

The background of the cover is a faded, high-angle photograph of a person's hands and arms as they write on a whiteboard. The person is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved shirt. The whiteboard surface is visible at the bottom, and the person's hands are positioned as if they have just finished writing or are about to start. The overall tone is professional and educational.

**SÍNDICA**

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION  
IN CATALONIA**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**January 2025**



# Executive summary

TWENTY ACTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION MODEL.....	3
1. Balanced schooling for pupils with special educational needs .....	7
2. Shared protocol for teachers and EAPs to fully detect pupils' educational support needs by designing strategies for inclusive care in the context of the classroom .....	10
3. Consolidating lower class size ratios.....	13
4. Promoting co-teaching.....	15
5. Provision of other universal measures and review of methodologies and resource organisation in the classroom: universal design for learning.....	17
6. Providing specific resources for implementing inclusive education .....	18
7. Intensive support as a structural, not an individually allocated, resource .....	21
8. Specific strategies for addressing special educational needs in highly complex schools.....	22
9. Equitable distribution of support among schools by complexity and stage .....	24
10. Transforming CEEs .....	26
11. School and educational service support for families.....	28
12. Equating the schooling conditions for pupils with special educational needs attending mainstream schools .....	31
13. In-service teacher training and alignment with other educational stakeholders in promoting the culture of inclusion in schools.....	33
14. Mainstreaming inclusive education in initial teacher training.....	36
15. Strengthening educational services for the accompaniment of teachers: the classroom as a context for intervention.....	37

16. Coordination of resources and services, and networking among professionals .....	40
17. Inclusive nursery school model .....	42
18. Educational continuity plan for pupils with special educational needs in post-compulsory education .....	44
19. Strategy for the participation of children with special educational needs in educational leisure .....	47
20. Guarantees for educational and training support on leaving the education system .....	49

## Twenty actions for effective implementation of the inclusive education model

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) expressly recognises the right to inclusive education, an essential model to ensure all pupils receive quality education and to guarantee universality and non-discrimination in the right to education. The main international organisations in the fields of education and the defence of rights stress the need for greater overall progress in pupils' inclusion in education, particularly those with special educational needs.

To achieve this, Decree 150/2017, of 17 October, on educational support for pupils in the framework of an inclusive education system, was passed in 2017, boosting the inclusive school model in Catalonia as already advocated by Law 12/2009, of 10 July, on education (LEC).

In recent years, the Catalan Ministry of Education has strived to develop this Decree. This has involved improving detection of pupils with educational support needs, increasing the number of specialist teaching and educational support staff in mainstream schools, and the number of staff available in different educational services. The aim is to meet these educational support needs (such as educational psychologist and guidance teams (EAPs) and educational resource centres for pupils with hearing disabilities (CREDAs)). **This report found that there has been significant progress in implementing the inclusive education model since the adoption of Decree 150/2017.**

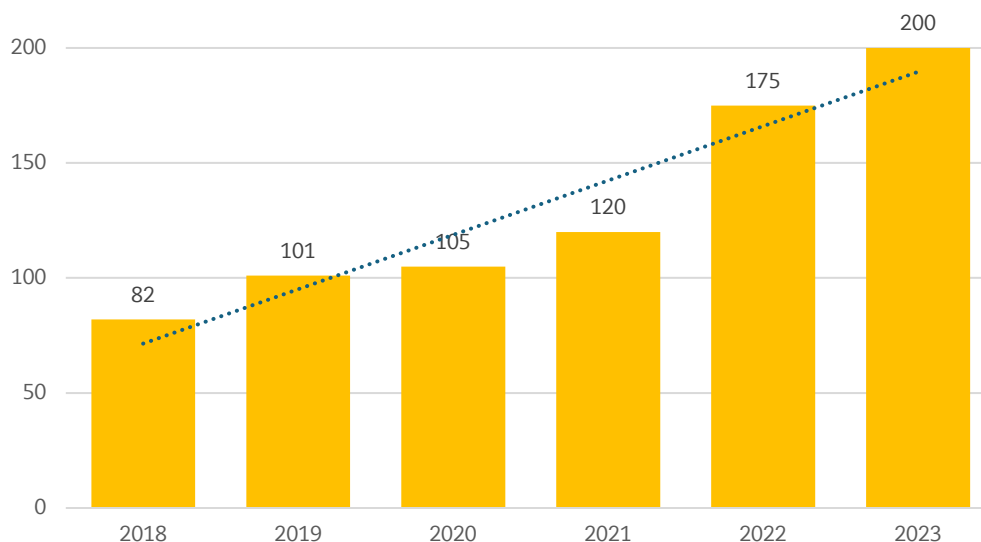
However, despite progress, the analysis of the education system also reveals persistent shortcomings in support for diversity and difficulties in effectively applying the inclusive education model established in the aforementioned Decree. This means that, **even today, pupils' full inclusion in school life is not sufficiently ensured.**

Implementing the model requires a transformation in the education system, which takes time and requires not only an improvement in the provision of resources but also consolidation of cultural changes among professionals and families in how diversity in the classroom is understood and addressed. **Lack of an ingrained, shared culture of inclusive education for the educational community as a whole is one of the main obstacles to implementing the model.**

Support for pupils with special educational needs continues to be one of the main causes of complaint to the Catalan Ombudsman office in the field of education. In 2023, the office received 200 complaints on school inclusion, 17.3% of the total complaints on education. Numbers of such complaints have steadily risen in recent years, as Decree 150/2017 has been rolled out (Graph 1) and difficulties and resistance have emerged. It is worth noting that the areas in which this institution receives the most complaints tend to be those where public authorities promote changes and transformations.



**Graph 1. Complaints and ex officio actions by the Catalan Ombudsman office in the field of inclusive education (2018-2023)**



	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Inclusive education	82	101	105	120	175	200
Education	800	832	1.292	1.637	1.836	1.156
%	10,3	12,1	8,1	7,3	9,5	17,3

Source: Catalan Ombudsman office.

In 2021, the Catalan Ombudsman office presented to Parliament the extraordinary report on *Inclusive education in Catalonia*, with the aim of analysing the implementation of Decree 150/2017, identifying difficulties in the effective application of the school inclusion model and formulating proposals for improvement.

This report aims to update the diagnosis on implementation of the school inclusion model and monitor implementation of the recommendations previously formulated by this institution in 2021.

In 2022, the Catalan Ministry of Education launched the Inclusive Education System Participatory Board (TAPSEI), conceived as a body for social and institutional participation to promote a change in the inclusive approach in social and institutional spheres and define lines of action to continue progressing towards an inclusive education system.

As part of this work, the Catalan Ombudsman office took on the tasks of evaluating compliance with the agreements adopted by this body and reporting back to its members, and assessing the measures adopted by the Catalan Ministry of Education in this area. This report is therefore part of this undertaking and assesses how the different lines of action proposed by the TAPSEI in 2023 are being implemented.

The inclusive education model is being rolled out progressively, and has received a significant increase in resources and strategies; however, the measures adopted so far do not yet ensure full inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in the education system

In recent years, the Catalan Ministry of Education has significantly increased the resources available for guaranteeing inclusive education (classrooms providing intensive support for inclusive schooling (SIEI), monitoring hours, specialist teachers, etc.).

This increase has gone hand in hand with a slight rise in the number of pupils attending special education centres (CEEs), especially following the adoption of Decree 150/2017.

Despite the increase in resources, there is still demand from families to send their children to CEEs and there are also complaints regarding insufficient support for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools (due to insufficient resources and information on the support available, among other issues).

In practice, implementation of inclusion still involves a degree of internal segregation of pupils with special educational needs within mainstream schools: SIEI is sometimes seen as separate from the mainstream classroom and the role of support staff is seen as individuals assigned to each student with special educational needs, rather than a resource for the school and the class group.

Resource allocation clashes with deficiencies in the teacher and support staff training in understanding the paradigm shift in professional practice involved in the inclusive school model and each professional's role in an inclusive education system.

A significant proportion of teachers still think inclusive education concerns only pupils with special educational needs, that the main responsibility for attending to these pupils lies with support staff and that their inclusion depends mainly on the provision of this additional specific support, while there is no need for teachers to change their professional practice or classroom dynamics.

There are still services, such as the Educational Inspectorate, EAPs and child development and early care centres (CDIAP), whose advice to families is not always oriented towards inclusion, where pupils are distributed differently in mainstream and special schools depending on where they live. This is partly conditioned by how professionals in different services position themselves with regard to the inclusive school model. In the same vein, the work of schools and education services is still not sufficiently coordinated and integrated.

Indeed, high pupil numbers in special schools and difficulties for enrolling in certain mainstream schools show that the approach proposed by Decree 150/2017 has still not been fully implemented or is not known by some schools and educational services.

This paradigm shift requires reinforcing staff in the different educational services involved in providing support for teachers.

The EAPs are already overworked and their intervention is not thorough enough. This limits their capacity to accompany school professionals in transforming their professional practice in line with the inclusive education paradigm and improve support for learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

The special education service and resource provider centres (CEEPSIRs), which provide services and resources to teachers in mainstream schools and facilitate the inclusion of learners with special educational needs, have not been fully implemented.

Finally, the educational resource centres for pupils with hearing impairment (CREDA), visual impairment (CREDV) and developmental and behavioural disorders (CRETDIC), which assist mainstream schools in the schooling of these pupils, also have difficulties in meeting existing demand and working with teachers to improve the educational care of these pupils in the classroom.

A number of measures aimed at improving the effectiveness of the inclusive education model in Catalonia are set out below.

