



## Best practice for inclusive VET

(NASOR)

### **Title of the best practice**

Vocational High School of Forestry and Woodworking “Nikolay Haytov”

### **Country of the case study**

Vocational High School of Forestry and Woodworking “Nikolay Haytov” is in Varna, Bulgaria. Training of students with SEN has been conducted in the school since 2009. This is the first vocational high school in the city of Varna that started training students with special educational needs, both integrated and in special classes. Students with SEN who did not meet the State Educational Standard were admitted and trained after completing the seventh grade with a certificate document in a three-year course of study in the specialty “Landscaping and Floristry”, profession “Landscaping Worker”. Since 2016, there have been no specialized classes. Students with SEN are admitted to mainstream classes after the seventh grade in the following specialties: “Furniture Production”, “Forestry and Hunting Management”, “Interior Design”, “Park Construction and Landscaping”, “Restoration of Antique Furniture and Joinery”. Students who do not meet the State Educational Standard are trained under Individual Education Plan and IEP; they do not receive a certificate of completed secondary education.

### **Context**

The Vocational High School of Forestry and Woodworking “Nikolay Haytov” in Varna is a pioneer in inclusive vocational education, being the first school in the city to admit and educate students with special educational needs (SEN) since 2009. The school offers a range of vocational programs, including landscaping and floristry, furniture production, interior design, and park construction, integrating students with SEN into mainstream classes while providing individualized support. The local context is characterized by a growing demand for skilled vocational workers and a need to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students. The school’s inclusive practice is supported by a strong partner network, including resource teachers, school psychologists, pedagogical counselors, parents, NGOs such as ASD



“Vision,” and local authorities, all contributing to a structured, supportive, and sustainable educational environment.

## **Problem and motivation**

For many years, students with special educational needs (SEN) faced serious difficulties in accessing quality vocational education and training. In many cases, they were excluded from the mainstream education system or directed exclusively to specialized institutions, which limited their opportunities for social integration, personal development, and future employment. The lack of an adapted learning environment, well-prepared teaching staff, and coordinated support further deepened inequalities and led to early school leaving.

The school’s motivation to admit and educate students with SEN stems from the recognized need to ensure equal access to education and to respond to the individual needs of each student. Guided by the principles of inclusive education and the belief that every child has the potential for development, the school leadership and teaching staff assumed the responsibility of creating a supportive and safe educational environment. The main motivation was not only the academic progress of students with SEN, but also their successful socialization, the development of independent living skills, and preparation for participation in the labour market. This led to targeted changes in the educational approach, the organization of the learning process, and the development of school capacity for sustainable inclusive education.

At the Forestry and Woodworking High School “Nikolay Haytov”, a supportive environment for students with SEN has been created, developed, and continuously improved. To achieve this, in our daily work the management and the entire teaching staff are guided by certain common characteristics, in compliance with a number of requirements.

## **Description of the practical approach:**

1. Support in mastering the learning material – an atmosphere of informality and calm is created between students and teachers; a relationship of mutual trust, respect, and support is maintained. In this way, teachers succeed in understanding students’ experiences, needs, problems, and requirements. Students seek communication with them daily and gladly share both their positive and negative emotions. The learning content is adapted to the abilities of each individual student. In their work, teachers apply interactive methods, storytelling, conversation, discussion, role-playing games,

