



# Inclusive education

For inclusive schools  
where all children can learn

#school4all Campaign



# Access to education around the world

Some 264 million children and adolescents worldwide are not enrolled in school<sup>1</sup>. We will not achieve the goal to provide quality and inclusive education<sup>2</sup> for all by 2030 – unless we urgently accelerate progress for the furthest behind groups. Inequalities in the education sector are particularly marked in West and Central Africa<sup>3</sup>. Children with disabilities are the most marginalised and the first to be excluded from the education system. More than 32 million children with disabilities in low and middle income countries (LMIC) are out of school and are denied an education. There are many challenges ahead to improve the quality of teaching, learning, and academic achievement for children with disabilities. Lack of access to school increases vulnerability and poverty and makes children more likely to suffer social exclusion, violence and discrimination.

However, every child, including children with disabilities, has the right to a quality, inclusive basic education which is free to all.

## At a glance

- In 2018, projects carried out by HI gave access to education to 127 000 children with disabilities
- Over 32 million school aged children with disabilities are estimated to be out of school worldwide, roughly 1/3 of the out of school population. (Education commission report, 2016).
- 1 in 20 children under 14 years old has a moderate to severe disability. (UNICEF, World Report, 2013).

1 The State of the World's Children 2016 Unicef.

2 4th goal (SDG4) of the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030

3 All children in school by 2015, global initiative on out-of-school children, West and Central Africa, Unicef and Unesco institute for statistics, 2014.

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## The unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on education systems worldwide

By early **May 2020**, **177 countries** had closed all schools due to COVID-19, impacting over **1.2 billion children and youth**. This is **73% of total enrolled learners across the globe**.

In addition to the health crisis, in low-income countries, this pandemic is also impacting on children's ability to access education and linked services such as access to school feeding programmes, social support, protection services or medical care. Children with disabilities are particularly affected, since the break-down of support structures can increase their vulnerability and disrupt protection systems.

HI is adapting many of its inclusive education projects to respond to these unprecedented circumstances and developing guidance to support country teams. Supported by our networks, HI is calling on governments and international aid actors to ensure quality and inclusive education for all during the current COVID-19 crisis and beyond. We need to use this as an opportunity to reinvent education systems and put children with disabilities at the forefront when schools reopen.

# The HI #school4all campaign

To mobilise the public on this important issue, HI is launching a summer fundraising campaign called #school4all every year.

The primarily digital campaign will run in 8 countries (Belgium, Canada, France, Luxembourg, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States).

## Factors limiting access to education for children with disabilities

- At the **local and community** level, many parents and community members, who are not sufficiently informed or made aware of issues faced by people with disabilities, have negative and stigmatising attitudes (including those related to traditional beliefs and practices towards children and people with disabilities).
- **In schools:**
  - **Teaching practices are not sufficiently adapted** to the needs of some children with disabilities. For example, teachers use traditional approaches which are not inclusive such as teaching techniques using verbal repetition and the copying of written content from the board without giving alternative options for children with visual or intellectual impairments for example. Teachers are not adequately trained about using inclusive education methods and how to support children with disabilities when they are in mainstream school. As a result, they do not always meet the needs of these children or do enough to include them in school activities with their peers without disabilities. Many of these children will end up dropping out as they are not able to learn if the content and teaching style is not adapted to their needs, they are likely to fail the end of year exams to pass to the next school year, and they will be put off ever trying

to go back to school after having a negative experience the first time.