# 01. Balanced schooling for pupils with special educational needs

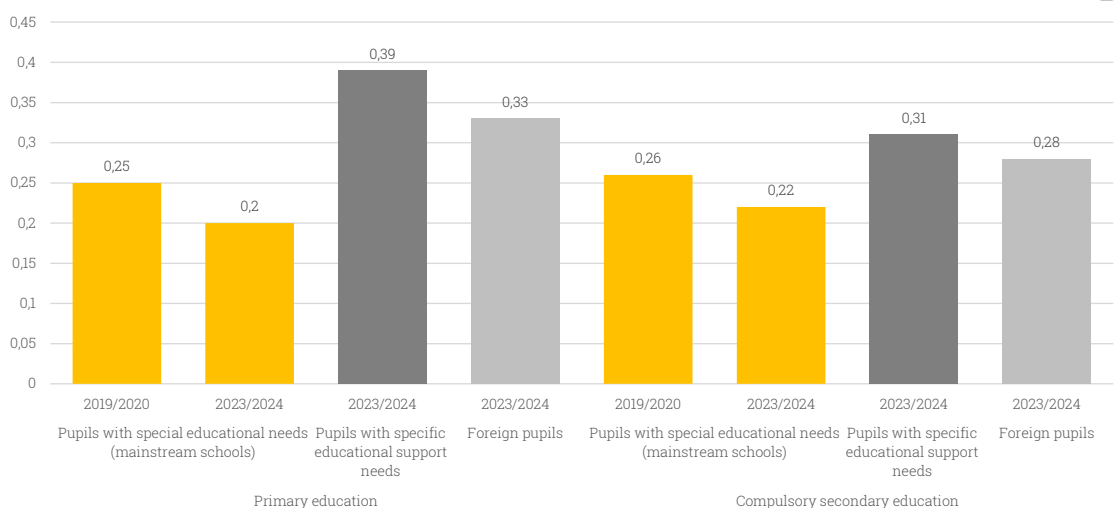
The education system has made progress in the balanced schooling of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. As a result, there are an increasing number of schools with greater internal diversity among their pupils

As regards pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools, the dissimilarity index, which measures imbalances in student enrolment, has decreased slightly, falling from 0.25 in the 2019/2020 school year to 0.20 in 2023/2024 in primary education, and from 0.26 to 0.22 in secondary education.

**Thus, the schooling of approximately one-fifth of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools where they are currently enrolled would hypothetically have to be modified to ensure it was balanced.**

However, these imbalances are lower those for pupils with general educational support needs (0.39 in primary and 0.31 in secondary) or for foreign pupils (0.33 in primary and 0.28 in secondary).

**Graph 2. Trend in the dissimilarity index (2019/2020 and 2023/2024)**



Source: Based on data from the Catalan Ministry of Education.

Note. Figures for the 2023/2024 school year are from December.

This improvement was boosted by the approval of Decree 11/2021, of 16 February, regarding the programming of the educational offer and the procedure of admission in the centres of the Catalan Education Service, which provides more instruments for the balanced schooling of pupils with special educational needs, such as reserving places up to the beginning of the school year, as first applied to the 2022/2023 admission process, and differentiated reserve places for pupils with special educational needs, applied for the first time in 2023/2024.

**At the same time, the percentage of schools with a low proportion (less than 2.5%) or no pupils with special educational needs dropped from 52.3% to 30.6%, and the percentage of schools with more than 5% of these pupils rose from 11% to 24.3% in the same period.**

State schools have a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs than charter schools.

Excess reserved places for pupils with special educational needs in some areas, where some schools filled their places and others not, is detrimental to tackling the concentration of these pupils among schools. In the 2023/2024 admission process, for example, age 3 pre-school pre-enrolment applications covered 66.5% of the reserve in the final offer for pupils with special educational needs (NEE A), far below the coverage provided by reserve places for pupils with specific educational needs due to socio-economic reasons (NEE B), which was 81.9%. **In the initial offer, there were almost 1,000 more reserve places than applications from pupils with special educational needs, and in the final offer, there were 1,500.**

Allocation of places to pupils enrolling after the deadline should also be improved. **Pupils with special educational needs who submit applications after the deadline (but before the start of the school year) experience further delays in their place allocation, which eventually occurs after the start of the school year.** In the case of the city of Barcelona, for example, 90.9% (77) of pupils with special educational needs pre-registered between June and August were assigned to a school after the start of the school year, a much higher rate than for ordinary pupils, where the proportion was 27.0% (627).

Actions for balanced schooling should be carried out especially in access to the education system. In the transition from primary to secondary education, making the criteria for assigning pupils with special educational needs to reserve places more flexible should be assessed, to ensure these pupils are not separated from their natural or reference peer groups.

## Recommendation

Continuity must be provided for the measures implementing Decree 11/2021, in order to make further progress through differentiated place reservation in the schooling of pupils with special educational needs. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure pupils with special educational needs pre-registered after the regular pre-registration period, who arrive during the summer, can obtain a place before the start of the school year, as is the case for most pupils in the same situation without special needs.

## 02. Shared protocol for teachers and EAPs to fully detect pupils' educational support needs by designing strategies for inclusive care in the context of the classroom

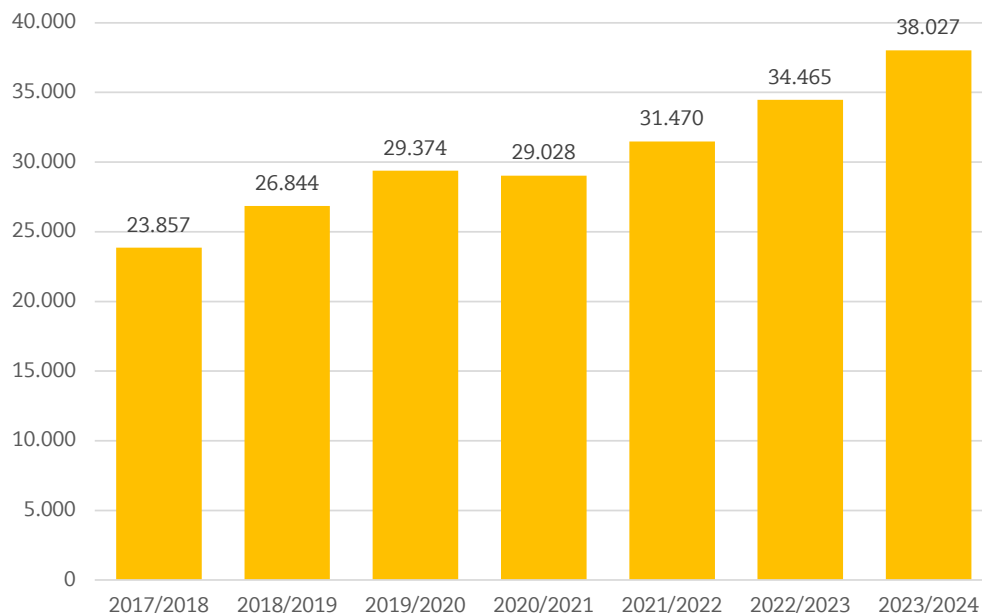
Since the approval of Decree 150/2017, there has been a 59.4% rise in the number of pupils with special educational needs enrolled in second-stage (3-6 years) primary and compulsory secondary education, despite total pupil numbers falling by 1.8%

This increase, mainly due to better detection, is especially notable among pupils with autism spectrum disorders (an 111.3% rise between 2017/2018 and 2022/2023), intellectual disabilities (35.9%) and developmental delay (33.0%). There has also been a significant rise in specific educational support needs for gifted pupils (62.4%) and pupils with learning disorders (105.7%).

The most prevalent special educational needs are autism spectrum disorders (around 14,000), intellectual disability (around 8,500), developmental delay (around 6,000) and severe behavioural disorders (around 3,000). Pupil with learning disorders (around 43,000) and gifted pupils (about 3,000) are also prevalent.

In Catalonia in 2023, there were around 35,000 pupils with special educational needs recognised by the education system in second-stage pre-school, primary and compulsory secondary education, and around 36,000 children aged 0-15 with a recognised degree of disability of over 33%.

**Graph 3. Pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools in second-stage pre-school, primary and compulsory secondary education in Catalonia (2017-2024)**



Source: Based on data from the Catalan Ministry of Education.

It should be noted that early detection of pupils with special educational needs in second-stage pre-school education has been improved through various measures, such as the programme for early detection and intervention in learning, communication and language difficulties in second-stage pre-school education in 2022/2023. Indeed, **the highest detection levels in all schooling (with percentages of pupils with special educational needs above 4%, above the proportion at all other levels) is at ages 4-5.**

However, available data also indicate that **there are still pupils in classrooms going undetected or unrecognised by established formal procedures.** For instance, in primary education the proportion of pupils detected with special educational needs is significantly lower than in second-stage pre-school or secondary education.

A further example is that cases of learning disorders go undetected because pupils adapt to school requirements well enough and do not seem to require specific support, or because teachers and families do not have the knowledge to associate certain learning difficulties with this disorder.

Early and official diagnosis by the public sector is not guaranteed in all cases, in neither health nor education.

There is a higher prevalence of special educational needs among boys than among girls. In the 2022/2023 school year, while in primary education 51.2% of pupils in mainstream schools were boys, this proportion rose to 75.0% in the case of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools (82.0% in the case of autism spectrum disorders and 88.0% in the case of severe behavioural disorders), and to 67.4% in the case of pupils in CEEs.

## Recommendation

The education system, especially teachers and EAPs, must continue to detect pupils with educational support needs as has been done so far, because such detection is the prelude to adopting measures to ensure they receive adequate support, and because there are still pupils in the system with these needs and who have not been properly diagnosed.

However, EAPs sometimes spend more time on diagnosis than devising strategies together with teachers to ensure pupils receive support in the classroom. In this sense, EAPs must guarantee a detection protocol shared with teachers that goes beyond diagnosis to incorporate joint definition of strategies to favour school inclusion.

## 03. Consolidating lower class size ratios

The Catalan Ministry of Education has an active policy of reducing pupil/classroom ratios in access to the education system

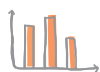
Classrooms today are more diverse and complex, mainly due to social factors. This has a major impact on the conditions of educability and pupils' health (e.g. use of electronic devices, the COVID-19 pandemic and greater social vulnerability).

However, the structural conditions teachers now find in the classroom are more favourable.

