Weaknesses: |
| | This type of structure (special class/unit) can easily create opportunities for micro-exclusion when coordinated efforts are not planned and monitored through formal procedures to facilitate the gradual transition of students from those settings to the mainstream class. |
| | It is not specified in the Inclusive Education Policy whether flexible adjustments will be provided primarily in the mainstream classroom to enable full inclusion. The scope of flexible arrangements should be to enable successful inclusion and not to provide effective education to students with disabilities in any setting. |
| | Recommendations: |
| | To promote inclusion, placement in mainstream classrooms should be recommended in the policy as the first level of educational provision to students with disabilities (3rd Part, article 9(a)). |
| | Depending on the intensity of learning support students require, mainstream teachers should collaborate with classroom teachers to develop a plan for including these students in their classroom. This requirement could then be linked with the professional development of *all* teachers which could be enhanced with training on co-teaching. |
| | Considerations of family involvement could be clearer. |
| To what degree are families seen as partners in supporting their children's education? | Strengths: |
| | Parents are involved in the development of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) in collaboration with the teacher and the SEN teacher at the beginning of the school year (5th Part, Article 14, para C) and are provided periodically with technical advice and instructions for teaching students with disabilities (5th Part, Article 13, para p). |

| | In addition, schools are required to run awareness programs for parents (5th Part, Article 14, para (j)) and there is a seat for a parent representative in the School Board (5th Part, Article 14, Para k) and in the Advisory Committee (5th Part, Article 19, para b). More importantly, teachers are responsible for forming close relationships with parents and using their advice in a meaningful manner (5th Part, Article 17, para k). |
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| | Weaknesses: |
| | It is uncertain whether all parents can access the information that is relevant to their children's education and learning, especially if it is written in formal, technical discourse/professional jargon. The language used in that documentation could defeat its purpose and may create more barriers to parents. |
| | Recommendation: |
| | The information provided to parents should be provided in an accessible and easy-to-understand language and this guideline should be made explicit in the relevant section of the policy. |
| | Considerations of student voice could be clearer. |
| To what extent are learners themselves asked about their need for support? | Strengths: |
| | One of the primary principles of the policy is to establish an adaptive system to capture students' thoughts, ideas, and feelings about their learning experiences to facilitate their inclusion in education matters (1st Part, Article 2, para b). |
| | Weaknesses: |
| | There is a gap in the policy in regard to the representation of students with learning supports in School Boards and the Advisory committee in alignment with the CRPD (United Nations, 2006). |
| | Recommendation: |
| | There should be a requirement for: a) all schools to include a student representative on their School Board (5th Part, Article 14, para k); b) there should be a student representative on the Advisory Committee (5th Part, |

| | Article 19, part b); and c) a Coordinator in regards to the formation of the School board (5th part, Article 18, para k). |
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3.2 All services and institutions involved with learners and their families work together in coordinating inclusive and equitable educational policies and practices

| To what extent do schools (and other education providers) collaborate with other relevant sectors, such as health and social work? | Strengths: |
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| | Children with health issues (e.g., asthma) are grouped under "children under special circumstances" (4th Part, Article 11, para b). |
| | The provision of counselling is part of the services included in the policy for students in that group. |
| | The policy acknowledges the need to prepare "technical staff" apart from teachers and the establishment of rehabilitation programs who can support children who are facing learning difficulties as a result of their special circumstances (4th Part, Article 12, para b, e). |
| | The policy makes a reference to the provision of community-based programs for students who are unable to attend schools. |
| | The need for further consultation with professionals as part of the assessment of students requiring learning support is mentioned (3rd Part, article 10, para c). |
| | Weaknesses: |
| | There is an absence of reference to any collaboration between health professionals and social workers, which could be critical for developing an IEP for students with complex learning profiles (or children with severe or profound needs as defined in the policy). |
| | The policy does not describe in detail the professionals (i.e., social workers) who will coordinate and implement the community-based programs for the students who cannot attend school programs. |

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| | Recommendation:

Engagement and collaboration with health and allied health professionals should be added to the responsibilities of schools, teachers, and coordinators to help establish multi-disciplinary teams and strengthen collaborative decision-making for more effective inclusive support of children with complex learning profiles. The collaboration between the education and the health ministries has been stated as a priority in the Maldives Strategic Plan 2016–2018 (under accountability and communication) especially in relation to the development of early childhood health services (early intervention). |
| To what extent is there effective cooperation between schools and other centres of learning? | Strengths:

The cooperation between the mainstream school and the support unit is put forward as one of the responsibilities of the Coordinators (5th part, article 18, para c).