- **The school environment is often difficult to access (both getting to school and moving within the school premises) and teaching and learning materials are poorly adapted:** schools often lack toilets and sanitary facilities adapted to the needs of children with physical or visual impairments. Classes do not always have enough natural light, which is problematic for children with visual impairments. School transport is generally not available, and when it is, it is seldom adapted to children with disabilities. In addition, education for children with disabilities in most low- and middle-income countries<sup>1</sup> is mostly provided in special schools located in urban areas where infrastructure is more developed. Children living in less advantaged and more rural environments do not have access to these educational facilities. Also children who attend special schools are generally segregated from their mainstream peers and cannot access the mainstream education curriculum, which can limit their options in the future.
- **Lack of inclusive education policies**<sup>2</sup> at a national and local level, are as a result of the following factors:
  - Governments are not sufficiently well informed about the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (even though many of them have signed and ratified it) and do not translate it into practical policies and action plans. Others may prefer to work on other priorities so even if they are informed they choose not to focus on it.
  - Inclusive Education is rarely included in the Education Sector Plans for countries, which means that most of the funds going to education are not focussed on this issue.
  - Disability is often approached from a **medical perspective:** support given to a child with disabilities is almost exclusively medical, and focuses little on his or her social inclusion at community and school level. Linked to this, sometimes the budget allocated for the education for children with disabilities is diverted to special schools only.
  - There is a **lack of reliable data** on the educational status of children with disabilities and numbers of children out of school.

1 Low-income economies are defined as those with a GNI per capita of \$1025 or less; lower middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between \$1026 and \$4035.

2 They do not sufficiently take disability and the educational needs of certain children into account.

# « Inclusive education »

Inclusive education refers to an education system that takes into account the **different educational and learning needs** of all **vulnerable and marginalized children and young people**<sup>1</sup> (including, but not limited to, children with disabilities). This education system considers the measures it must take to be able to provide an **appropriate education with all children learning together**. It is an **educational approach** that aims to ensure equal rights and opportunities in education, strengthens childrens' participation and limits their exclusion. It is also an important step to building an inclusive society as children can learn about diversity and inclusion from an early age and influence their families' views, with a view to change entrenched stigma and negative cultural beliefs. Inclusive education is a

**human right**, as defined under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (article 24)<sup>2</sup> "Inclusive education aims to provide **appropriate and quality education for all children** so that they can learn together, in a way that reflects their differences and individual needs. An **inclusive education system** ensures not only that school facilities adapted to meet the needs of certain children with disabilities (using ramps and so on) but crucially that teaching methods meet the diverse educational needs of all children. Inclusive education promotes the **participation of children with disabilities** in their community, and enables them to have a better future and to contribute to society,"

Julia Mc Geown,  
HI's **Global Inclusive Education Specialist**.

1 Street children, girls, groups of children belonging to ethnic minorities, children from financially destitute families, and nomadic/refugee/displaced families.

2 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (article 24)



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## HI's work

### Legitimacy and expertise

HI has been working in the field of education **since 1998**<sup>1</sup> and in the inclusive education sector since **2004**. Its work focuses particularly on children with disabilities - the most vulnerable and excluded young learners in the world, **both in humanitarian and in development settings**. HI aims to strengthen the enrolment of children

and young adults with disabilities in school, as part of an inclusive approach. The need for inclusive education has been given strong backing at an international level: one of the global **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4)**<sup>2</sup> for 2030 is to "ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning".

1 And between 1989 and 1997, in partnership with the NGO Action Nord Sud.

2 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4)

## Projects in 27 countries

HI implements 52 projects in **27 countries**<sup>1</sup> in West, Central, North and East Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The organisation also implements regional actions covering nine countries in West Africa and Madagascar.

1 Data revised in January 2020.

Inclusive education projects map in 2020



© Mary Josefine / HI

In all of its projects, HI **supports** children who have a range of **disabilities** (for example, children with physical disabilities requiring crutches or wheelchairs, children with intellectual or communication disabilities or children who are blind or deaf, and also children who have a range of different learning needs but no specific disability), who are excluded from the education system and community life in general.

### HI aims to:

- **Increase the number of children with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools** or who are supported to receive appropriate education for their situation (such as community based schooling, home based schooling in rare and challenging circumstances, or alternative / accelerated learning centres etc.).
- **Improve their social inclusion with other children and**

participation in social activities as part of their education

- **Increase the number of teachers trained in inclusive education** and strengthen their skills to meet the learning needs of children with disabilities;
- **Support schools to become more inclusive, and to set up improvement plans or other action plans which as disability inclusive.**
- **Support parents of children with disabilities and help them to support their children's education**
- **Increase the focus on disability within national level education policies and action plans**

**Innovative educational strategies** are being piloted in some countries including Togo, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Nepal and Rwanda to improve the inclusion of children and young people with severe disabilities in education, such as including children who are deaf, blind or have more complex intellectual disabilities.