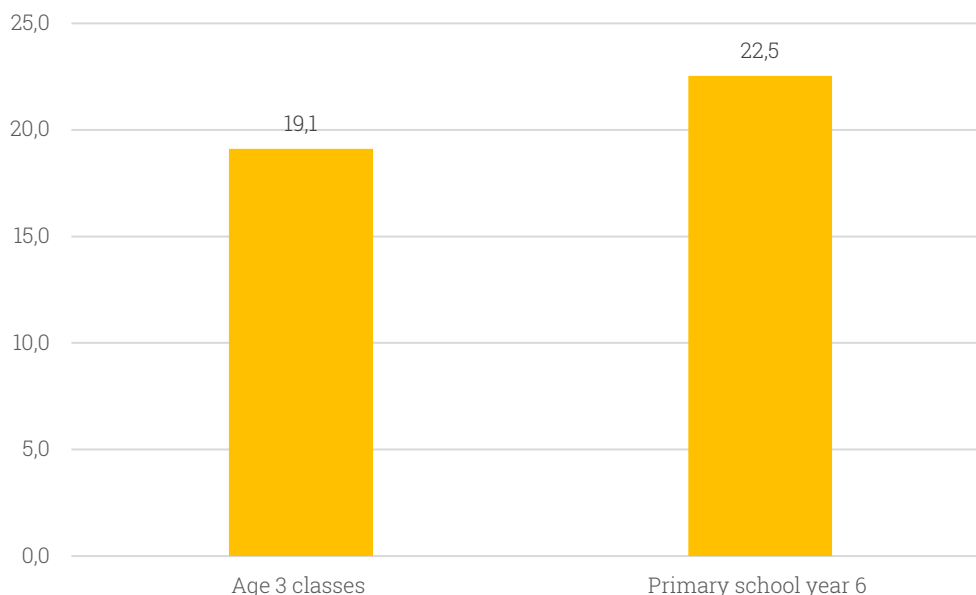
The high official pupil/unit ratios have been steadily reduced in recent years, thanks to demographic decline and the requirements of Decree 11/2021 regarding cutting excess places as a measure to combat school segregation, which has helped reduce ratios on entry to the system.

From the 2022/2023 school year onwards, cuts in ratios of 20% were applied, and this trend has grown since then. In the 2023/2024 age 3 pre-school admission process, one third of the units in state schools (34.3%) already had ratios of 19 pupils or less, more than double the schools in 2022/2023.

**At the end of the 2023/2024 school year, the average pupil ratio for age 3 classes was 19.1 pupils, almost 3.5 pupils less than in 6th year of primary school, where the average ratio was 22.5.**



**Graph 4. Average ratio in age 3 classes and primary school year 6 for the 2023/2024 school year**



Source: Based on data from the Catalan Ministry of Education.

All state schools and 83.1% of charter schools have ratios in age 3 pre-school below the 25 places established in Royal Decree 132/2010, of 12 February, setting the minimum requirements for second-stage pre-school, primary and secondary education schools (Art. 7).

State schools have more pupils with special educational needs than charter schools, but also have lower ratios.

## Recommendation

Ratio reductions facilitate personalised support and accompaniment for pupils with special educational needs.

The Catalan Ministry of Education needs to maintain the ratio reduction policy it introduced two years ago in entry to age 3 pre-school, and ensure the reductions are maintained as the pre-school education groups enter primary education.

The demographic decline already affecting compulsory secondary education should also help set lower ratios at this stage. The structural conditions for ensuring school inclusion are worse in compulsory secondary education than in preceding stages.

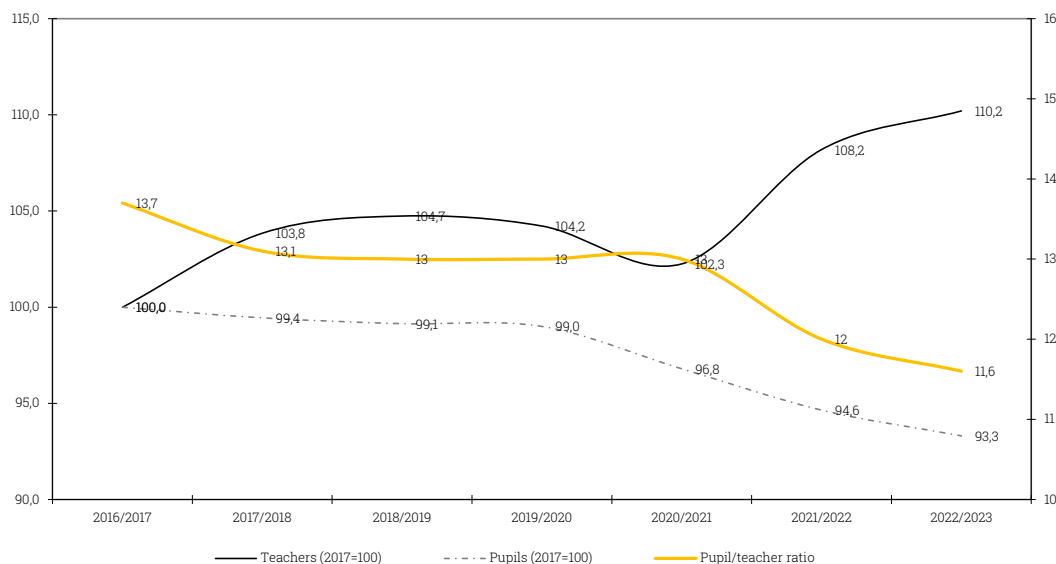
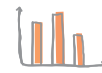
## 04. Promoting co-teaching

### Pupil-teacher ratios have also tended to fall as a result of larger teacher numbers

Since the 2017/2018 school year, when Decree 150/2017 was approved, the education system has added nearly 10,000 teachers to the general education system (8.9%), with 11,500 more teachers in the public sector (15.4%) and 1,500 fewer in the charter sector (-4.3%). This is despite the fact that the pupil numbers have risen by 4.4% in this period (3.5% in the public sector and 6.1% in the charter sector). This trend has led to a drop in the overall pupil-teacher ratio during this period (from 12.0 in 2017/2018 to 11.5 in 2022/2023), and also in the public sector (from 11.7 to 10.5), but not in the charter sector, where it has risen from 12.6 to 14.0.

In the case of second-stage pre-school and primary education, the number of teachers in the public sector rose by more than 2,000 in this period, although the number of pupils dropped by nearly 30,000. The pupil/teacher ratio fell from 13.1 to 11.6.

**Graph 5. Pupil/teacher ratio in second-stage pre-school and primary education and pupil and teacher numbers in the public sector in Catalonia (2016/2017-2022/2023)**



Source: Based on data from the Catalan Ministry of Education.

Increasing teacher numbers and lowering pupil/teacher ratios in the public sector provides greater opportunities for promoting co-teaching.

Catalonia is in a comparatively good position in terms of teacher numbers in the education system. The pupil/teacher ratio in primary and compulsory secondary education in Catalonia is below the European average. However, it has slightly higher ratios than the average for Spanish general education, especially in the public sector, where it is only better than Madrid, Murcia and Andalusia.

## Recommendation

The increase in resources for inclusive education needs to be analysed to see whether to focus on increasing teacher numbers or on better organisation and use of existing resources to promote co-teaching. This is particularly relevant in compulsory secondary education, where co-teaching is more scarce.

Further analysis is needed on whether the provision of other professional profiles (such as educational support staff) and staff with educational services supporting schools to guarantee coverage of pupils' special educational needs (EAP, CEEPSIR, etc.) should be further strengthened, to ensure two professionals are present in the class group, even if they are not two teachers.

## 05. Provision of other universal measures and review of methodologies and resource organisation in the classroom: universal design for learning

No hi ha prou coneixement encara entre el professorat a l'hora de garantir un disseny universal per a l'aprenentatge (DUA), que passa per suprimir les barreres que incideixen en el context de l'aprenentatge de l'alumnat

There are still schools that do not comply with accessibility regulations and have not removed architectural barriers. The Catalan Ministry of Education states that it prioritises removing such barriers when schools require it if they have pupils with mobility problems, but lack of accessibility discourages such pupils from enrolling. Consequently, improving accessibility in these schools is not prioritised due to lack of pupils enrolling in them.

However, barriers must also be removed in the classroom, by introducing greater flexibility in measures to promote personalisation of learning and transform teaching practices and methods to ensure all learners have opportunities to develop their full capacities and potential from an inclusive perspective.

In 2023, the Catalan Ministry of Education published the document *Mesures i suports universals en el centre educatiu. Orientacions per als centres en la planificació de mesures i suports universals* [Universal measures and support in the school. Guidelines for schools in planning universal measures and support], which marked a step forward in the dissemination of these universal measures and supports among professionals in the educational system. It has also carried out training courses.

### Recommendation

Incorporating universal design for learning in all classrooms with special educational needs pupils must be intensified, starting with removing barriers to learning in the classroom and implementing the universal measures and supports established in the document *Mesures i suports universals en el centre educatiu. Orientacions per als centres en la planificació de mesures i suports universals*.

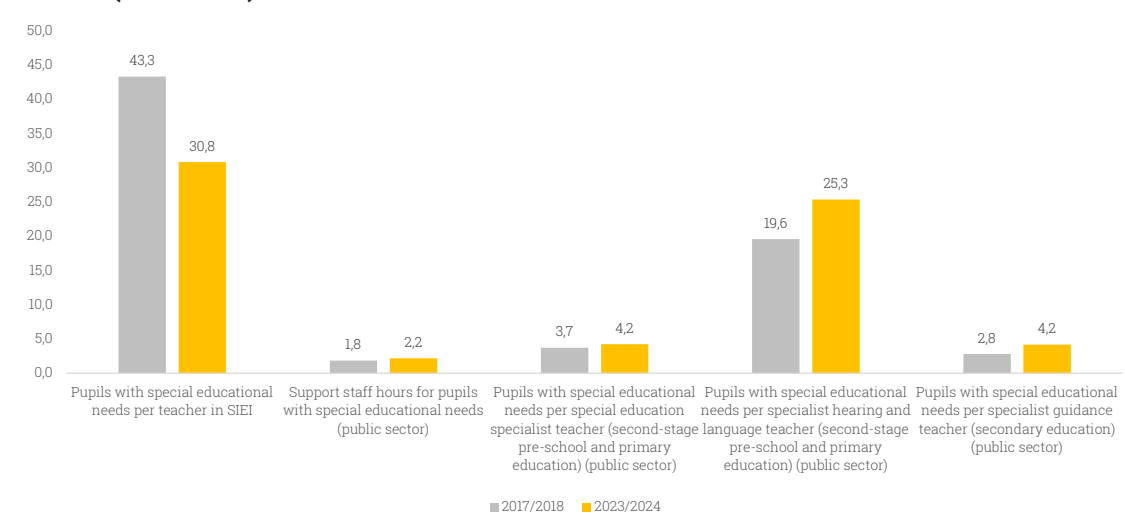
## 06. Providing specific resources for implementing inclusive education

Intensive resources for implementing inclusive education have doubled since Decree 150/2017 was approved, but so has the number of pupils with special educational needs

Since the approval of Decree 150/2017, between the 2017/2018 and 2023/2024 school years there was a 124.0% increase in the number of teachers in SIEI, a 94.3% increase in the number of contracted hours for support assistants in state schools and a 30.3% increase in specialist special education teachers in the second-stage pre-school and primary education. There was also a 14.4% increase in the number of specialist hearing and language teachers (MALL) in primary education and a 42.0% increase in the number of specialist guidance teachers in secondary education, while the number of integrated support classrooms tripled.

