



## Improving Inclusion and Learning Outcomes for Pupils with Disabilities in Sierra Leone's Secondary Schools

The Government of Sierra Leone, through its Free Quality School Education (FQSE) programme is committed to creating a high quality, accessible education system in all children and young people can realise their potential. However, evidence shows that marginalised learners, such as pupils with disabilities, often suffer discrimination and face structural barriers that deprives them of their right to safe, inclusive, and quality education.

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education's approach to 'radical inclusion' is a commitment to ensure that every child – regardless of family origin, location, gender, or disability – can live and learn in safety and dignity. Led by the MBSSE, the UK Aid-funded Leh Wi Lan (LWL) is designed to support learning outcomes for all secondary school pupils in Maths and English, with a priority on including and improving outcomes for girls and children with disabilities.

This Information Briefing summarises the interventions and learning of Leh Wi Lan and its partners towards the Ministry's goal of improving inclusion and outcomes for students with disabilities.

### Disabled learners face significant barriers to fulfilling their educational potential.

In Sierra Leone as elsewhere, children who are disabled face significant barriers to full participation in education and wider society, both inside and outside the classroom. These barriers may be institutional, environmental - such as poor lighting or inaccessible toilets - or attitudinal, in the form of stigma, bullying and inadequate teacher training/pedagogy. Pupils most at risk of becoming victims of violence include adolescent girls and students with disabilities, learning difficulties and special needs.



Glasses fitting

## Lack of awareness of how to identify and support children with disabilities prevents inclusion.

*Providing education for the blind child in secondary school needs a whole lot of education both to the teachers, principals, pupils and every other stakeholder."*

**Salieu Turay, Principal, Milton Margai School for the Blind**

Special Needs Schools (SNS) are underfunded and lack basic teaching and learning materials and, in mainstream schools, there little support for disabled children and the stigma around disability is high. As a result, communities, schools, and families do not prioritise the education of children with disabilities.

Leh Wi Lan was the first to assist MBSSE to include support to Children with Disabilities in mainstream schools at a national level, developing teachers' and principals' capacities and knowledge on inclusion through training on the social model of disability. Through their training school mentors together with English and Maths teachers are supported to observe their classes to identify children with difficulties, impairments, and disabilities using a new disability checklist. This checklist is a practical tool which enables schools to assess the type and level of support required to increase pupil participation and includes tips and classroom strategies as well how to access specialist support.

Recognising that disabled pupils may be more vulnerable to bullying; it also suggests a buddying system is put in place and that teachers and principals encourage a culture of respect among all students in the school.



Voice recorder distribution

## Children with disabilities in Sierra Leone miss out on education because of limited access to specialist support and adaptations.

Lei Weh Lan has supported medical screenings for visual impairment in junior secondary schools (JSS) across the country and provided assistive devices to students, including glasses and solar lamps, to address mild and moderate visual impairments that have become barriers to learning in school and at home. 2,270 visually impaired children have received this help and the intervention will be extended to senior secondary school (SSS) level. LWL also plans to continue supporting children with disabilities through further medical screenings for mobility.

**2,270** 

**Visually impaired children have received help**

As a part of Leh Wi Lan's efforts to supply every secondary school child in Sierra Leone with appropriate pupil handbooks, English handbooks in braille have been distributed to blind students. These children have also received voice recorders to allow them record and listen to their lessons in all other subjects. Voice recorders have also been supplied to the personnel of the six national special needs schools for the blind.

## A key barrier to inclusion in classrooms in Sierra Leone's schools is a lack of inclusive teaching practice

Teachers do not receive any inclusion training in Teacher Training Colleges, despite children with disabilities having to attend mainstream schools after primary school. To address this challenge, following the model of the new Gender Responsive Pedagogy (GRP), Leh Wi Lan has supported MBSSE to pioneer a Disability Inclusion Responsive Pedagogy (DRP). This aims to strengthen the capacity of MBSSE, Teaching Service Commission and teachers to respond to the needs of children with disabilities, particularly those in mainstream secondary schools. The dissemination of the DRP in schools is planned for the school year 2021-22 and will build on the successful implementation of the Reducing Violence in Schools Guide and the GRP.



## The sustainability of new school safety and inclusion initiatives is undermined without resources and expertise to support and embed new systems and practices

Leh Wi Lan has purposefully developed the skills and capacity of local staff to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions to address school safety and inclusion. The 200 School Support Officers (SSOs) and 16 District Inclusion Officers (DIOs) introduced by LWL provide external support on inclusion as well as on school safety and monitoring on a range of areas including inclusive pedagogy. These staff are playing a key role in enhancing accountability and driving inclusive practices in Sierra Leone's secondary schools.

However, there is more to do to embed inclusive and safe practices in secondary schools. All school-based activities need continuous monitoring, and it is hoped that SSOs and DIOs will be maintained in some form as a function of the education system. Going forward, there is a need for a school health policy and the coordination of all stakeholders working on school health to ensure a concerted and cohesive approach to hygiene and safety.

## Platform for success

Thanks to the leadership and commitment of the Government and the MBSSE, Lehi Wi Lan's has been able to support the processes and practices that support safety and inclusion in Sierra. The UK Aid-funded Lehi Wi Lan programme will continue to target resources and expertise at inclusion and school safety order to support the Government's Free Quality School Education (FQSE) programme spearheaded by President Bio, which aims to develop the human capital in the country by ensuring inclusion and equal educational access and participation for all children.

*Lehi Wi Lan/Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme (SSEIP) is a five- year (2016-2021) UK Aid-funded programme aimed at improving English and maths learning achievement in all secondary schools, especially for girls. Any views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of UK Department for International Development, Sierra Leone Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Mott MacDonald or Oxford Policy Management*

