

Strategy for Strengthening Public-Sector Special Education Institutes in Islamabad

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Directorate General of Special Education,
Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training

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Background

The Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE), operating under the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT), is responsible for managing the Special Education Institutes (SEIs) in Islamabad that serve students with diverse disabilities. These institutes provide essential services, including education, therapy, and rehabilitation, for children with visual, hearing, intellectual, and physical impairments.

Since their formal transfer from the Ministry of Human Rights to MoFEPT in June 2024, renewed emphasis has been placed on expanding institutional capacity, modernizing infrastructure, enhancing teaching quality, and embedding inclusive education principles. This strategy document sets out the key actions and investments required to reform and strengthen the SEIs. Through DGSE, the federal government operates five institutes that provide free education and specialized services:

	Special Education Institute	Focus Area	Enrolment
1.	National Special Education Centre for Physically Handicapped Children (G-8/4)	Physical Disabilities and Cerebral Palsy	120
2.	National Special Education Centre for Visually Impaired Children (G-7/2)	Visual Impairment	180
3.	National Special Education Centre for Hearing Impaired Children (H-9/4)	Hearing Impairment	550
4.	Rehabilitation Centre for Children with Developmental Disorders (H-8/4)	Autism & Developmental Disorders	140
5.	National Training Centre for Special Persons (G-9/2)	Vocational Training and Skills	167

In addition to these core institutes, DGSE manages several supporting institutions that extend essential services such as professional training, community outreach, library access, Braille services, and printing. These include the National Institute of Special Education (NISE), National Mobility & Independence Training Centre (NM&ITC), National Library & Resource Centre (NL&RC), National Braille Press (NBP), and Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment of Disabled Persons (VREDP).

Evidence for Action: Understanding Disability in ICT

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) undertook a significant step toward strengthening disability data by incorporating specialized questions in the 2023 Population and Housing Census. These questions were aligned with international best practices, particularly the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, to ensure more accurate and comparable estimates of disability prevalence.

The tools focused on identifying individuals with functional difficulties across six core domains:

- Seeing (visual impairment, even when using glasses)
- Hearing (partial or complete hearing loss)
- Walking or climbing steps (mobility limitations)
- Remembering or concentrating (cognitive difficulties)
- Self-care (challenges with washing, dressing, writing, or holding objects)
- Communicating (speech or language difficulties)

To illustrate the scale and distribution of disability in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), the following tables present census findings across all age groups and specifically for children aged 5-16:

Table 1: Disability Statistics in ICT (All age groups, Census 2023)

Indicators	Male	Female	Total	Prevalence rate (All ages)
Disability	43,044	29,978	73,022	3.20%
Functional limitation	105,255	80,125	185,380	8.12%
Seeing	19,143	14,626	33,769	1.48%
Hearing	21,059	16,522	37,581	1.65%
Walking/ Climbing	35,195	26,439	61,634	2.70%
Communication	13,137	9,344	22,481	0.98%
Memorization/ Focus	16,884	12,584	29,468	1.29%
Self care etc.	12,620	9,716	22,336	0.98%

Table 16- Population Census 2023

Table 2: Disability Statistics in ICT (5-16 years, Census 2023)

Indicators	Rural	Urban	Total	Disability prevalence for aged 5-16
Disability	4,545	1,759	6,304	1.07%
Functional limitation	5,199	2,367	7,566	1.28%
Seeing	1,041	865	1,906	0.32%
Hearing	1,160	690	1,850	0.31%
Walking/ Climbing	2,437	1,197	3,634	0.61%
Communication	1,778	926	2,704	0.46%
Memorization/ Focus	1,516	860	2,376	0.39%
Self care etc.	510	40	550	0.09%

Table 17- Population Census 2023

Foundation & Legal Mandate

This strategy is grounded in Pakistan’s national and international commitments to inclusive education and disability rights:

- **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – Quality Education:** Calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, with explicit attention to marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities.
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD):** Ratified by Pakistan in 2011, obligating the state to ensure equal access to inclusive, quality, and free education for persons with disabilities within their communities.
- **Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan:** Establishes the right to free and compulsory education for all children aged 5 to 16 years, explicitly encompassing children with disabilities.
- **ICT Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2020:** Provides a legal framework for the protection, inclusion, and empowerment of persons with disabilities in ICT, including their rights to education, training, and rehabilitation services.