However, greater detection of pupils with special educational needs in the education system means that more resources have produced an equivalent qualitative leap in the provision of support staff. Thus, the ratio of pupils with special educational needs per specialist special education teacher in the public sector rose from 3.7 to 4.2 between 2017/2018 and 2023/2024, while the ratio of pupils with special educational needs per contracted hour of support in the public sector rose from 1.8 in 2017/2018 to 2.2 in 2023/2024. Only in the case of SIEI provision did larger teacher numbers reduce the ratio of pupils with special educational needs per resource from 43.3 in 2017/2018 to 30.8 in 2023/2024.

**Graph 6. Staff numbers by the number of pupils with special educational needs (2017-2023)**



Source: Catalan Ministry of Education.

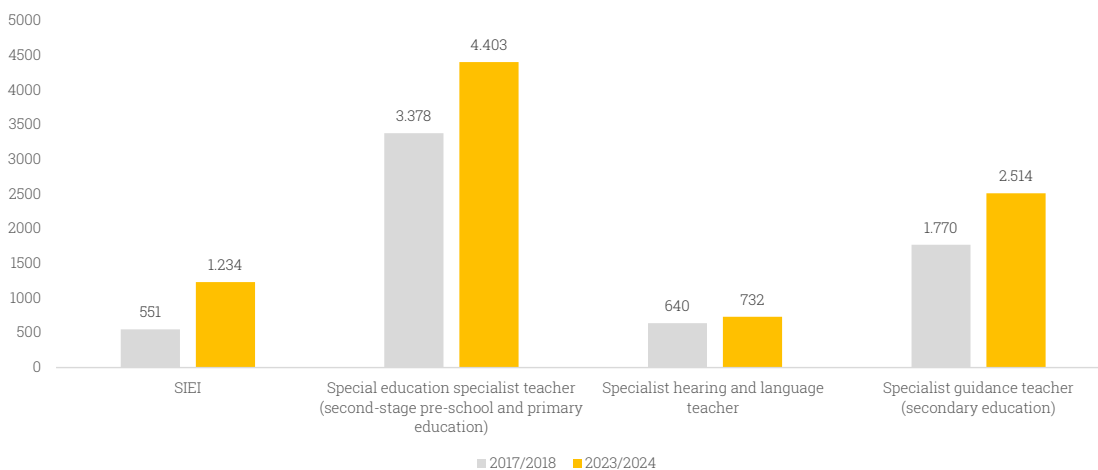
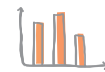
Indeed, in the case of the SIEI, although allocations are higher (1,234) than the targets set out in the Decree 150/2017 (845) impact assessment report, the SIEI available does not yet cover all the pupils proposed by EAPs for this resource. Some regions have a waiting list, so they invite pupils to change school to provide them with SIEI. Otherwise they cannot guarantee the SIEI at the assigned school on transition from primary to secondary school. Furthermore, the SIEI sometimes has more pupils assigned to it than it should.

In the 2023/2024 school year, the creation of the SIEI Plus resources helped to lower support ratios for pupils with greater complexity in areas with no reference CEEs, in order to improve the support provided to them.

There are also insufficient numbers of educational personnel, as current numbers do not guarantee inclusion for all pupils with special educational needs in different school activities beyond class work. This is the case of pupils who cannot access the school dining room, school trips or camps because as they lack access to this resource.

**Natural pathways must be guaranteed for pupils with intensive support, especially when changing their stage of education, so that the support accompanies pupils to their assigned school according to their pathway, rather than the pupils having to go to another school to get the support they need.**

Graph 7. Trends in professional staff numbers (2017-2023)



Source: Catalan Ministry of Education.

## Recommendation

Mainstream schools must be provided with the specific resources and additional and intensive support necessary to guarantee inclusive support for pupils with special educational needs, in accordance with the EAP educational psychology evaluations.

The Catalan Ombudsman Office asks that the provision of these measures and support be guaranteed and that the increase in recent years be continued until there are no needs left uncovered.

This provision should be for both state and charter schools.

## 07. Intensive support as a structural, not an individually allocated, resource

The idea still persists that SIEI is an individualised allocation for each student with special educational needs or a resource separate from the classroom

In some schools, the SIEI resource continues to function as a specific classroom.

The Resolution by the Director General for Inclusive Education issuing instructions on the organisation and operation of SIEI, dated October 2023, states that SIEI should not be seen as individual support for a pupil, in isolation from the classroom. Instead, it should identify the target group as pupils with special educational needs arising from very significant limitations, rather than the pupil body as a whole. Such allocation for pupils with special needs favours this concept of individualised attention.

The same occurs with the CEEPSIRs, which are sometimes conceived as individualised support for pupils with special educational needs. Resolution EDU/1010/2021, of 9 April, which regulates this resource, may reinforce this idea, in considering that the recipients of the resource are pupils with special educational needs.

### Recommendation

There is a need to ensure that SIEI classrooms and CEEPSIRs are designed as resources to ensure inclusive education for learners with special educational needs in the regular classroom and in the school as a whole. These are not resources intended to cater only for pupils with special educational needs assigned to a school while teachers attend to the rest of the pupils.

In this context, the resolutions setting out the functions and fit of these resources in schools need to be reviewed.

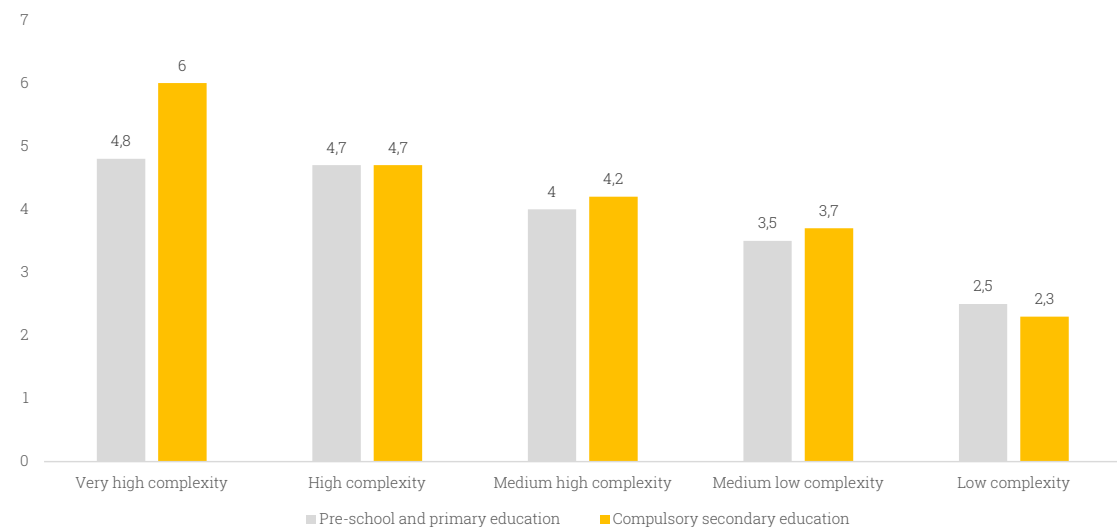
## 08. Specific strategies for addressing special educational needs in highly complex schools

Highly complex schools have a high concentration of pupils with specific educational needs due to socio-economic reasons, but also have more pupils with special educational needs

**For instance, the most complex schools have four times more foreign pupils and seven times more pupils with specific educational support needs (in most cases, stemming from socio-economic situations) than low complexity schools, but they also tend to have about twice as many pupils with special educational needs (4.8 % v. 2.5%).**



**Graph 8. Proportion of pupils with special educational needs by complexity of school (2023/2024)**



Source: Based on data from the Catalan Ministry of Education.

Professionals point out that **the provision of special educational needs in settings with a high prevalence of social vulnerability is a factor of complexity not present in settings with a more favourable social make-up.**

Support for socially vulnerable pupils with special educational needs is more complex because these pupils' conditions of educability tend to be more unstable and hinder their educational development.

Working with families of socially vulnerable pupils with special educational needs also requires more time and expertise from the school's teaching and support staff. In situations of greater social vulnerability, there is sometimes greater discontinuity between the educational task carried out in school and the educational task carried out in the family environment. Inclusive education for learners with special educational needs is therefore more difficult.

## Recommendation

The effects of concentrating pupils with special educational needs in settings with high social vulnerability should be analysed to implement specific measures preventing such concentrations and to ensure the inclusive education model is implemented in these settings.

The inclusive education model in highly complex schools must go beyond an educational psychology approach and incorporate a comprehensive social dimension while guaranteeing rights.

## 09 ■ Equitable distribution of support among schools by complexity and stage

Unequal distribution of educational needs due to school segregation occurs in a context of general inequality in the distribution of teaching staff

Teacher numbers in the education system are linear. In the case of state schools, although there is slight positive discrimination towards highly complex schools, only 5% of teachers are distributed equally among schools by concentration of specific educational support needs. And in the case of charter schools, provision of teaching staff is linear through educational agreements, without establishing differences according to the complexity of the school or diversity of its pupils.