In addition, the coordinator carries the responsibility to explore local and international opportunities to enhance the capabilities of teachers (5th part, article 18, para l).

Weaknesses:

There is no specification on the content of the teacher training that could be sought to strengthen quality teaching.

There is no recommendation to form school-to-school partnerships as a means for increasing the capacity of individual organisations to respond to student diversity.

Recommendations:

The policy should include the provision of local/international professional development opportunities for teachers in evidence-based inclusive practice as part of the responsibilities of the Government, the Coordinator, and the schools.

School-to-school collaboration can transform teaching practices and teacher beliefs about their own capabilities and their work (UNESCO, 2017). Considering that inclusion is a challenging, long process requiring |

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| | a whole-of-school approach, it is crucial to set up mechanisms that enable teachers to learn from other teachers, which in turn will encourage self-reflection and responsive, flexible pedagogies. |
| | The establishment of cluster schools which apply similar inclusive practices could help create a wide inclusive community of practice in the Republic of Maldives, with all the advantages this type of endeavour could generate for educators, parents, and students. |
| To what degree do institutions and services within districts have a shared understanding of inclusion and equity, and work together? | Gaps: |
| | There is no reference to actions or mechanisms to establish a common understanding of inclusion and equity in the policy. The policy is more focused on establishing a shared understanding of the groups of students who require learning support in schools and the educational provisions (human and material) for them. |
| | However, one of the tasks to achieve Objective 1 (Strategic Plan) was to raise awareness about disability and inclusion in schools and the wider community through a variety of activities (i.e., development of an awareness kit by NIE and NGOs). |
| To what extent do both public and private education providers apply inclusive and equitable education practices? | There is evidence on the use of inclusive education practices in the public sector. According to the Maldives Strategic Plan, by 2017, 50% of teachers in samples (unspecified number of schools) were observed using differentiated instruction. |
| | Gaps: |
| | There is no evidence or plan to collect evidence on the application of inclusive practices in the private sector. |
| | Recommendation: |
| | The collection of data from private schools on inclusive practice should be included as an important government strategic objective given that the number of students in private schools is growing at a fast pace in the Republic of Maldives. |

3.3 Resources, both human and financial, are distributed in ways that benefit potentially vulnerable learners

| To what extent are all learners seen as being of equal importance educationally?<br><br>To what extent are available resources used flexibly, and targeted to support participation and learning? | Strengths:<br><br>Education is provided in accordance with the degree and type of need (3rd Part, article 9, para b). For example, specific provisions for specialised resources (material and human) for children with sensory and physical impairments are included in the policy.<br><br>Evaluation of students' support needs is conducted periodically (once a year) and monitored by the Coordinators (i.e., IEPs) and the Ministry of Education (Registry for Children with Disabilities) (5th Part, Article 13, para p and r).<br><br>The policy refers to the provision of equal learning opportunities for all children (1st part, article 3, para a).<br><br>Weaknesses:<br><br>The Maldives Strategic Plan has identified unequal distribution of: a) material resources (i.e., assistive technology, software) for students with disabilities who attend schools in remote atolls; and, b) human resources (such as medical professionals, physiotherapists, occupational therapists) to assist with the assessment and education of students with disabilities in those schools.<br><br>Recommendation:<br><br>Prioritise the provision of equipment and professionals to schools in remote areas to reduce inequity in educational resources with proportionate impact on student participation and achievement. |
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3.4 There is a clear role for special provision, such as special schools and units, in promoting inclusion and equity in education

| To what extent do special schools and units have a common understanding of inclusion and equity?<br><br>To what extent do students from special schools and units have opportunities to take part in activities within mainstream schools?<br><br>To what degree is the expertise made available in special settings also made available to teachers in other schools? | Strengths:<br><br>Special teachers are highly regarded experts for the education of students with disabilities in the education system.<br><br>It is a requirement of teachers to collaborate with special teachers for the participation of children with disabilities in core-curricular activities to the maximum extent possible (5th part, Article 17, para d).<br><br>Schools have the responsibility to organise how teachers in mainstream schools will receive advice from specialist teachers.<br><br>Weaknesses:<br><br>It is unclear from the policy and strategic plan whether the staff in special schools share a common understanding of equity and inclusion with teachers in mainstream schools.<br><br>More importantly, the policy does not include arrangements for peer coaching or co-teaching to enable the inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom and the collaboration and mutual learning between teachers.<br><br>Recommendations:<br><br>The Coordinator and the school leaders should encourage and support mainstream and specialist teachers to plan and teach together as well as review their co-teaching experiences.<br><br>Examples of effective co-teaching should be showcased and receive official recognition in the school community.<br><br>Co-teaching models should be embedded in initial teacher preparation courses both for mainstream and specialist teachers. |