- and problem-solving. They show films created based on works included in the educational program.
2. Additional support for the personal development of students – work with a resource teacher. The resource teacher at the school additionally supports students with SEN in the learning process and in extracurricular activities for optimal acquisition of the learning content, intellectual, psychological, and social development, and adaptation to the general learning environment. Together with the mainstream teacher, they organize both curricular and extracurricular activities, teaching individually or in groups depending on the needs.
  3. Work with a school psychologist and pedagogical counselor – in their work, the psychologist and the pedagogical counselor are present daily, consistently, and effectively in the school life of all students, and particularly those with SEN.
  4. Providing emotional support – it is extremely important for students with SEN to be educated in an environment where they feel protected and secure. In their teaching activities, pedagogical specialists work toward developing students' self-esteem and motivation. This is achieved by providing emotional support to all learners.
  5. Work with parents – systematic and regular, with the aim of monitoring progress and discussing important and significant topics related to the student's development.
  6. Work of the SST – class teacher, resource teacher, psychologist, teachers of Bulgarian language and literature and mathematics. Discussion of students' development.
  7. Qualification of pedagogical specialists – in recent years, teachers at Vocational High School of Forestry and Woodworking "Nikolay Haytov" have gained confidence in working with students with SEN and skills for maintaining their interest and encouraging their participation in the learning process. Improving qualifications for working with students with SEN is a good practice in which the school management continuously invests.
  8. Interest-based activities – all students in the school are included in clubs for interest-based activities offered by the school.
  9. Interaction with NGOs.
  10. Use of a social service for students with SEN – social assistant from ASD "Vision" – for more than 15 years, students from the school have used social assistants from ASD "Vision". There is very good cooperation between the two institutions.

When training students with SEN, the school has a good system for adaptation and integration. Among graduating students, indisputable progress is observed in terms of:

- Acquired knowledge and skills;
- Independent handling of a number of practical tasks;
- Sense of security and protection;
- Good communication among them;
- Their behavior in public places is calmer;
- Their practical training classes are interesting, useful, and meaningful;
- They demonstrate high standards toward themselves and others;



- Aggressiveness decreases, motor activity increases, fine motor skills improve, etc.;
- Successful completion of grades 10 and 12 with successfully passed state, matriculation, and qualification exams.

Students trained at the school over the years have had various diagnoses, conditions, and difficulties: mild to moderate intellectual disability, learning skills disorder, visual impairment, hyperkinetic disorder with attention deficit, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, Asperger syndrome, etc.

## **Accessibility**

An accessible architectural environment is provided; a team of specialists appointed to the school is ensured. Teachers apply an individual approach to students and assign individual tasks; students without disabilities become more tolerant toward those with SEN; they are encouraged to participate in interest-based activities; cooperation with parents who are consulted by the SST on important and significant topics related to their children; organization of periodic round tables and seminars with parents and teachers aimed at improving relationships and increasing competence on important topics concerning their children; participation in various extracurricular and out-of-school activities, etc.

## **Results**

Since the introduction of inclusive practices, the initiative has affected a significant number of learners with special educational needs (SEN) enrolled in the school over the years, including students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, learning difficulties, visual impairments, attention deficit and hyperkinetic disorders, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, and autism spectrum conditions. Each year, students with SEN are integrated into mainstream classes and supported through Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and the work of a multidisciplinary Student Support Team (SST).

The learners are positively affected through improved access to vocational education, increased academic achievement, stronger social and communication skills, greater independence in practical tasks, improved emotional well-being, and reduced risk of early school leaving. Many students successfully complete grades 10 and 12 and pass state, matriculation, and vocational qualification exams, demonstrating measurable educational progress.

In classroom practice, teachers apply an individual approach by adapting learning content, assigning differentiated tasks, and using interactive methods such as discussions, role-



playing, problem-solving activities, and visual learning materials. Practical training sessions are tailored to students' abilities, making learning meaningful and engaging. Collaboration between mainstream teachers, resource teachers, and psychologists ensures continuous support, while peer interaction in mixed-ability classrooms promotes tolerance, inclusion, and mutual respect among all students

## **Work-Based Learning and Transition to Employment**

The issues that still remain unresolved in society are related to the employment of graduating students with SEN. The efforts made by the school management and staff remain fruitless, despite numerous meetings with employees of the Employment Office and companies from the sector. Whether only the crisis is to blame for their lack of realization or whether there are other administrative barriers remains unclear. State intervention is necessary in these difficult times to create conditions for graduating young people with SEN to start work in the relevant specialty. This should be implemented in a long-term perspective, not only through temporary employment. Otherwise, they return to their previous level of development. The profession and dignified employment for each student should be the main goal and motto of schools that train students with intellectual disabilities for the labor market. The goal here is not preparation for further education, as this is considered the final stage of training. Therefore, we feel responsible not only for education but also for the successful placement of students in employment afterward. Of course, this is not always possible, but our efforts are directed toward achieving this goal. Information is obtained from parents, who do not sever their connection with the school after graduation but, on the contrary, contact us on various issues and participate in concerts and school events.