Charter schools are less resource-intensive than state schools, but also have a lower proportion of pupils with special educational needs. Thus, for example, in 2022/2023 there were 127 charter schools with SIEI teaching staff, 21.8% of the total. Currently, **there is about one SIEI teacher for every two schools in the public sector, and one SIEI teacher for every three schools in the charter sector.**

There is no positive discrimination towards highly complex state and charter schools in the provision of resources for pupils with special educational needs, although the diversity stemming from these needs is heightened by the presence of specific needs arising from socially disadvantaged situations, requiring more intensive intervention.

Nor is there a direct relationship between school complexity and the provision of SIEI and educational support staff. For example, the proportion of very highly complex state schools that have special education educators or assistants is lower than the proportion of medium to very highly complex schools in the same situation.

It should be added that **the measures to lower ratios and increase teacher numbers in schools described above have been applied linearly in the public sector since 2022/2023.** This has had a greater impact on promoting personalisation of student learning in low complexity schools, which also have fewer pupils with special educational needs:

- As a result of this lower demand and the lower ratios already in place, **the ratios of pupils per unit in age 3 pre-school were lowered by less than one pupil between the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 in the case of the very highly complex schools (from 18.8 to 18.3 pupils per unit), and by twice as much (1.0) in the case of the low complexity schools (from 22.2 to 21.2 pupils per unit).**
- **The cut in teaching hours in the public sector in January 2023 has also failed to discriminate positively in favour of highly complex schools, although in these**

schools there are more pupils with special educational needs who make use of external educational and health services, and a greater need for coordination between the teachers and professionals from these services.

These measures, especially in the public sector, tend to equalise pupil/teacher ratios between schools, regardless of their educational complexity.

In addition, in general terms, **the Catalan Ombudsman office has also detected fewer guarantees of and greater difficulties in school inclusion in compulsory secondary education than in previous stages.** However, no specific strategies to further reinforce measures at this stage of education, in relation to other stages, are discernible. SIEI teacher numbers in compulsory secondary education are also lower than in primary education.

## Recommendation

The Catalan Ombudsman office asks the Catalan Ministry of Education to distribute resources among schools according to their complexity, thereby ensuring that schools with greater educational needs have more resources to meet them and can counterbalance the effects of inequality as far as possible.

More specifically, the proposals are to:

- Strengthen provision of intensive resources in highly complex schools.
- Create programme contracts to provide more resources for highly complex schools, as laid down in the LEC (Art. 48.5, 201.2 and 205.9), and with a higher presence of pupils with special educational needs.
- Establish criteria for distributing staff in state and charter schools according to the complexity and concentration of pupils with special educational needs.
- Increase teacher coordination and mentoring hours and pedagogical leadership hours by school heads in highly complex schools.

This task also requires greater provision of intensive measures and support in compulsory secondary education, thereby moving towards greater equality in the provision of resources between state and charter schools by their level of complexity, to promote inclusive education.

# 10. Transforming CEEs

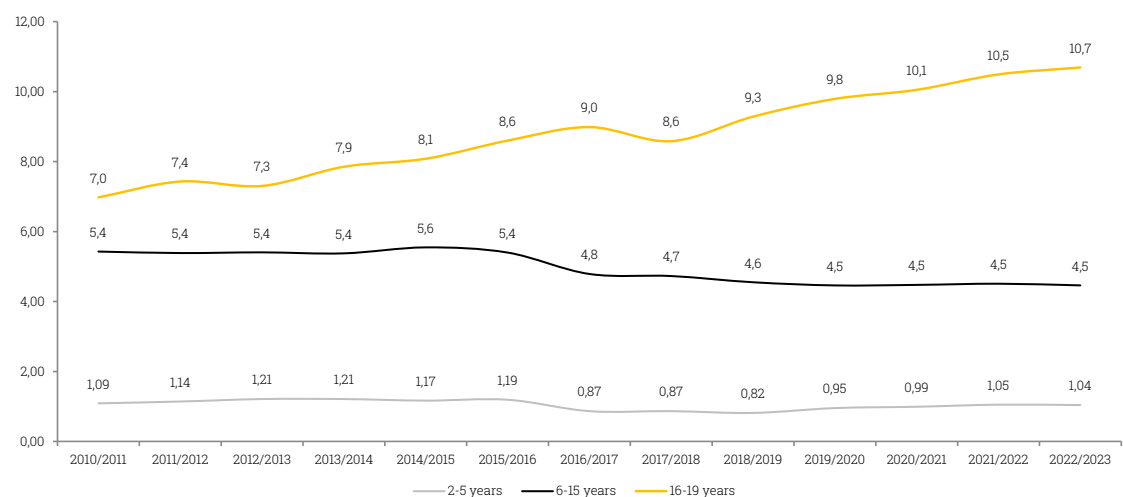
The approval of Decree 150/2017 has not led to fewer numbers of pupils with special educational needs enrolled in CEEs, and there is a mismatch between supply and demand

Since Decree 150/2017 was passed, the number of pupils enrolled in CEEs has increased by 20.3%, to 8,226 pupils in the 2023/2024 school year.

This increase is mainly explained by the rise in the number of pupils of post-compulsory school age. However, it should be noted that:

- **Excluding pupils over the age of 15, the number of pupils in CEEs has remained stable at around 5,000 since the approval of Decree 150/2017, or around 6,000 pupils if all pupils in pre-school and basic education are included.**
- **The ratio of basic education pupils in CEEs per 1,000 pupils in regular education has remained stable at 6.9%, while the enrolment rate of 6- to 15-year-olds in CEEs is also around 4.5%.**
- About 300 children in CEEs are aged 2 to 5, the theoretical school age for second-stage pre-school education (3.4% of the total).

**Graph 9. Trend in special education pupils by age per 1,000 inhabitants in the reference population group in Catalonia (2010-2023)**



Source: Based on data from the Catalan Ministry of Education.

The CEEs have waiting lists of pupils who have been proposed for schooling in them. This demand exceeds the current supply of places, which means that criteria other than the pupils' needs and their psycho-educational assessment, but rather based on organisational criteria conditioned by the availability of resources in the system, are sometimes used for the allocation of places. This is the case, for example, when priority is given only to pupils who require full-time schooling in a CEE or who do not have SIEI, or when no proposal is made to place the EAP in a CEE if there is no place.

It should also be noted that there are pupils attending CEEs who could be attending mainstream schools.

Around 80% of pupils with special educational needs are enrolled in mainstream schools, a slightly higher proportion than in the 2017/2018 school year. However, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs due to disabilities or serious disorders attending mainstream schools in Catalonia (82.9%) is still below the national average (84.3%).

Foreign pupils are over-represented in CEEs. In the 2022/2023 school year, the proportion of foreign pupils in these schools was 19.0%, while the proportion in mainstream schools was 16.0%.

## Recommendation

Improving the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream settings also requires efforts in transforming CEEs, to steadily reduce the number of pupils in them, provided they can be given support in mainstream schools.

The Catalan Ombudsman Office has called for a general plan to reduce schooling in CEEs to accompany their conversion into CEEPSIRs. It has also called for the creation of a technically qualified interdisciplinary assessment committee for the admission of pupils with special educational needs to these schools, which should draw up the schooling proposal.

Together with experts in the field of inclusive education and representatives of CEEs, the Catalan Ministry of Education has designed a roadmap for the transformation of these schools, to be applied from the 2024/2025 school year onwards.

One of the objectives of the roadmap is to accompany CEEs in starting implementation of the proposed methodological, organisational and educational changes to turn them into CEEPSIRs. Another objective is to reduce the number of pupils schooled in CEEs (at different speeds to ensure the reduction matches the needs and particularities of each CEE).

## 11. School and educational service support for families

All too often, the relationship between the families of pupils with special educational needs and mainstream schools focusses on the difficulties in making school inclusion effective, without providing adequate support to ensure the participation of families in their children's schooling

Families of pupils with special educational needs often feel poorly supported by mainstream schools and this unease sometimes leads to requests for changes in the schooling model towards special schools. This office considers this to be one of the main obstacles in ensuring a more effective roll-out of the inclusive education model.

**Families complain of not receiving sufficient information, which affects both follow-up for their children and the resources allocated for their support. They also complain about the lack of focus on inclusion in the support for their children and in the approach taken by the mainstream school, with family-school relations often centred on deficiencies and difficulties rather than on the pupils' potential and the objectives they are achieving.** Mainstream schools often report difficulties to families in guaranteeing schooling equivalent to that of their peers, who can stay in school for the whole school day without having to rely on the family to pick them up as early as possible. Furthermore, some teachers convey to families their lack of expectations regarding pupils with special educational needs. There are also complaints about failure to listen in situations of suffering or discomfort that pupils with special educational needs may experience in school, or also about the lack of family participation in decisions regarding their schooling.

The 2023/2024 school year saw the launch of the Family Care and Educational Inclusion Support Unit, which received a total of 401 queries up to May, mainly regarding doubts about measures and support in the classroom (22.6%) and individualised support plans (9%).

Although users value this service positively, the Catalan Ombudsman office reiterates the need to promote work with families and their accompaniment by schools and the inclusive school support services, so that they can participate in their children's inclusion.

Involving and accompanying families is fundamental to the successful inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. In general, families' participation and involvement has a positive impact on pupils' success at school, and this effect is even more significant in the case of pupils with special educational needs.

In General comment no. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that the participation of children and their families in the diagnosis of their needs throughout their schooling is a prerequisite for inclusion and its effectiveness.

In Catalonia, the LEC recognises the right of families to receive information on their children's progress. In addition, Decree 150/2017, expressly recognises families' participation in the educational needs assessment carried out by the EAP, generally at the beginning of the educational stages, and in the individualised support plan.

However, it must be said that the need to involve families in the inclusion process goes beyond initial detection and diagnosis of pupils' needs and should continue throughout their schooling.

