

Visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development Mr. Saad Alfarargi

Lugano, 27 September 2019

Ticino education system and inclusion

1. Foreword: the Ticino education system and inclusion

In Ticino, the concept of inclusion progressively entered the debate on educational policies during the 1960s.

With the introduction of the unified middle school (Scuola media) at the end of the 1970s, the Canton decided to prefer a single educational path for all students in compulsory schooling rather than a school segregative system separating students in different study programmes at an early age according to their abilities.

This political orientation is based on the principle of educability, according to which everyone, regardless of their social and cultural origin, has a potential that deserves and needs to be developed.

From this fundamental assumption derive the principles of inclusiveness and heterogeneity: an inclusive school wants to go beyond simple integration and proposes to welcome different students and to provide them with more and adequate training opportunities even if there are cognitive difficulties or other difficulties.

At the basis of these three principles (educability, inclusiveness and heterogeneity) there is an important and fundamental value: equity. The Ticino school intends to offer each pupil the same educational opportunities, regardless of his socio-economic condition and peculiarities. It is a school aiming at equal opportunities, in which differences do not constitute an obstacle and the quality of learning is consistently pursued in all schools.

This approach is intended to significantly enhance the performance of the entire school population through differentiated educational opportunities.

2. Inclusive education and special school

The concept of inclusion applies to the whole school population and, at the same time, finds a specific declination with regard to pupils with special educational needs.

Since the 1970s, cantonal school stakeholders have contributed to creating new reception conditions for individuals or groups of students with special educational needs. The aim was to propose accessible, qualifying and normal situations and conditions of learning, growth and life for students with special educational needs.

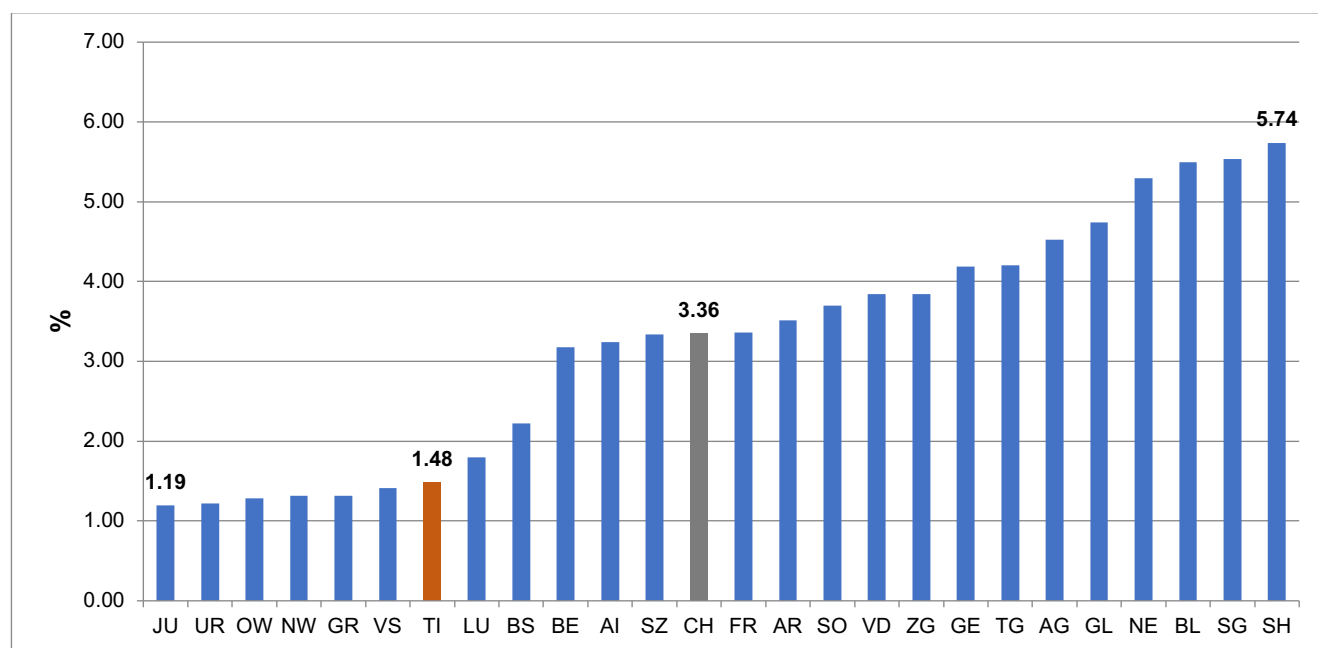
This commitment has led Ticino to question the separation of tasks and places of school education coinciding with the presence of distinctive features among individuals or groups of students.