## **Outcome Indicators (0, 6, 12 months)**

The initiative is monitored through a set of qualitative and quantitative indicators measured at different stages of the learning process. Participation and retention are measured continuously through enrollment records, attendance tracking, and monitoring of students' engagement in both curricular and extracurricular activities. Completion rates are assessed at key milestones, including the successful completion of grades 10 and 12 and the passing of state, matriculation, and vocational qualification exams.

Progression to work-based learning (WBL) and employment is monitored during the final stages of education and after graduation, through cooperation with employers, follow-up communication with parents, and feedback from students. Where available, data from



internships, practical training placements, and employment services are used to track transitions to the labour market.

Learner satisfaction and well-being are assessed periodically through individual meetings, consultations with the Student Support Team (SST), feedback from parents, and observations by teachers, psychologists, and counselors. Additional indicators include the development of social, communication, and independent living skills.

Monitoring and documentation are ensured through Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), progress reports, team meeting records, attendance logs, exam results, and qualitative case notes. The collected data are reviewed regularly by the school leadership and the SST to evaluate impact, inform adjustments, and ensure continuous improvement and sustainability of the inclusive practice.

## **Sustainability**

The provider has been implementing inclusive education practices for students with special educational needs (SEN) since 2009, with continuous development and improvement over the years. These long-term efforts have allowed the school to embed inclusive approaches into its institutional culture, teaching practices, and support systems, rather than treating them as short-term or project-based interventions.

The changes are considered sustainable, as they are supported by established structures such as a multidisciplinary Student Support Team (SST), trained teaching staff, adapted curricula, and ongoing cooperation with parents and external partners. The good practices developed in the school over the years have contributed to increased trust and interest from parents of children with educational deficits, who increasingly choose to enroll their children in the school already at the lower secondary stage. As a result, the school currently ranks first in terms of the highest number of students with SEN being educated, demonstrating both the sustainability and the long-term impact of the inclusive model.

## **Transferability**

To replicate the inclusive education model of Vocational High School “Nikolay Haytov,” other VET providers need to ensure several minimum conditions: an accessible physical and digital learning environment, trained teaching staff familiar with inclusive methods, a multidisciplinary support team (Student Support Team – SST), and engagement with parents and external partners such as NGOs and local authorities.



Key steps include conducting a needs assessment of students with SEN, developing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), training staff in inclusive pedagogical approaches, adapting curricula and learning materials, establishing regular communication and collaboration with parents, and integrating support services into both curricular and extracurricular activities. Roles should be clearly defined: class teachers lead day-to-day instruction; resource teachers and SST members provide targeted support; psychologists and counselors address emotional and behavioral needs; school leadership coordinates strategy, monitoring, and resources; parents act as partners in planning and feedback. Resources and time required involve investment in staff training, development of adapted learning materials, time for planning and collaboration between staff, and infrastructure adjustments for accessibility. Implementation may take 1–2 school years to establish a fully functional inclusive system, with ongoing monitoring and adaptation to ensure sustainability.

### **Cost efficiency**

Vocational High School of Forestry and Woodworking “Nikolay Haytov” is the first school in Varna that boldly and responsibly took on the challenge of educating students with SEN. The many years of experience, the good team of specialists, their responsibility in their work, the good partnership and trust from parents, the good material and technical base, etc., contributed to building a model for working with students with SEN. The current model has proven not only good but also functional and successful in working with our students and their parents.