Improvements must be made in integrating organisations for the disabled in the support network and implementing the inclusive education model, especially in their accompaniment role with families

**The Catalan Ombudsman office, which is in constant dialogue with many of these entities, notes that they do not always feel involved in implementing the inclusive education model and do not always orient their accompaniment towards this objective. Lack of alignment and integration of these actors with the education system does not contribute to the effective implementation of inclusive education.**

The Catalan Ministry of Education has reported that **it wants to create a directory of entities and associations that foster inclusion in the educational field for the 2024/2025 school year** and is looking into establishing a stable collaboration agreement.

## Recommendation

Educational inclusion is an ongoing and dynamic process that needs to be regularly monitored to assess the appropriateness of measures and strategies and difficulties and obstacles that may arise. The participation of the children, adolescents and families themselves in these processes is essential to assess the effectiveness of changes and to avoid any form of segregation.

Families have valuable information about children's needs. Their information and experience are highly relevant not only in the initial diagnosis of the children's educational needs, but also in assessing their progress and well-being at school and providing a more suitable response to their needs.

Furthermore, family involvement and participation in decision-making is associated with higher levels of satisfaction with school and the emotional well-being of pupils and families.

In this sense, the Catalan Ombudsman office asks the Catalan Ministry of Education to develop models of relationship between professionals from schools and educational services, and the families of pupils with special educational needs to help them feel better accompanied.

It also calls for promoting collaboration agreements with entities that provide support for families in order to improve this accompaniment of the education system.

## 12. Equating the schooling conditions for pupils with special educational needs attending mainstream schools

Situations still persist in schools where the attention received by pupils with special educational needs is not comparable to that received by other pupils

As part of its activity, the Catalan Ombudsman office notes that some of these situations affect the timetable in which pupils with special educational needs remain in school on a daily basis, or also the timetable in which they participate in activities organised outside the school.

There are times when pupils with special educational needs cannot stay at school during lunchtime due to lack of support staff, posing a major problem for families in reconciling work and school life.

Pupils with special educational needs are sometimes also unable to participate in camps, outings and school trips due to lack of support staff. It should be borne in mind that all activities organised by a school, even if they take place outside the school premises, should be aimed at and accessible to all pupils. The right of pupils with special educational needs to participate in these school activities does not fall under the powers of the school management or teachers. Schools sometimes justify excluding pupils from camp or school outings for disciplinary reasons or claiming it is in the child's best interests, without a report from the EAP.

On a positive note, it is worth highlighting that, for the 2023/2024 school year, the Catalan Ministry of Education implemented a new model for allocating support monitoring hours for pupils with special educational needs, which includes lunchtime coverage for the canteen. In the case of pre-school, primary and secondary state schools, 80% of hours during the class time and 20% for lunchtimes.

However, it must be said that not all schools respect this quota. In addition, the new model apparently offers no clear response to secondary schools or charter and other schools without monitoring services, especially when required for outings and camps outside the school, or cases where pupils have health needs not associated with special educational needs.

The report also mentions other situations of greater vulnerability for pupils with special educational needs, such as:

- **Pupils with disabilities are at potentially higher risk of experiencing violence at school than other pupils.** Disability itself can help normalise such violence and mask

the suffering it can cause to the pupils involved. These situations can eventually lead to school drop-out or change of school, often to special schools.

■ **Pupils with special educational needs receive punishment, sometimes for manifesting behaviour arising from their needs.** There are pupils diagnosed with mental health problems or who have a recognised intellectual disability or behavioural disorder who are punished with temporary suspension of the right to school activities or exclusion from participating in end-of-year activities or camps for having manifested behaviours directly related to their educational needs, which may be discriminatory. A pupil with special educational needs or a health problem cannot be punished for manifesting these needs or for their consequences, as this would be discriminatory based on their disability or health situation.

## Recommendation

Pupils with special educational needs must, as far as possible, be guaranteed the same schooling conditions as other pupils in mainstream schools, by providing appropriate resources.

# 13.

## In-service teacher training and alignment with other educational stakeholders in promoting the culture of inclusion in schools

Beyond insufficient resources, there are deficiencies in the training for teaching and educational staff in mainstream schools to make inclusive education effective

In recent years, the Catalan Ombudsman office has received a significant number of complaints from families who consider that their sons or daughters with specific needs, as recognised by the educational services, do not receive the attention they truly require for an inclusive education in a mainstream school.

One of the problems detected is lack of training and awareness among some of the teaching and support staff in mainstream schools, not only with regard to meeting pupils' educational support needs but also the general proposal of inclusive education in the terms set out in Decree 150/2017.

**Implementing the inclusive education model requires a change of culture and training of professionals in the education system so they understand the role that each of them plays in this implementation.**

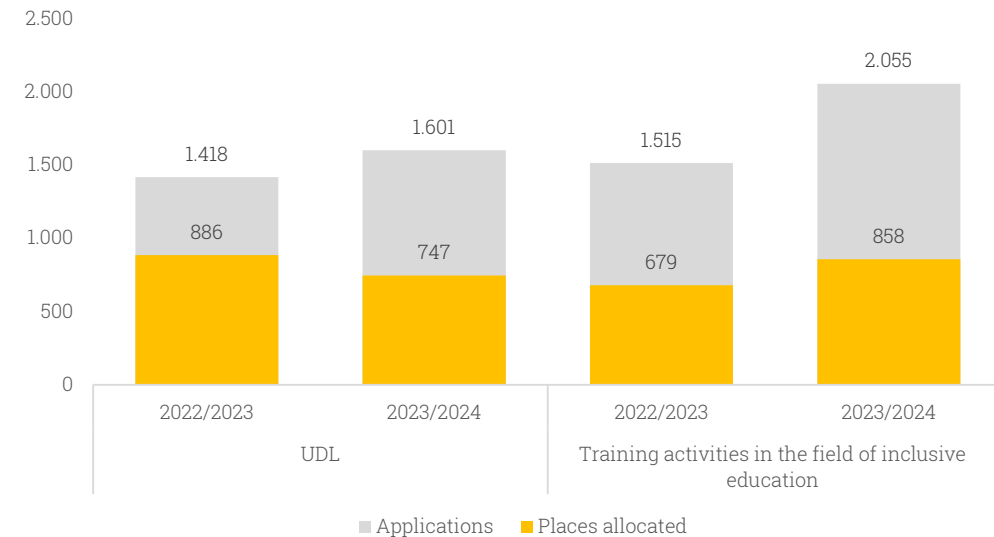
However, there are still deficiencies in professionals' training with regard to internalising the model. Implementing it entails a true transformation of the education system which, in turn, requires a profound cultural change among the different professionals, besides organisational changes and providing resources.

And there are also deficiencies related to adequate support for pupils' specific educational needs in mainstream contexts. Awareness of these needs is essential to providing an educational response in the context of mainstream classrooms.

Given that several complaint files have been opened, the Catalan Ministry of Education has acknowledged shortcomings in school interventions in areas such as: deficiencies in detecting and assessing possible educational support needs and pupils' individualised accompaniment; failure to seek advice from the reference EAP and draw up an individual support plan; failure to apply Catalan Ministry of Education guidelines in addressing the needs of pupils with certain neurodevelopmental disorders; deficiencies in tutorial action and in the intervention of the school's educational guidance professionals; lack of understanding or "alignment" in some teachers with the new approach to inclusive education; deficiencies in coordination with specialised services.

The Catalan Ministry of Education is training teachers in universal design for learning (UDL) and other specific topics. **For the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 school years, however, there were more applications for training than places available.** In the case of the UDL, for example, nearly 3,000 applications were received over the two school years and nearly 1,600 places were allocated (54%), while in the case of training activities related to inclusive education, nearly 3,500 applications were received and 1,500 places allocated (43%). Furthermore, applications for these courses are increasing by the year: in the 2023/2024 academic year, UDL training received 12.9% more applications than in the previous school year and training on specific inclusive education topics received 24.6% more applications.

**Graph 10. Applications for teacher training in the field of inclusive education and places allocated (2022/2023, 2023/2024)**



Source: Catalan Ministry of Education.

Lack of training for support staff, especially intensive support such as SIEI, can lead a move to special education, despite such intensive support being designed to prevent such moves.

On the positive side, it should be noted that in fostering the culture of inclusion **the Catalan Ministry of Education has established the figure of inclusive education facilitator (DEI). There are currently 34 DEIs, whose mission is to accompany and advise schools in changing their outlook and eliminating barriers to support for all pupils.** These professionals work to train and promote an inclusive culture in the education community.

## Successful implementation of the inclusive education model is very difficult without the Education Inspectorate being aligned with it

The Education Inspectorate plays a key role in implementing the inclusive education model because it intervenes in most of the problems arising from its progressive implementation, whether in schools, families or educational services: it participates in the student admission commissions and in the territorial commissions responsible for implementing the measures in Decree 150/2017; it deals with complaints from school management and families about lack of resources; and it guides educational service interventions in the territory, among other areas.

In the opinion of the Catalan Ombudsman office, the vision of the Education Inspectorate is not fully shared or aligned with the Directorate General for Inclusive Education in terms of implementing the inclusive education model.

### Recommendation

Further training for school management teams, teachers and other school staff is needed to cater for all pupils through inclusive educational practices.

In this context, sufficient places for in-service teacher training must be provided to meet existing training applications.

In addition, measures must be taken to foster a shared vision, fully aligned with the Directorate General for Inclusive Education regarding implementation of the inclusive education model.

## 14. Mainstreaming inclusive education in initial teacher training

### Initial teacher training does not guarantee teachers' training in inclusive education

Pre-school and primary education degrees do not sufficiently guarantee initial teacher training in the field of inclusive education. With the exception of a few specific subjects, there is no comprehensive approach to tackle this in core subjects. In any case, this content is part of interdisciplinary competencies, with no guarantee of having a central position in the curriculum.

This more global approach is guaranteed in the case of students taking the specific learning pathway related to attention to diversity, but not for other trainee teachers taking other pathways.

This deficiency in teacher training is even more evident in the case of secondary teacher training. These teachers have university education in their subject, but generally only receive teacher training through the University Master's Degree in Teacher Training - Secondary Education, Language Teaching and Vocational Training. However, this master's degree does not guarantee the comprehensive approach to the inclusive education model either.