# Three areas of activities: families and communities, making services inclusive (education, social, etc.) and developing policies

- HI provides **direct support to children with disabilities** and their families by working with **communities**. In conjunction with local partners (disabled people's organisations, neighbourhood associations, and so on), HI visits villages, identifies out-of-school children with disabilities, makes parents aware of the importance of educating their children, and how to support them, providing peer to peer support if appropriate. HI also gives some direct assistance to help children attend school, such as providing rehabilitation support, and assistive devices such as wheelchairs, or white canes.
- **HI builds the capacities of staff in education, social and health services:** HI ensures that schools provide appropriate infrastructure (such as access ramps, adapted toilets and special adapted chairs for children with physical disabilities), and supports them to develop inclusive learning environments ( such as ensuring that teaching and learning materials are inclusive for learners with intellectual disabilities or sensory impairments), teachers with disability training, and rehabilitation support for children with disabilities. The aim is to make services more inclusive for all.
- HI helps ministries develop **more inclusive national education policies** that take disability issues into account

## Projects

- The organisation provides direct support to children with disabilities and their families through needs based personalised support ,implemented by multidisciplinary teams not only by workers from the education field, but also from rehabilitation, social work and other sectors. Some 127,000 **children with disabilities benefited directly** from Inclusive Education projects in 2018.
- HI supports the development of support systems to include children with more **severe disabilities** in school (e.g supporting children with intellectual disabilities, children who are deaf or blind children in mainstream classes). This may include setting up a **network of specialist mobile teachers**, transitional classes (where children gradually move to mainstream classes), and so on.
- HI carries out **awareness-raising and outreach activities** to inform communities, parents, etc., on the importance of including children with disabilities in school (awareness-raising tools include films, cartoons, etc.). These activities are implemented in conjunction with civil society, including disabled people's organisations.
- HI pays particular attention to **training inclusive education focal points** (student teachers, teachers



and primary school heads) to ensure they provide adequate support to children with disabilities. The organisation develops teaching and learning aids and suggests educational methods adapted to children with hearing, visual or intellectual disabilities.

- HI adapts and **makes the school environment and school facilities accessible** to children with disabilities.
- HI conducts **advocacy work** with **education ministries** to ensure that the issue of inclusive education for children with disabilities is better addressed. In the countries where it works, the organisation supports staff in charge of inclusive education (such as the Department of Inclusive Education in Burkina Faso, or the Rwandan Education Board for example) to formulate policies, strategies and action plans in order to advance the **right to quality inclusive education**.
- HI also contributes to **international advocacy for inclusive education** and lobbies for national governments to achieve **Goal 4** of sustainable development goals to “ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.” HI participates in major national and international meetings related to the inclusion of people with disabilities, in association with the network of European NGOs within the IDDC consortium (International Disability and Development Consortium). It is also a member of the French and British coalitions of the Global Campaign for Education.

## Examples of innovative practices:

- **HI trains teachers in new teaching and learning techniques:**
  - Teachers are encouraged to set up small groups where children learn how to discuss an issue, solve a problem together, and this makes it easier for children with different strengths to support each other.
  - Teachers use concrete learning methods (such as using real objects to teach children to count) and visual aids (photos, pictures and drawings) to explain concepts in a more meaningful way that is easier to understand.
- **HI strengthens inclusive education in communities in conjunction with parents and student committees:**
  - HI works with learners to organise creative activities (singing, theatre, sports, etc.) for children, especially children with disabilities.
  - Parent voluntary workers and other students such as those involved in “Inclusive Education clubs” or other similar initiatives support teachers, such as by helping to produce teaching and learning materials (using low cost local materials), and spreading the message about Inclusive Education through drama.
- **HI links inclusive education to rehabilitation:**
  - For example, children with disabilities who benefit from inclusive education projects can be referred to health and rehabilitation centres and given the support they need, including rehabilitation sessions. This support will enable them to become more independent and continue on at school.