*Dimension 4: Practices*

4.1 Schools and other learning centres have strategies for encouraging the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners from their local community

| To what degree do teachers use a range of pedagogical strategies to cater to learner differences? | Strengths:<br><br>The National Curriculum: Inclusive Education Guidelines and Adaptations to Support the Implementation of the National Curriculum has been developed to support the development of pedagogical strategies to cater to learner differences. This document has much detail for adjustments for various learners and includes adaptions in planning, teaching, assessment, the environment, and resources. There are also examples of lesson plans provided that model differentiation. Students with special education needs are required to have an Individual Education Plan (Inclusive Education Policy, p. 14, and see Responsibilities of teacher p. 16). The IED has great potential to support schools and teachers.<br><br>Gaps:<br><br>The Education Sector Analysis Maldives, February 2019 indicates that there has been continuous teacher training both at pre-service and in-service levels; however, it is not clear what impact that training has had on teachers' ability to use inclusive pedagogies in the classroom.<br><br>Weaknesses:<br><br>The Inclusive Education Policy indicates that "arrangements for the children with special needs to take part in the school's core-curricular activities should be made to the maximum extent possible" (p. 16). This type of statement does not send a clear message to school leaders, teachers, and specialist teachers about what is expected in an inclusive approach. Some practices may foster new and subtle forms of segregation even if the activities do happen in mainstream settings (Florian, Black-Hawkins, & Rouse, 2016).<br><br>Recommendation: |
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| | It would be useful to include some case studies of teachers who are successfully using inclusive pedagogy in their classroom with a range of diverse students. Data could be collected about the impact on all student learning and social participation in the mainstream classroom. |
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| To what extent are there reflective procedures for taking account of students' views regarding their learning and aspirations? | This has been covered under Dimension 3.1. |
| To what degree do school leaders support the presence, participation, and achievements of all learners? | Strengths:<br><br>The issue of improving training for school principals is mentioned a number of times in The Education Sector Analysis Maldives, February 2019. Section 4.32 "Synthesis: Towards a theory of change to reduce the learning gap" provides valuable information.<br><br>Weaknesses:<br><br>The Education Sector Analysis Maldives, February 2019 indicates that principals think it is the responsibility of the PD coordinator to plan and implement PD activities relating to teachers' needs.<br><br>Recommendations:<br><br>School leadership is an important requirement for developing inclusive schools and they need to be actively engaged in ethical leadership to support the presence, participation, and achievements of all learners (Ehrich & Carrington, 2018; Harris, Carrington, & Ainscow, 2018).<br><br>Follow up and continue the work described in Section 4.32 "Synthesis; Towards a theory of change to reduce the learning gap" as this provides valuable information (The Education Sector Analysis Maldives, February 2019). |

4.2 Schools and other learning centres provide support for learners who are at risk of underachievement, marginalisation, or exclusion

| To what extent are teachers skilled in assessing the progress of individual students and in supporting their development? | Strengths: There is a culture of national assessments that links inputs with the expected learning outcomes. Various types of assessments are utilised: school-based assessment, NALO, and examinations. Teachers understanding and use of fair assessment is an emerging priority. Weaknesses: There is not enough information about the knowledge and skill that teachers have in assessing the progress of individual students and in supporting their development. Recommendation: It is important to gather information about the knowledge and skill that teachers have in assessing the progress of individual students and in supporting their development. This should be a priority area to address in the future. |
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| To what extent do teaching and non-teaching staff take account of the cultures, identities, interests, and aspirations of all of their students in order to enhance their learning? | We have not specifically addressed this feature. We agreed that this could draw on the work on the National Curriculum: Inclusive Education Guidelines and Adaptations to Support the Implementation of the National Curriculum. |
| To what extent are teacher trainees helped to develop teaching pedagogies that respond positively to student diversity? | We have not specifically addressed this feature. We agreed that this could draw on the work on the National Curriculum: Inclusive Education Guidelines and Adaptations to Support the Implementation of the National Curriculum. |

4.3 Teachers and support staff are prepared to respond to learner diversity during their initial training

We have not specifically addressed this feature. We agreed that this could draw on the work on the National Curriculum: Inclusive Education Guidelines and Adaptations to Support the Implementation of the National Curriculum.