Together, these commitments form the foundation for action. They require Pakistan not only to uphold its constitutional and international obligations but also to translate them into practical measures that ensure accessibility, equity, and quality in education for all children and young persons with disabilities.

Institutional Realities & Key System Challenges

Field visits to DGSE-run institutions revealed several operational, human resource, infrastructure, and service delivery challenges. The following key issues were documented:

- **Teaching Staff Shortages:** 85.7% of institutions reported being critically understaffed in terms of qualified teaching staff.
- **Non-Teaching Staff Gaps:** 100% of institutions cited acute shortages of support personnel including attendants, drivers, and clerical staff.
- **Lack of Functional Labs:** 71.4% of schools lacked fully equipped labs for science, computer education, and home economics.
- **Transportation Deficiencies:** While 85.7% of schools reported having transport facilities, most vehicles required major repairs or lacked trained drivers/support staff.
- **Inadequate Security Measures:** 71.4% of schools did not have CCTV surveillance, limiting monitoring and student safety measures.
- **Infrastructure Needs:** 37.5% of school buildings required major renovation or structural upgrades to be fit for use.
- **Limited Sports Facilities:** 57.1% of institutions lacked appropriate playgrounds or sports equipment, curtailing opportunities for physical development.
- **Absence of Specialists:** 85.7% of schools lacked essential professionals such as psychologists, speech and behavioral therapists, physiotherapists, audiologists, and ophthalmologists.
- **Need for Teacher Training:** 85.7% of institutions identified the need for structured and ongoing professional development programs for teaching staff.

- Shortage of Learning Materials: 57.1% reported insufficient access to updated teaching-learning materials and classroom resources.
- Lack of Assistive Devices: 85.7% lacked basic assistive technologies such as Braille kits, hearing aids, white canes, and wheelchairs.
- Emergency Preparedness Gaps: All schools (100%) lacked functioning fire alarms or emergency evacuation protocols, posing serious safety risks.

These findings underscore the urgent need for a system-wide transformation. Addressing these gaps requires coordinated investment in human resources, infrastructure, specialized services, and safety measures to ensure that children with disabilities can access quality, inclusive, and secure learning environments.

Structural and Functional Challenges of DGSE: Summary Matrix

Category	Key Challenges	Recommendations
Administrative & Certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delayed issuance of disability certificates • Inappropriate labeling (e.g., “Not Fit for Work”) on some certificates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamline certification processes and support parents in acquiring disability certificates for children • Ensure use of enabling and rights-based language aligned with the UNCRPD
Transportation & Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-functional or limited transport facilities • Inaccessible buildings • Lack of appropriate classroom furniture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate funds for repair and procurement of accessible vehicles • Upgrade infrastructure (ramps, accessible toilets) • Provide ergonomic and adaptive furniture
Infrastructure Deficiencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdated and deteriorating buildings • Absence of accessibility features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renovate facilities in line with accessibility standards • Capacity Building of staff (faculty and support staff)
Human Resources & Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortage of trained attendants and therapists • Lack of in-house specialists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit qualified therapists and support staff
Curriculum & Learning Aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National curriculum often too rigid for students with disabilities • No modified syllabus • Limited access to assistive technologies • Outdated sign language curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a flexible, needs-based curriculum • Incorporate assistive tools like screen readers, speech-to-text apps, audiobooks • Update the sign language curriculum in consultation with relevant stakeholders
Skills Development &	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited linkages with industry • Lack of platforms to showcase student-made products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish internship and placement programs • Develop e-commerce or physical spaces to promote student products

Economic Empowerment		
Resource Constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient teaching aids, therapy tools, and digital equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate dedicated budgets for the procurement of inclusive teaching and therapeutic resources

Stakeholder Consultations and Partnership Pathways

To develop a collaborative and sustainable approach for strengthening Special Education Institutes (SEIs) in Islamabad, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT), Project Coordination Unit (PCU) and the Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE) conducted a series of consultations with private sector stakeholders, NGOs, and INGOs. These discussions were aimed at identifying pathways for partnerships and defining a shared way forward to promote inclusive, quality, and rights-based education for children with disabilities.