The challenge faced by the Canton was therefore to adapt situations, conditions and ordinary resources to each child/young adult and to open up with adequate competences to all pupils, including those with disabilities or special educational needs, anticipating the intentions and facts of the Salamanca Declaration (1994) and the precept of inclusive school.

In 1975, through the “cantonalisation” (transfer of powers from private or municipal institutions to the Canton) of the special school, the principle was introduced according to which the special schools are included in the same buildings as the regular school. This choice has favored the development of shared projects between regular and special school, as well as the sharing of formative moments and individualized projects that have promoted, where that was possible, the integration and inclusion of students with special needs in the path of regular schooling.

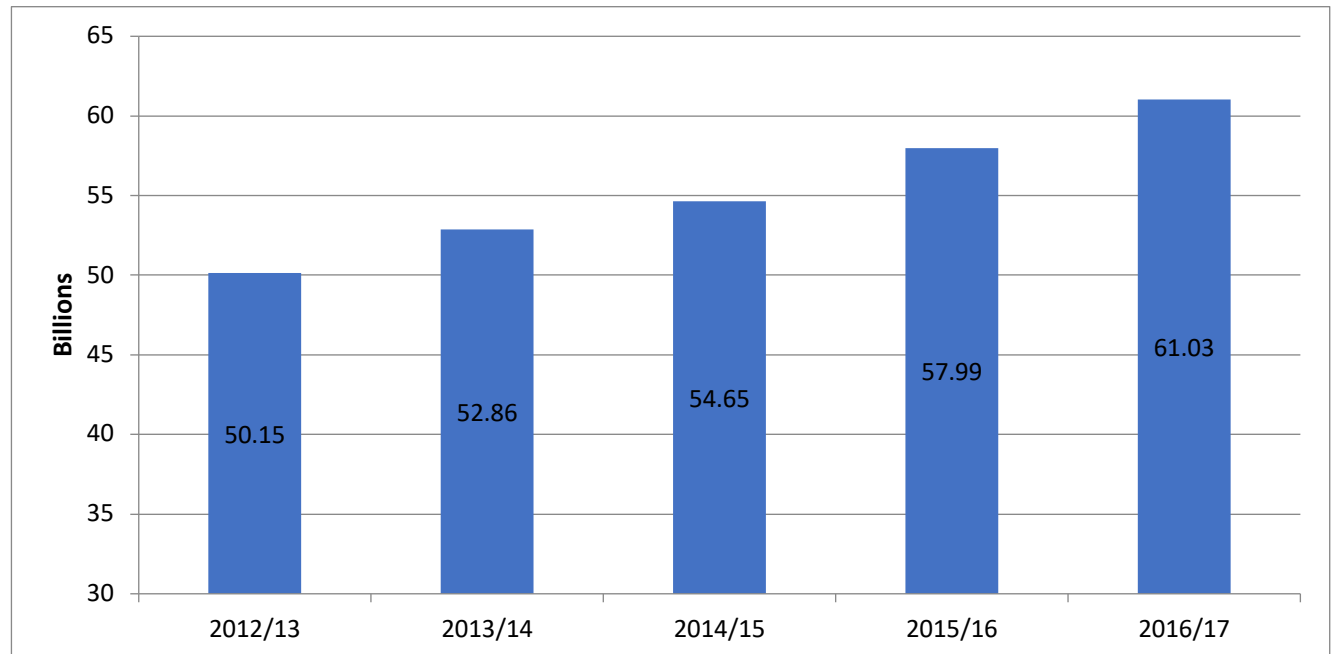
At the same time, the special school has made it possible to adapt the training courses to special individual needs, when the latter prevent a differentiated course within the regular school.

Unlike what happened in most Swiss cantons, Ticino then conducted a highly integrative and inclusive school policy, as indicated by the extremely low special schooling rate which, over time, stabilised at around 1.5% of the school population.



Percentage of pupils in special classes (compulsory schooling, school year 2016/17). Source: Federal Statistical Office. Student and student statistics.

Inclusive education as conceived by the Canton, therefore, implies changing the way of understanding and 'acting' the regular school, promotes the development of new conditions and new school practices and the analysis of their impact with respect to the different identities and commitments and responsibilities of the school.



Evolution of expenditure for pupils with special needs 2012-2017. Source: Statistics Office of Special Pedagogy.