### Recommendation

The requisite competencies must be included in the study programmes for the Bachelor's Degree in Pre-School and Primary Education and in master's degrees to teach secondary education.

# 15. Strengthening educational services for the accompaniment of teachers: the classroom as a context for intervention

Beyond improving teacher training, educational services need to have a greater presence in schools

The education system has a number of services, such as EAPs, CEEPSIRs or CREDAs, which are responsible for advising mainstream schools to ensure pupils with special educational needs (and other educational support needs) are catered for. These services often act as an external agent, who periodically visits schools to determine pupils' educational support needs and guide their individualised support plan. They do not see the pupils or, if they do, there is no direct intervention in class work.

These educational services should be part of the school's resources to ensure both educational projects and class work are transformed into truly inclusive environments.

Until now, the EAPs have taken on a very focused role in detecting specific educational support needs, but the function of accompanying educational teams in schools has not been implemented to the same extent. EAPs should take a much more active and direct role in accompanying teachers in implementing the inclusive education model in classrooms, in designing strategies to ensure the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in the dynamics of the group-class and in training teachers to respond to the needs of the classroom as a whole.

In the case of CEEPSIRs, implementing this support resource must also be fully integrated into schools' educational projects and operational dynamics. School management sometimes does not see CEEPSIRs as key actors in (re)defining the approach to inclusive education taken by the school in general and by teachers and support staff in the classrooms. The resource model, whose broad functions are defined by regulations to ensure its adaptation to a variety of educational projects, must match the dynamics of each school.

These services must also be strengthened to prevent them from becoming overwhelmed and to promote stronger roots in schools and more intensive intervention.

EAP numbers have increased in recent years: for instance, educational psychologist numbers have increased by 26.3% since the 2017/2018 school year. Despite this increase, the ratio of pupils with educational support needs per professional rose from 42.1 pupils to 55.8 pupils for each educational psychologist from 2017/2018 to 2023/2024, due to an increase in detection of pupils with special educational needs.

There is now one educational psychologist for every 3.3 primary schools and 1.6 secondary schools, equivalent to an average time of about one day per week per school per psychologist. For pupils, this is equivalent to 4.5 working days a year on each pupil with special educational needs.

After the diagnostic assessment, the presence of EAPs in schools is insufficient to provide good support for teachers and pupils and introduce changes in educational models and practices beyond individual cases.

In the case of CEEPSIRs, in recent years there has also been a steady rise in the number of CEEs converted into CEEPSIRs, following the opening of public calls for the selection of publicly funded CEEs interested in carrying out this transformation. However, at present only about half of CEEs (52 out of 102 in 2023/2024) are now providers of services and resources for mainstream schools.

In the case of the CREDAs, the number of professionals has also increased, thereby permitting an increase in the number of pupils attended without affecting the ratio of pupils attended per professional. However, the speech therapy they provide only covers the most severe cases, leaving children with less severe speech pathologies untreated in the public education system. In January 2023, according to CREDA census data, these centres had 967 children on their waiting lists.

Finally, it should be noted that regulations governing EAPs and other educational services date back to 1994 (Decree 155/1994, of 28 June, regulating the educational services of the Catalan Ministry of Education), which pre-dates the inclusive education model. The Catalan Government's 2024 Regulatory Plan foresaw the drafting of a regulatory decree, but this is yet to be approved.

## Recommendation

The Catalan Ombudsman office asks the Catalan Ministry of Education to reinforce educational support services for schools, and more specifically to:

- Turn EAPs into agents for the transformation of the inclusive education system and accompanying pupils, families and professionals throughout their schooling, especially teachers. The role of the EAPs and the educational psychology support teams must be redefined as key instruments for the transformation of the education system.
- Consolidate the creation of CEEPSIRs, to transform CEEs into support service providers for mainstream schools to implement the principle of inclusive education.
- Evaluate the CREDA model to assess organisational needs (professional profiles, staffing levels, frequency of support, etc.) and cut waiting lists without sacrificing quality in support.

These services and resources should work together with teachers to accompany them in the process of implementing the inclusive model and to ensure the transformation of educational practices to make the classroom a more inclusive learning environment.

**The classroom must become the context for intervention by the different educational services.**

The psycho-educational assessment of pupils' special educational needs should be complemented by evaluation of the measures and strategies to ensure the pupils' inclusion in the classroom, especially with support from the EAPs. The latter should take a more active role in evaluating implementation of the inclusive education model in each school and establishing strategies to accompany and improve teaching and educational practice in each class with pupils with special educational needs.

## 16. Coordination of resources and services, and networking among professionals

Teachers now have more hours set aside for coordination than in the past, but they also have more pupils with specific educational support needs who receive care from the health and social services

Teachers in the public sector now have more hours for internal and external coordination than when Decree 150/2017 was passed, thanks to the elimination of one teaching hour from the timetable for public sector teachers (from 24 to 23 teaching hours in primary and 19 to 18 hours in secondary school) and increasing the number of hours for extra-curricular activities at the school. This change, involving an annual investment of around 170 million euros to recruit the necessary teaching staff, means there are more hours to meet families and coordinate with other professionals and to make the school more inclusive.

Other services, which depend on the Catalan Ministries of Social Rights and Health, such as CDIAPs and the child and youth mental health centres (CSMIJs), also attend children's and adolescents' special educational needs and should work in close collaboration with mainstream schools. Although around 10% of pupils use the CDIAPs and CSMIJs, there is no culture of integrated work with teachers and educational support staff in the schools and with the EAPs to ensure adequate support is given to pupils with specific educational needs.

These staff numbers in these services have also risen in recent years, but so has the number of children and adolescents they serve. From 2010-2022, for example, the number of children attending CDIAPs rose by 51.8% (up to 45,000, or 12.3% of children under 6 years of age in Catalonia) and the number of children and adolescents attending CSMIJs by 45.1% (nearly 80,000 children and adolescents, representing 8.0% of the population aged 6 to 17).

Growing pressure on these services has led to problems in coverage, longer waiting lists, and the intensity of intervention, with less frequent visits.

In the case of the CDIAP, for example, the number of professionals (excluding administration and management staff) has increased by 2.3% and working hours by 7.1% since 2019. However, the number of children in care in the same period has risen by 11.0%. In 2023 there were more than 3,000 children on the waiting list for the service, more than double the number in 2019. The frequency of care, which in 2005 was 1 hour a week, stood at 0.65 hours a week in 2022, clearly below the amount set in Decree 142/2010, of 11 October, approving the social services portfolio, which provides for a frequency of care for children of between 0.8 and 1.2 hours per week. Contrary to regulations, which guarantee care up to the age of 6, coinciding with access to second-

stage pre-school education, many children are withdrawn from the service from the age of four on the grounds that mainstream schools already provide the care they need. However, the support these children receive in school is not necessarily comparable and does not necessarily replace the CDIAP (indeed, first-stage pre-school education (0-3 years) does not entail leaving the service).

And in the case of the CSMIJs, the number of children and adolescents using them has also dropped but so has the frequency of visits, from 7.4 a year to 7.1 in 2022, i.e. less than one visit every month and a half, and the waiting list has lengthened. In June 2023 there were 3,568 children on the waiting list, 26.5% more than in 2022.

The Framework Agreement between the Ministries of Education and Health has been implemented in recent years, improving coordination between the education and health services. The care programme for pupils with special health needs in mainstream schools caters for 1,588 pupils, 1.4 % of the total, and includes a nurse as the reference person linked to care for special health needs in schools for pupils with complex illnesses. This has helped cut the number of complaints received by the Catalan Ombudsman office regarding attention for these needs.

In the 2023/2024 school year, the creation of the Education-Health territorial commissions was promoted and the protocol for health care in education was published providing all schools with information and clear indications on attending to the health of the minors in their care in the school environment. The Catalan Ministry of Education has stated that work is under way to update the Framework Agreement with the Catalan Ministry of Health and to bring the Catalan Ministry of Social Rights into the agreement.

## Recommendation

Joint work by the Catalan Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Rights must be strengthened and primary care centre community health services, child and youth mental health services, social services and the CDIAPs, among others, must be integrated into the inclusive education model in mainstream schools and in the support provided by teachers for pupils with specific educational needs.

The Commission for Inclusive Educational Support (CAEI), professionals from SIEI and other teaching and professional staff from the EAPs are particularly important in applying the inclusive education model in each school and in aligning and coordinating the professionals involved. The model must be set up in all publicly funded school and measures put in place to ensure that the planning, specification, application, monitoring and evaluation of the educational support measures are carried out appropriately.

## 17. Inclusive nursery school model

There are fewer pupils with special educational needs in first-stage pre-school education, but this difference has been narrowing in recent years.

**Participation of children with special educational needs in first-stage pre-school education has increased.** In the 2022/2023 school year there were about 1,700 pupils with these needs (2.2% of all pupils), while the proportion was 1.2% in 2017/2018. However, this is still slightly lower than in second-stage pre-school primary education, where the figure is 3.3%.

This rise in the number of pupils with special educational needs in first-stage pre-school education is due to better detection of needs, but also improvements in the attention given to these needs by professionals at this stage.

The overall organisation of pre-school education, with the approval in 2023 of Decree 21/2023, of 7 February, on the organisation of pre-school education, favours the inclusive education model in the first stage to guarantee school inclusion, as is already the case in the second stage.

However, there are still difficulties in accessing the provision of specialised resources or support at this stage. The ratio of professionals established by Decree 282/2006, of 4 July, which regulates first-stage pre-school education and requirements for schools, does not take into account the additional or intensive support needs a school will require if it has pupils with special educational needs. Local councils and private school owners are not always willing to hire additional support staff, and the Catalan Ministry of Education does not have a consistent policy of providing support resources for first-stage pre-school education, as it does for other stages. Educational services, such as EAPs, do not pay the same attention to the intervention needs of pupils in nursery schools.

However, the Catalan Ombudsman office has detected progress in the willingness of local councils to hire support staff or the EAPs to intervene in nursery schools.

## Recommendation

With a view to the 2024/2025 school year, the Catalan Ministry of Education plans to provide grants and a call for applications in order to select schools to monitor support for pre-school years 0-3, and to develop a years 0-3 model for children with very complex needs. Many such children currently attend specialised schools, as mainstream nurseries do not provide intensive support.