4.4 Teachers and support staff have opportunities to take part in continuing professional development regarding inclusive and equitable practices

| To what extent do schools and other centres of learning have effective staff development programmes related to inclusive practices? | Strengths:<br><br>The Education Sector Analysis Maldives, February 2019 indicates that there has been continuous teacher training both at pre-service and in-service levels. Inclusion coaches have been trained and supporting inclusive education in the atolls.<br><br>Gaps:<br><br>It is not clear what impact this training has had on teachers' ability to use inclusive pedagogies in the classroom.<br><br>Weaknesses:<br><br>There could be information about how PD links to levels of mastery for teachers and promotion.<br><br>Recommendations:<br><br>Teachers develop an e-portfolio of PD to support inclusive culture and practice.<br><br>Principals could work with school leaders and "SEN" teachers and inclusion coaches to develop Communities of Practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) for inclusive education. This type of approach supports social learning in the social and cultural context which would be appropriate in the Republic of Maldives. |

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| To what extent do teachers have opportunities to see one another working in order to share ideas and practices? | We have not specifically addressed this feature as we do not have enough information. |
| To what extent are there opportunities for teachers to attend in-service courses and benefit from customised school support regarding the development of inclusive practices? | We have not specifically addressed this feature as we do not have enough information. |

**7. Recommendations**

Following is a summary of the recommendations made using the UNESCO policy review framework.

*Dimension 1: Concepts*

- Reinforcing the principles of inclusion and equity would require use of the language of student diversity and education for all learners. We also suggest using a term like "Students with Complex Learning Profiles". This would include students described as having a combination of impairments affecting communication, mobility, cognition, social emotional learning, emotional regulation, sensory processing and/or behaviour.
- Suggested new terms could be support classes, inclusion classes, inclusion teachers. Suggest use of terms and frame ways of thinking in a different way that is more aligned with inclusion and equity.
- "Rather than have SEN teachers support children with SEN to catch up with missed learning, improve children's participation in mainstream classes …" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 8), the focus should shift to a co-teaching model. A co-teaching model (Friend & Cook, 1996) can follow a number of structures: one teach, one observe; one teach, one assist; station teaching; alternative teaching; team teaching. It is important to emphasise that in this model all teachers have equal status and share responsibility for the learning of all students.
- All teachers are on the same award and promotion/level scheme as inclusive education is everyone's business. A co-teaching model (Friend & Cook, 1996) could support specialist teachers to work with mainstream teachers. A co-teaching team works in the mainstream classroom for the majority of time.
- There is now a need to move forward with new terminology, roles, and responsibilities for mainstream and specialist teachers and to support capacity building for a co-teaching model (Friend & Cook, 1996) as discussed above.
- Develop monitoring tools to support gathering data about percentages of children and students being included in the SEN unit and research and monitor the students who complete education, their results, and their life proceedings.

*Dimension 2: Policy statements*

- Develop a policy to support early assessment and learning for 0–3 years (ECCE program) that is initiated by MoE and discussed with MoH.
- Consider MoE led outreach support for families and very young children that would facilitate greater collaboration (MoE and MoH) in pre-primary health screening and early learning and play stimulation programs. The focus should be on family-centred, culturally responsive practice, and strengths-based practice (https://www.ecia.org.au/). Research indicates that children with developmental disabilities can yield significant improvements in cognitive, academic, and social outcomes if they receive early intervention.
- We recommend the clear and consistent articulation of the framework and values that underpin inclusive education policies. These can be used as a measure for decision-making and planning, and also used for consistency across all levels of the education system, and for sustainability of inclusive education reforms as leadership changes.
- Work on clarity at all levels about what inclusive and equitable practices mean.

- A strategy to develop inclusive education leadership at all levels (perhaps incorporated into "Lead Teacher" role or Inclusion Coach role referred to in the Strategic Plan, or as part of the role of the Teacher Resource centres in each atoll) (Education Sector Analysis, p. 188).
- An opportunity exists in the Leadership and Management Recommendation of the Education Sector Analysis (p. 222). There is potential here to include a focus on school development planning in inclusive and equitable practices.
- Further consideration of the approaches used to identify students who are excluded or are at risk of exclusion. How can this be done in order to promote inclusion rather than perpetuate a deficit approach to education?
- The development of an external complaints mechanism for parents and students.
- The establishment of an accountability process for principals.