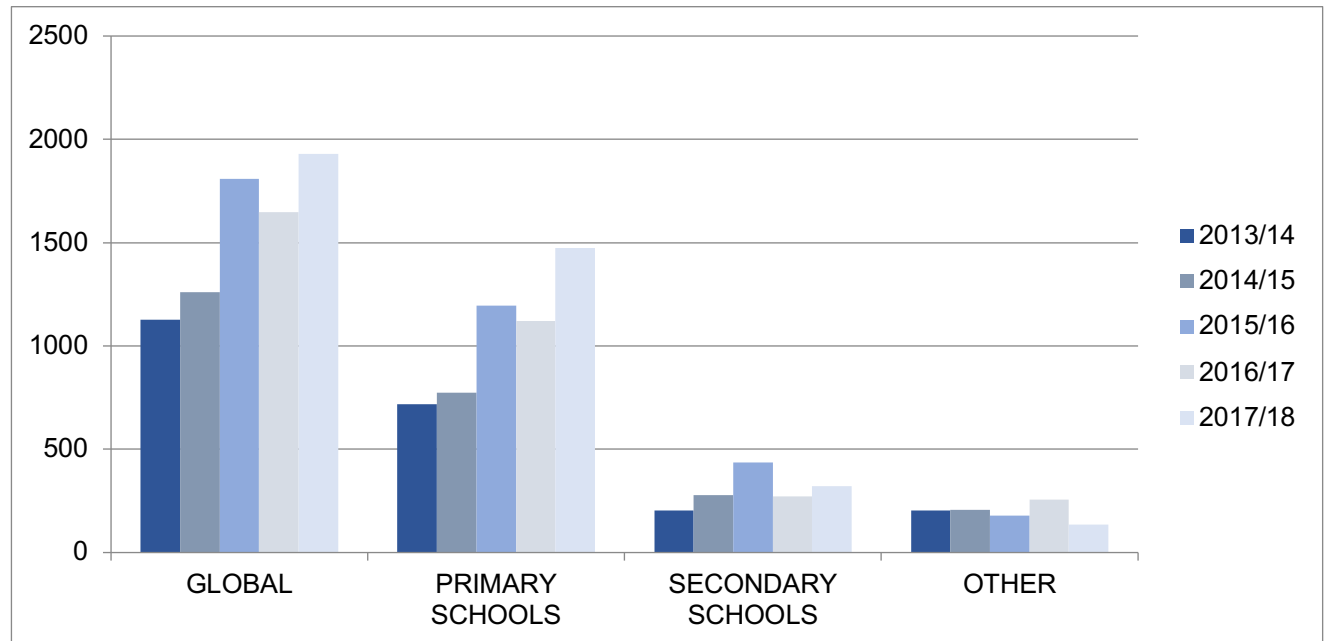
The Special Pedagogy Section is the body that deals with pupils with special educational needs, encouraging – where that is possible - their inclusion in regular classes.

Among the various measures implemented by the Section we can mention, for example, the inclusive classes. These are reduced membership classes in which some pupils with special educational needs are included. Class management is shared between the specialized teacher and the 'regular' teacher in kindergarten, primary or middle school. During this school year in Ticino there are 9 sections included in kindergarten, 8 classes included in primary school and 1 classes included in middle school.

In addition to inclusive classes, the regulations of the special pedagogy provide for the schooling of pupils in compulsory schooling who have special educational needs the following basic measures:

- speech therapy and psychomotor interventions for a maximum total of two units per week and for a maximum duration of 4 years;
- special early education measures of a maximum of two units per week for pre-school pupils;
- combined special early education, speech therapy and psychomotricity interventions, up to a maximum of two units per week;
- special schooling and educational interventions in day care facilities or internships for children with proven psychophysical disabilities from an early age;
- accompaniment of the pedagogical operators for integration (OPI) up to a maximum of four intervention units per week for students with special educational needs placed in regular classes in the first four years of schooling.

The pedagogical operator for integration (previously called specialized support operator), is a figure that was introduced in Ticino in 2009 following the ratification of the Intercantonal Agreement on collaboration in the field of special education. Over time, the hours invested for the interventions of pedagogical operators for integration have increased, as can be seen in the graph below.



Number of hours of specialised support provided by the Office for Special Education per year, total and by school sector. Source: Statistics Office of Special Pedagogy. In the category "Other" are included the hours provided in the upper middle, professional and special schools.