The consultations yielded valuable insights and commitments from various partners across various key thematic areas:

1. Inclusive Education & Curriculum Development

- Initiate a *“Teach the Trainers”* program to build the capacity of educators in effectively managing diverse learning needs.
- Development of *national guidance for inclusive classrooms*, the piloting of inclusive education models with integrated therapy services in public schools, and the co-creation of monitoring tools and annual progress tracking systems.

2. Teacher Training & Capacity Building

- Stakeholders expressed readiness to design and conduct inclusive teacher training programs tailored to different types of disabilities.
- Adapting existing inclusive teacher training modules and offering technical support to strengthen institutional capacity.

3. Technology, Digital Tools & Innovation

- Piloting innovative solutions for the deaf community, including a *real-time AI-based sign language translator app*.
- Setting up *inclusive technology labs* and sensory learning environments for children with visual and other impairments.
- Experiment with *Aptus Pi* device, a portable solution enabling *offline digital learning* in schools with limited or no internet access.

4. Infrastructure, Accessibility & Therapy Services

- Conduct *accessibility and infrastructure audits* of public special education institutions to identify gaps and guide physical upgrades.
- Collaboration in providing *mobility aids and prosthetics*
- Introducing *therapy-integrated inclusive school models*, emphasizing *early screening* and *physical accessibility* improvements across SEIs.

5. Policy Advocacy & Data Systems

- Collaborate on *national-level policy advocacy* to advance inclusive education across Pakistan.

- Provide *technical assistance* in the design and formulation of inclusive education policies aligned with global best practices.
 - Development of *shared learner progress data systems* to inform evidence-based planning and program improvements.
6. Community Engagement & Awareness
- Strengthening role of *local CSOs and Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs)* in conducting awareness campaigns and mobilizing communities for inclusive education.
 - *Strengthening family engagement programs* to encourage school enrolment and retention of children with disabilities.
 - Developing and leading *nationwide awareness campaigns* that promote social inclusion and challenge stigma in education settings.

Vision & Mission

Vision

To provide enabling environment and opportunities through policies, plans, programs and projects that would promote social progress, educate and rehabilitate children / persons with disabilities.

Mission

Optimal development of persons with disabilities for realization of their full potential in all walks of life, especially in the areas of health, education, socio-economic and vocational needs for fulfillment of their present as well as future requirements.

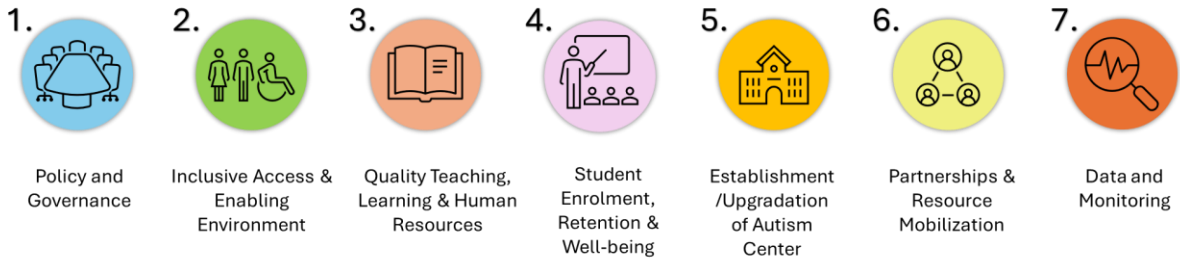
Strategic Objectives

This strategy intends to:

1. Strengthen institutional governance, certification systems and policy coherence.
2. Upgrade infrastructure and ensure physically accessible and secure learning environments.
3. Improve quality of teaching through workforce development and curriculum reform.
4. Provide holistic support through therapy, nutrition, transport, and assistive technologies.
5. Expand vocational skills pathways to employment and economic participation.
6. Leverage partnerships, innovation and technology for scale.
7. Establish robust data systems for monitoring, accountability and planning.