## Dimension 3: Structures and systems

- All children who are experiencing challenges for a variety of reasons should be entitled to have their learning needs assessed so that they are catered for from a very young age. There needs to be consideration and provision of flexible supports.
- To promote inclusion, placement in mainstream classrooms should be recommended in the policy as the first level of educational provision to students with disabilities (3rd Part, article 9(a)).
- Depending on the intensity of learning support students require, mainstream teachers should collaborate with classroom teachers to develop a plan for including these students in their classroom. This requirement could then be linked with the professional development of all teachers which could be enhanced with training on co-teaching.
- Considerations of family involvement could be clearer.
- The information provided to parents should be provided in an accessible and easy-to-understand language and this guideline should be made explicit in the relevant section of the policy.
- Considerations of student voice could be clearer.
- There should be a requirement for: a) all schools to include a student representative on their School Board (5th Part, Article 14, para k); b) there should be a student representative on the Advisory Committee (5th Part, Article 19, part b); and c) a Coordinator in regards to the formation of the School board (5th part, Article 18, para k).
- Engagement and collaboration with health and allied health professionals should be added to the responsibilities of schools, teachers, and coordinators to help establish multi-disciplinary teams and strengthen collaborative decision-making for more effective inclusive support of children with complex learning profiles. The collaboration between the education and the health ministries has been stated as a priority in the Maldives Strategic Plan 2016–2018 (under accountability and communication) especially in relation to the development of early childhood health services (early intervention).
- The policy should include the provision of local/international professional development opportunities for teachers in evidence-based inclusive practice as part of the responsibilities of the Government, the Coordinator, and the schools.
- School-to-school collaboration can transform teaching practices and teacher beliefs about their own capabilities and their work (UNESCO, 2017). Considering that inclusion is a challenging, long process requiring a whole-of-school approach, it is crucial to set up

mechanisms that enable teachers to learn from other teachers, which in turn will encourage self-reflection and responsive, flexible pedagogies.

- The establishment of cluster schools which apply similar inclusive practices could help create a wide inclusive community of practice in the Republic of Maldives, with all the advantages this type of endeavour could generate for educators, parents, and students.
- The collection of data from private schools on inclusive practice should be included as an important government strategic objective given that the number of students in private schools is growing at a fast pace in the Republic of Maldives.
- Prioritise the provision of equipment and professionals to schools in remote areas to reduce inequity in educational resources with proportionate impact on student participation and achievement.
- The Coordinator and the school leaders should encourage and support mainstream and specialist teachers to plan and teach together as well as review their co-teaching experiences.
- Examples of effective co-teaching should be showcased and receive official recognition in the school community.
- Co-teaching models should be embedded in initial teacher preparation courses both for mainstream and specialist teachers.
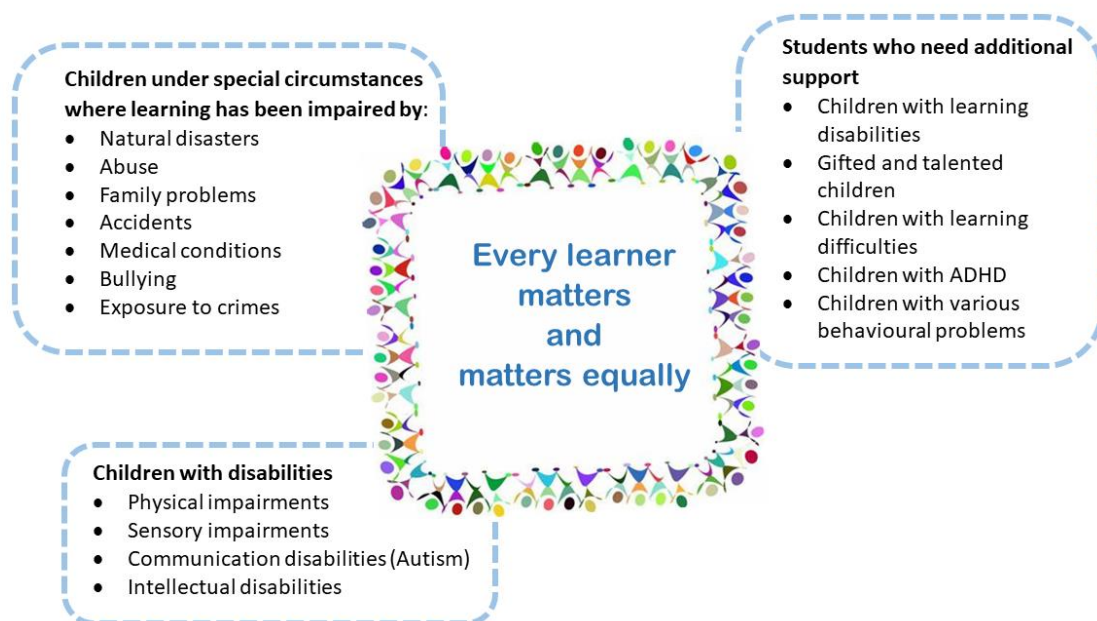
### *Dimension 4: Practices*