3. Social and educational integration of foreign students

The concept of inclusion, in addition to students with special educational needs, has a special declination for students coming from a cultural and linguistic context different from that of Ticino.

Following the post-war economic development, starting in the 1960s, Ticino experienced a strong migratory flow, first mainly from Italy, then, starting in the 1980s, especially from Portugal, Spain and Turkey. Subsequently, following the conflicts that broke out in the Balkans at the beginning of the 1990s, numerous families arrived from those regions at war.

Before 1990, in the Ticino school no special measures were foreseen in favor of foreign students. In 1994, as a response to the Balkan migration emergency, the cantonal department of education (DECS) instituted Italian language courses and integration activities, with the aim of encouraging the school integration of students with a mother tongue other than Italian, the language of schooling in Ticino.

The aim of this service, which is still active nowadays, was to offer equal opportunities to all pupils in compulsory schooling. In particular, the aim was to provide foreign language pupils with a basic knowledge of Italian in order to enable them to achieve a level of education such as to facilitate their schooling and their social and professional integration. In practice, Italian language courses can be organised in public schools for students of another language who are not able to follow the teaching normally and, in particular, initiatives to promote the school integration of students from non-Italophone countries, in order to safeguard their cultural identity.

To this end, the Canton has instituted the figure of the Language and Integration Teachers (DLI) who deals with - the progressive integration into the school environment of the students who have just arrived at the school; - the teaching of Italian according to the hours assigned; - the awareness of colleagues docent (presentation of materials, topics to be addressed, projects of the institution, provision of resources) and collaboration with the management and the inspectorate in the context of intercultural education initiatives; - contacts with the families of the students and with bodies and

services responsible for assisting immigrants.

In recent years, new needs have emerged in this field due to the intensification of migration flows and, in particular, in relation to the arrival in the Canton of underage accompanied or unaccompanied migrants.

For these students the Canton has provided, in collaboration with other state or private bodies that deal with the welcoming of migrants, the inclusion in the classes of primary or secondary school or, for those students who have passed the age of compulsory schooling, the inclusion in vocational training courses (the Canton for this purpose uses the Pretirocinio di integrazione, which is a structure for the reception of young non-Italophone speakers).

In addition, at the beginning of the 2019/2020 school year, classes were created for the schooling of asylum seekers of school age within the Federal Asylum Centre. As of 1 March 2019, the new fast-track asylum procedures will be introduced throughout Switzerland following the fundamental reform of the asylum procedure, which was approved by a popular vote in June 2016. As part of this reform, basic schooling is to be established in the new Federal Asylum Centres. The pupils arriving at the federal centre can vary a lot in terms of training already received, age, but also of contingent situations due to the journey of arrival. For this reason, it is considered useful for these children and teenagers to benefit from a protected space, where they feel completely welcomed and where the teachers have the flexibility to devote themselves completely to their needs. This would happen in small classes, accommodating no more than 15 students each.

The pupils will attend the internal class of the Federal Asylum Centre until a decision on their family's asylum application has been taken (the Secretariat for Migration estimates that a decision will be taken within 5-6 weeks of arrival).

4. Access to education for Yenish, Sinti and Roma

The number of cases in question in Ticino is very limited (if not completely absent). For this reason, in accordance with the principle of inclusion, so far it has not been necessary to adopt additional measures to those already mentioned.

In this regard, however, it is possible to recall a case dating back to 2014 in which the children of a family of Ecuadorian origin resident in Ticino with a tourist visa has been educated in Ticino classes, respecting the constitutional principle according to which every child of school age has the right to be educated regardless of his situation.

5. Participation of parents' and teachers' associations in the development of measures for pupils with special educational needs

One of the main stakeholders in school policies for pupils with special educational needs in Ticino is ATGABBES, an association of parents and friends of children in need of special education. This association aims at inclusion at all levels (school, profession, society) by creating opportunities for meetings and exchanges between people with disabilities, their families and society as a whole. ATGABBES, as well as other associations sharing its aims, are privileged interlocutors for the Canton.

As far as the participation of magistral associations is concerned, the canton regularly convenes the main associations to a discussion table. It is also worth mentioning the trade associations of specialist operators working in the special school (speech therapists, occupational therapists, etc.) with whom a regular dialogue is maintained.

In the case of the introduction of innovations into the Ticino school system, the canton also promotes consultations to which all stakeholders (internal and external) are invited to participate. An example of this is the project to reform the compulsory schooling system "La scuola che verrà", which was subject to two successive consultations.