# “Our goal is to advance the right to education for all”



Sandra Boisseau,  
HI's Global Inclusive  
Education Specialist

## What is inclusive education?

More than **264 million children and youth** are out of school. **One third of out-of-school children** have a disability – they are the largest group of out-of-school children. Where enrolment of children with disabilities is possible, retention is often made difficult by an environment that does not or not sufficiently take into account their specific needs. More than 50 per cent are out of school before completing primary education. **Access to learning and retention remain major challenges.**

This limits opportunities for learning and inclusion and exposes youth to multiple forms of violence, precariousness and social risk.

As individuals, we all have different ways of learning which often change over time. Inclusive education is **an approach that recognises the diversity of individual learners** who have specific needs and creates learning environments to meet these needs. **It takes into account the individual teaching and learning needs of all marginalised and vulnerable children and youth:** for example, children with disabilities, refugee or displaced

children, street children, girls, and groups of children from ethnic minorities. The aim of inclusive education is to ensure these children have equal rights and opportunities in education.

## How is HI helping to improve the current situation?

HI has been working in the inclusive education sector since 1998. Our action focuses on children with disabilities, who are among the most vulnerable and excluded.

We work extensively in this sector and some thirty countries implement inclusive education projects. In 2018, we reached more than **127,000 beneficiaries.**

We aim to **improve access of children with disabilities to inclusive quality education and retention**, in order to advance their rights and improve their social participation and quality of life.

An effective inclusive education system adopts a **two-pronged approach** and seeks to strike a balance between **systemic changes** in policies, practices and attitudes, and **specific support to learners with disabilities**, for example, by providing them with assistive devices.

We implement this approach by providing direct assistance to children with disabilities and their families through individual support and improved education, social and health services, by helping education actors improve their knowledge of disability, change attitudes and advance professional practices, and by promoting the development of inclusive education policies nationally.

## Why is it so important to invest in inclusive education?

Education is both **a right** and a means to advance other rights. **Every child**, including children with disabilities, has **the right to a basic, quality and free education.** These rights are recognised in international texts and conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Inclusive education is not designed simply to improve the education of children with disabilities; **it provides better quality learning opportunities for all learners.** The aim is for **children to learn together and build**



**together a better society** where everyone is included. When children learn together regardless of their differences, the whole of society benefits in the long run.

Practicing **cooperative and differentiated teaching**, making the **learning environment more accessible**, **safer and enjoyable**, and creating interaction between all actors involved in education are some examples of what inclusive education can do.

Investing in inclusive education **improves the quality of the whole education system**. Inclusive education can result in better social and academic performance for all learners.

Inclusive quality education can remove educational obstacles for all children, reduce the number of people out of school, and help combat discrimination in general.

## Are HI's programmes effective?

Thanks to HI's efforts and support to improve access and conditions for the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education systems, we have seen a significant shift in attitudes towards people with disabilities in communities where we work. Families are generally more open to enrolling their children in schools and the number of school-enrolled children with disabilities is rising.

There have also been significant changes in schools. The information collected on children sometimes takes into account the specific needs of children with disabilities. Teachers better understand disability, the needs of children with disabilities, and the inclusive approach.

Key partners in the countries where we work, ministries of national education are also more closely involved and sometimes request support to develop or revise national education policies for children with disabilities.

## Parental involvement

Parents play a big role in their child's education. Awareness-raising helps parents understand the importance of taking action and engaging in the education of all their children. It should be said, however, that education places a heavy burden on many families since, although education is free, in general they must pay school fees and buy school supplies, uniforms and so on. This is a major obstacle to school retention.