- It would be useful to include some case studies of teachers who are successfully using inclusive pedagogy in their classroom with a range of diverse students. Data could be collected about the impact on all student learning and social participation in the mainstream classroom.
- School leadership is an important requirement for developing inclusive schools and they need to be actively engaged in ethical leadership to support the presence, participation, and achievements of all learners (Ehrich & Carrington, 2018; Harris, Carrington, & Ainscow, 2018).
- Follow up and continue the work described in Section 4.32 "Synthesis; Towards a theory of change to reduce the learning gap" as this provides valuable information (The Education Sector Analysis Maldives, February 2019).
- It is important to gather information about the knowledge and skill that teachers have in assessing the progress of individual students and in supporting their development. This should be a priority area to address in the future.
- Teachers develop an e-portfolio of PD to support inclusive culture and practice.
- Principals could work with school leaders and "SEN" teachers and inclusion coaches to develop Communities of Practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) for inclusive education. This type of approach supports social learning in the social and cultural context which would be appropriate in the Republic of Maldives.

### 8. Conclusion

The review and analysis of the Inclusive Education Policy and Strategic Plan has been conducted using the UNESCO guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education (UNESCO, 2017). Many strengths regarding inclusive education reform have been identified and some of these reflect the

unique nature of the Republic of Maldives; for example, the clear focus on mainstream as opposed to special schooling, and the strong community nature of the country's geography. Challenges to the implementation of inclusive and equitable practices are also evident, and some of these, too, can be attributed to distinctive features of the country (e.g., the difficulty with tracking school enrolment across the many islands). However, many of the gaps and weaknesses highlighted through this review are common across the world and illustrate the challenges associated with inclusive education reform more broadly. All educational jurisdictions, for example, struggle with attitudinal change and moving away from segregated practices and non-inclusive terminology.

As the Ministry considers recommendations from this review, it will be important to ground deliberations in international understandings of what inclusive education means but also to build on the strengths and existing reform measures in the Republic of Maldives itself. Strong leadership and commitment to inclusion are apparent, and there is a spirit of change in the policy documents that seems likely to drive existing inclusive education reforms forward. As the direction of this change is considered by the Ministry, policy-makers will need to deliberate on goals that might be achieved in the short term, and those that are long-term and aspirational (and will therefore need ongoing investment). For example, change of terminology might be made quite quickly; however, the attitudinal change associated with the way we use language is likely to take time, and will need leadership and considerable thought. Decision-makers will also need to consider goals which build on and strengthen existing endeavours (e.g., current plans regarding the development of teacher capacity for inclusion) and those which might take the Ministry in new directions (e.g., the development of a co-teaching approach). The recommendations made in this review, under the headings of the UNESCO dimensions (concepts, policy statements, structures and systems, and practices), aim to stimulate this decision-making and goal setting. In addition to these recommendations, we include the following visual which might be useful in highlighting that every learner matters and matters equally (UNESCO, 2017, p. 13).

**Children under special circumstances where learning has been impaired by:**
- Natural disasters
- Abuse
- Family problems
- Accidents
- Medical conditions
- Bullying
- Exposure to crimes

**Students who need additional support**
- Children with learning disabilities
- Gifted and talented children
- Children with learning difficulties
- Children with ADHD
- Children with various behavioural problems

Every learner matters and matters equally

**Children with disabilities**
- Physical impairments
- Sensory impairments
- Communication disabilities (Autism)
- Intellectual disabilities

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