The inclusive education model at Vocational High School “Nikolay Haytov” has proven to be cost-efficient due to the long-term benefits it generates relative to the resources invested. By leveraging existing staff, optimizing the use of resource teachers, psychologists, and counselors, and integrating support into regular classes and extracurricular activities, the school minimizes the need for expensive separate programs. Investments in teacher training, adapted learning materials, and collaboration with partner organizations (such as NGOs and social assistants) are offset by higher student engagement, lower dropout rates, improved academic and social outcomes, and smoother transitions to employment for students with SEN. The model demonstrates that well-structured, sustainable inclusive practices can achieve significant educational and social impact without requiring disproportionate additional funding.

### **Success Factors**

The successful implementation of the inclusive education practice at the Vocational High School of Forestry and Woodworking “Nikolay Haytov” is the result of long-term and



purposeful work by all participants in the school. Strong leadership commitment and coordinated action by the school management and the entire teaching staff ensured the consistent development and continuous improvement of a supportive environment for students with special educational needs (SEN).

A key condition was the qualification and continuous professional development of pedagogical specialists, which enabled teachers to gain confidence and practical skills in working with students with SEN, maintaining their interest, and encouraging active participation in the learning process. The work of a multidisciplinary support structure, including class teachers, resource teachers, psychologists, pedagogical counselors, and subject teachers, ensured coordinated monitoring and support of students' academic, social, and emotional development.

The availability of a wide variety of extracurricular and out-of-school activities further supported inclusion, social interaction, and personal development. Effective partnerships with non-governmental organizations, particularly through the long-term cooperation with ASD "Vision" and the provision of social assistant services, strengthened the support system for students with SEN. In addition, institutional support from the Regional Department of Education and Varna Municipality contributed to the stability and sustainability of the practice. The combination of committed leadership, qualified staff, coordinated teamwork, partnerships, and institutional support created the conditions necessary for the successful and sustainable implementation of inclusive vocational education.

## **Challenges and Solutions**

One of the main challenges in implementing inclusive education was addressing stereotypes regarding the abilities of students with SEN, managing concerns about the behavior of students with more severe conditions, and overcoming initial distrust from parents about how their children would cope in upper secondary education. These challenges were addressed through a combination of targeted strategies. Teachers and staff participated in professional development and awareness-raising sessions to challenge assumptions and build a school culture of inclusion, highlighting the achievements and potential of students with SEN. Collaborative activities and peer learning opportunities were implemented to foster mutual understanding and respect among all students. Clear behavioral support plans, risk assessment procedures, and continuous guidance from the Student Support Team (SST), including resource teachers, psychologists, and counselors, ensured that both students and staff felt supported. Regular communication with parents, involvement in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) development, and participation in open classes and school events helped to build trust and transparency. Continuous monitoring, feedback, and the



celebration of successes further reinforced confidence in the inclusive approach and supported the sustainable integration of students with SEN.

### **Reason for Selecting the Practice for WIN**

We have chosen to present the Vocational High School of Forestry and Woodworking “Nikolay Haytov” in Varna as a good practice example of inclusive education and integration of students with special educational needs (SEN) for several reasons. It was the first vocational high school in the city to admit and educate students with SEN, starting in 2009, and it continues to serve as a pioneer in developing inclusive educational practices. The school has successfully implemented both integrated learning in mainstream classes and, initially, specialized classes, providing opportunities for students with diverse abilities to acquire vocational skills in areas such as landscaping, floristry, furniture production, interior design, and park construction. Over the years, the school has developed a comprehensive support system, including resource teachers, psychologists, pedagogical counselors, and individualized education plans (IEPs), ensuring that each student’s learning, social, and personal development needs are met. The school’s experience demonstrates a structured and sustainable model for inclusive VET, with a long-term commitment to student success, social inclusion, and preparation for the labour market. These factors make it an exemplary institution and a valuable reference for other vocational education providers seeking to implement inclusive practices.

### **Contacts for more information and/or references**

<https://pggsd-varna.com/>,

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