An inclusive nursery school model must be designed that revises the ratios established in Decree 282/2006, of 4 July, and also adapts Catalan Ministry of Education funding for public and private places in coordination with local councils and owners of charter schools, should they have pupils with specific educational support needs in their schools.

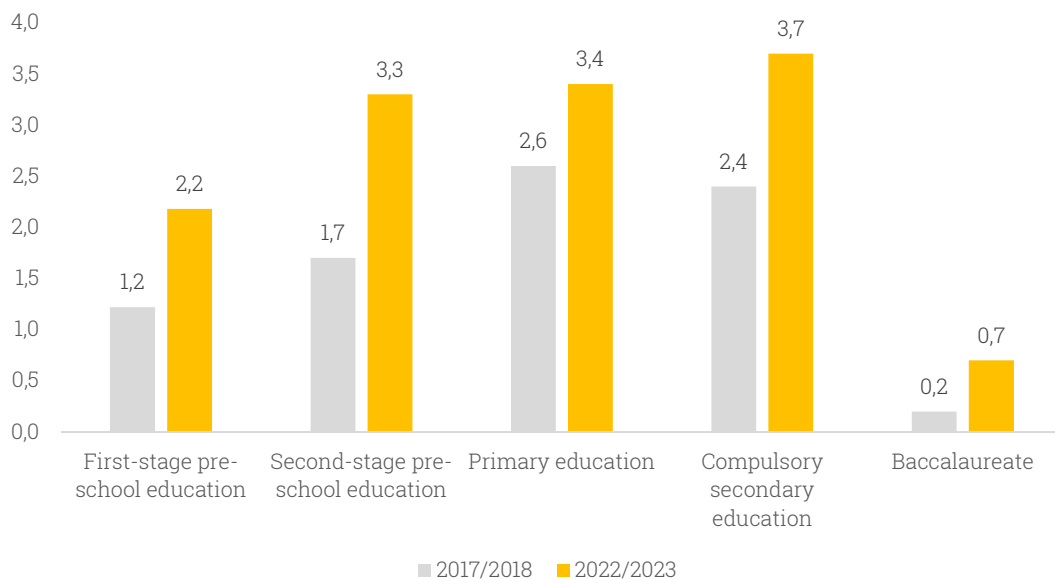
# 18. Educational continuity plan for pupils with special educational needs in post-compulsory education

The difficulty of ensuring inclusion for pupils with special educational needs in post-compulsory education in mainstream schools increases the amount of pupils in CEEs and school leavers: half of adolescents with special educational needs aged 16 to 21 no longer study

**Numbers of pupils with special educational needs in post-compulsory secondary education have also increased**, although, again, they are under-represented at this stage. In the case of the **baccalaureate**, the number of pupils with special educational needs rose from 0.2% in the 2017/2018 school year to 0.7% in the 2022/2023, a total of 666 pupils, but the proportion is significantly higher in basic education, at 3.5%.



**Graph 11. Pupils with special educational needs by school stage in Catalonia (for 2017/2018 and 2022/2023)**



Source: Based on data from the Catalan Ministry of Education.

Most pupils with special educational needs in the baccalaureate are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. There are also 3,478 pupils with learning disorders and 714 gifted pupils.

While 58.0% of pupils who complete compulsory secondary education go on to take the baccalaureate, this figure is estimated to drop to only 10.5% for pupils with special educational needs, more than five times lower.

In the case of intermediate-level vocational training, the Catalan Ombudsman office has received complaints about pupils' difficulties in continuing their studies through the formal vocational training offer.

Hurdles to accessing post-compulsory education stem from difficulties in adapting curricula and low secondary education completion rates for pupils with special educational needs, which limits their options for continuing their studies in vocational training.

On a positive note, it is worth highlighting here that the measures to ensure pupils with special educational needs complete their compulsory secondary education have been improved. Decree 175/2022, of 27 September, on the organisation of basic education, stipulates that assessment of pupils with special educational needs must be based on the criteria established in the individualised support plan and not on acquiring the general competencies established for the stage, as was the case until 2022/2023.

However, there is still reluctance on the part of some teachers to apply curricular modifications to vocational training. Some pupils with special educational needs are excluded, for example, from the practical modules, because curricular modifications are not applied, even if this means failing to ensure they acquire the general competency for the stage, which in turn means they can only obtain a partial certificate of studies, not the diploma.

In the case of training and integration programmes (PFIs), pupils with special educational needs are over-represented: about 25% of pupils have these needs, partly because the programmes are adapted and run by CEEs (about 800 pupils are in this situation). Since 2017/2018, there has been a 17.2% increase in the number of PFI places available, to nearly 1,200, providing more opportunities for pupils with special educational needs to continue their education. The number of pupils enrolled in adapted PFIs in CEEs has increased by 23.5%, more than 150 places.

The number of pupils over the age of 16 enrolled in CEEs is increasing year by year (4,258 in 2022/2023), due to lack of opportunities in mainstream settings. More than half the pupils in CEEs are over 16 (51.9%), when in 2017/2018 this proportion was 40.1%.

In addition, a significant proportion of young people aged 16 to 21 with special educational needs are not enrolled in the education system due to lack of opportunities adapted to their needs. The Catalan Ombudsman office estimates that nearly 50% of pupils with special educational needs between the ages of 16 and 21 are not enrolled in any form of education.

This rise in the number of pupils enrolled in CEEs is largely explained by the implementation of specific training courses (IFEs), an offer aimed at pupils with mild or moderate intellectual disabilities who have had difficulties in following their studies in vocational training.

IFEs started as a pilot scheme in 2016/2017, with an offer of 100 places, rising to 1,275 places in 2023/2024. In 2023, the offer was consolidated with the approval of Resolution EDU/294/2023, of 2 February, establishing specific training pathways, marking the end of the experimental pilot plan and regulating the organisation of these courses. There is no record of pupils going without an IFE place, apart from some exceptions where there were not enough places in their reference territory.

In the CEEs, the offer of IFEs rose from 192 in 2017/2018 to 1,301 in 2022/2023.

## Recommendation

This plan should include measures to increase the training offer for these pupils, either through adapted qualifications (as is already the case with IFEs and adapted PFIs, which have ensured continuity for a growing number of pupils), or by reserving places in baccalaureate and vocational training. The regulation does not establish specific reserve places in the case of the baccalaureate, although it does open up the possibility for territorial services to establish one, if necessary. It also provides for two reserve places in each group for pupils with disabilities in admission to basic-, intermediate- and advanced-level vocational training, and in vocational training specialisation courses, in general.

The plan should also provide measures to guide and accompany pupils with special educational needs towards this provision, in accordance with their needs and interests.

Finally, the plan should also promote flexibility to ensure effective inclusion of these learners, through measures such as curricular modifications or strategies based on UDL.

## 19. Strategy for the participation of children with special educational needs in educational leisure

There is no consistent public policy to guarantee access to educational leisure for children and adolescents with special educational needs

The Catalan Ombudsman office notes the unequal access for children with disabilities (or other children with special educational needs, including behavioural needs) to leisure activities, especially due to the non-inclusive design of many of the activities, lack of adequately trained educators able to provide support for children's and adolescents' special educational needs, and also deficiencies in the provision of support staff by public authorities to accompany the participation of these children.

This means that, even today, families sometimes have to pay for the provision of these personnel, an additional cost for participating in these activities.

To tackle this situation for the first time, in 2022 the Catalan Ministry of Social Rights established specific grants for hiring support assistants for children and young people with disabilities so they can participate in leisure education activities. The total amount earmarked for the grants was 300,000 euros (260,305 of which was spent) and they benefited around 250 children. In 2024, this amount was doubled to 600,000 euros, at 65.88 euros per beneficiary per day without an overnight stay. This amount covers about 900 children with disabilities with a two-week summer camp, however this is clearly insufficient considering there are about 40,000 children and adolescents with special educational needs.

It should also be added that the processing system for applications does not greatly favour inclusion of children and adolescents with disabilities, as the decision to award the grant is issued months after the activity has been completed. In particular, decisions to award the grants for 2023 were notified in 2024, when the grant was meant to cover activities in 2023. This delay in deciding additional funding for the activity has a negative impact on the effectiveness of the grant (Article 8.3 of Law 38/2003 of 17 November, on general subsidies), because the entity may find out it will receive the money only after the activity has already taken place.

Furthermore, lack of regulations on the right to leisure does not help guarantee accessibility and inclusion for children and adolescents.

## Recommendation

In 2024, the Catalan Government passed Agreement GOV/48/2024, of 27 February, approving the drafting of the strategy to recognise educational leisure in Catalonia, with the aim of understanding the main difficulties facing the sector and formulating policies to promote children's and adolescents' participation on equal terms. In this sense, measures should be included in this strategy to address the obstacles for children and adolescents with special educational needs in participating in existing opportunities.

Among other aspects, the Catalan Ombudsman asks the Catalan Ministry of Social Rights to increase the amount earmarked to co-fund contracting of assistants for educational leisure activities and to speed up decisions on awarding subsidies, to ensure they have a real impact on improving accessibility for children with disabilities in this area of education.

## 20. Guarantees for educational and training support on leaving the education system

The waiting list for CAEs means there are pupils with special educational needs who do not have an alternative to the CEE from the age of 21

As stated above, CEEs guarantee support for a significant part of pupils with special educational needs who have greater difficulties in pursuing their studies in the mainstream education system. However, such schooling cannot be extended beyond the age of 21.

The Catalan Ministry of Social Rights funds places in specialised care centres (CAEs), the occupational therapy service and the occupational integration service. However, there are not enough places to guarantee continuity of education for pupils with special educational needs when they have to leave the CEE. In fact, there are pupils who leave CEEs without an alternative resource, and stay at home without their special educational needs being addressed.

In the case of the CAEs, for example, there are 159 people on the waiting list.

### Recommendation

Numbers of places in CAEs, the occupational therapy service and the occupational integration service must be adapted to existing needs, taking into account the territorial distribution of these resources.

# SÍNDICA

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