

**Title:** Situational analysis of the educational needs of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments

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Despite policy commitment, there has been slow progress towards achieving quality education for learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments (SPSII) in South Africa. One of the main obstacles is that there are very few teacher-training programmes that prepare teachers to teach these learners through specialisation courses focused on disability and education. In addition, the educational needs of learners with SPSII in South Africa are not fully understood. In light of this gap, drawing on a human rights based and eco-systemic approach, the aim of this study was to provide an evidence base for the current needs of learners with SPSII and the teacher education required to meet these needs.

The study was conducted in eight schools (six special schools and two full service schools) across the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Gauteng in South Africa. Participants included 19 provincial and district officials, 39 teachers, 8 school management team members, 39 learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments, and 27 parents of these learners.

Findings indicate that learners with SPSII have the following educational needs: (1) They require social and psychological support, (2) Their additional barriers to learning need to be addressed, (3) The curriculum should be adapted to their needs through additional programmes or modifications, (4) They need access to assistive technology (including devices and training) and (5) They require appropriate language and media (including sign language, braille and alternative and augmentative communication (AAC)) for teaching and learning. It is essential that teachers are upskilled and empowered to meet these needs. In particular, teachers require training and support in (1) Understanding disability as an issue of social justice and establishing empathic and caring relationships with learners and their families, (2) Responding to diversity and differentiating the curriculum, (3) Impairment-specific knowledge and pedagogy, (4) The selection and use of assistive devices as well as teaching learners to use these devices, and (5) Sign language, braille and AAC.