Key Strategic Domains and Focus Areas

The strategy is structured around seven core domains, each defining targeted objectives and priority actions required to strengthen special education service delivery in Islamabad. These domains collectively address policy development, institutional capacity, inclusive access, teaching quality, student well-being, technology integration, partnerships, and data systems. Together, they provide a coherent and comprehensive framework for reform, enabling coordinated implementation, resource alignment, and sustained improvement in outcomes for children with disabilities.



Domains	Objective	Key Areas/Measures
1. Policy and Governance	Strengthen the institutional frameworks and policy to ensure inclusive, accountable, and sustainable special education service delivery.	1.1: Development of Inclusive Education Policy
		1.2: Updated Service Rules for Special Education staff
		1.3: Awareness and Outreach Campaigns
2. Inclusive Access & Enabling Environment	Ensure all Special Education Institutes (SEIs) provide physically accessible, inclusive, and safe environments for children with disabilities, including reliable transport and appropriate learning tools, modern assistive technologies, and digital tools	2.1: Infrastructure Upgrades
		2.2: Horticulture & Green Spaces
		2.3: Enhancement of Play Areas
		2.4: Provision of improved School Transport for SEIs
		2.5: Provision of Assistive Technology and Learning Materials
		2.6: Upgrading Equipment, Machinery and Labs
		2.7: Use of Technology & Innovation for learning
3. Quality Teaching, Learning & Human Resources	Develop a skilled, inclusive, and adequately staffed teaching workforce supported by ongoing professional development, inclusive curricula, and recruitment of specialized staff.	3.1: Staff Recruitment & Placement
		3.2: Capacity Building & Professional Training Programs
		3.3: Upgrading Curriculum and Standardizing Pakistan Sign Language
		3.4: Audiobooks for Visually Impaired
4. Student Enrolment, Retention and Well-being	Improve student enrolment, retention, and overall well-being through integrated therapy services, nutrition, extracurricular programs, and psychosocial support.	4.1: Enhanced Enrolment & Retention
		4.2: Promote Student Well-being through specialized sessions
		4.3: Skill development and industry linkages
5. Establishment /Upgradation of Autism Center	Establish and operationalize a dedicated Autism Center of Excellence offering diagnostic, therapeutic, and educational services tailored to autism spectrum disorders.	5.1: PC-I Development
		5.2: PC-I Implementation

6. Partnerships & Resource Mobilization	Leverage cross-sector partnerships and mobilize public, private, and nonprofit resources to sustain and scale special education reforms.	6.1: Mapping of NGOs, INGOs and Private partners working on disability and special education
		6.2: Enhanced Coordination with partners
		6.3: CSR Mobilization & Fundraising
7. Data and Monitoring	Enhance data systems and accountability frameworks for evidence-based decision-making and real-time performance monitoring.	7.1: Disability Data Mapping & Analytics
		7.2: Monitoring & Evaluation Framework
		7.3: Data Visualization Dashboard

Implementation of the strategy will be led by the Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE) under the supervision of the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training. DGSE will be responsible for operational execution, partner coordination, and delivery of activities at institute level, while the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) will support with technical inputs, tracking, reporting, and facilitation for smooth implementation.

Expected Impact

The implementation of this strategy is anticipated to generate transformative outcomes:

- **Expanded Access and Participation:** Enhanced infrastructure, reliable transport, and inclusive learning environments will enable greater enrolment and sustained participation of children with disabilities.
- **Improved Teaching Quality and Specialist Support:** Structured training, targeted recruitment, and curriculum adaptation will raise teaching standards while ensuring the availability of essential specialists to address diverse learning needs.
- **Enhanced Student Well-being and Retention:** Provision of therapy services, assistive devices, and holistic support programs will strengthen student health, confidence, and long-term retention in education.
- **Accelerated Adoption of Digital and Assistive Technologies:** Integration of innovative tools will expand accessible learning, improve communication, and support skill development for children with varying disabilities.
- **Vocational and Career Pathways:** Focused skill-building initiatives will prepare students for employment and entrepreneurship, fostering independence and economic inclusion.
- **Scalable Inclusive Education Model:** A tested model of inclusive education that can be expanded beyond Islamabad to other regions of Pakistan.