Under the parent peer educators system developed in Burundi, the "peer" is a parent of a child with disabilities who has enrolled his or her child in school and who volunteers to directly help their community by raising awareness of their children's schooling among his or her peers, if they have not already done so, and by ensuring, through support activities, their success at school. Parents with successful experiences can provide testimony on how schooling is possible when we work on the child's personal situation (his or her disability) and environment (external barriers and facilitators).

As well as raising the awareness of other parents, they also have a role to play in identifying children and adding them to the civil register, monitoring their progress, and referring them to health centres.

## Follow-up for schools and children

We have implemented a follow-up system as part of our projects. Our teams follow up activities done by children and schools. However, most follow-up is done by our partners, Disabled People's Organisations, or other civil society organisations and institutional actors.



# Testimonies

## MOZAMBIQUE

### On the path to school with Chelsia

Chelsia, 14, was born with cerebral palsy. Her parents are separated, and she lives with her mother and adopted brother, an orphan taken in by the family. They did not have the resources to send Chelsia to school until she was 8 years old, when she was finally given a wheelchair<sup>1</sup>. Her journey to school is full of pitfalls. The rutted sand path is long and uneven. Her mother is not free to go with her, so everyday she pays her neighbour to help Chelsia get to school. When she arrives at school, Chelsia enters her classroom using an access ramp built on school premises. Once inside, other students must help her onto the bench. She is reliant on other people to do routine tasks. For this determined girl, mobility is one of the main obstacles to studying and living like everyone else.

“We want to include Chelsia in our community-based rehabilitation programme because her parents cannot afford for her follow-up care or treatment in hospital. So we are going to talk with doctors and physiotherapists, organise consultations and then rehabilitation and motor stimulation sessions. At the moment, Chelsia cannot use her wheelchair independently, but we hope she will through exercise and home care,” explains Hilário Jamissone, community supervisor of HI’s inclusive education project. “Chelsia also has a lot of schoolwork to catch up with and it would be good to include her in a learning group with friends. They can explain things to her and help her improve



her school grades. This approach will make them closer friends and help them move forward together.”

1 [HI did not provide Chelsia with her wheelchair](#)



## GAZA, PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

**“When she wakes up, she can’t wait to go to school”**

HI’s inclusive education project in Gaza, in the Palestinian Territories, provides Nermeen and her daughter Shahed with personalised support and counselling at school and at home.

Shahed, 13, with physical and intellectual disabilities. In the past, her mother, Nermeen, was not closely involved in her daughter’s education and found it hard to convince

her family to accept invitations from the school. “I didn’t take part in outdoor activities because I was afraid of the negative attitude of my family and friends. I avoided situations where people might make comments or give me accusing looks. I had to stay at home,” says Nermeen.

A support group for parents of children with disabilities helped Nermeen overcome her problems. “I made my daughter my priority. I chose to be strong and with support from the school and the group, I finally convinced my family. I’m free to take part in lots of different school activities now,” she explains.

The group gives parents a chance to share their daily experiences and problems. This successful initiative provides them with a support network inside and outside meetings. Mothers like Nermeen no longer feel alone: “If I have a problem, I know where to go.”

Teachers are in regular contact with Nermeen. They update her on her daughter’s progress and use a liaison diary to exchange ideas with her, as they do with other parents. As a result, Shahed and her mother communicate with each other more, and she is more fulfilled. “She feels comfortable at school – she’s happy. She has made a lot of friends. When she wakes up, she can’t wait to go to school.”



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## Expert’s quote



Julia Mc Geown,  
HI’s Global Inclusive  
Education Specialist

« In many countries, there are still widespread beliefs that stigmatize children with disabilities and their families, such as the idea that witchcraft or curses can cause disabilities. As a result, many children remain hidden from society, often because parents are worried about their children’s safety and wellbeing if they send them to school. It’s crucial that we work with

communities and local groups to not only dispel these myths, but also to engage them in ways to develop a more inclusive society starting from childhood, and the school gates. For example, in some projects we work with trained community education volunteers who act as a bridge between home and school. They encourage parents to enroll their children, and work with them to support their children to learn and stay motivated to attend. These, and other community initiatives, can make a huge difference to the numbers of children with disabilities who access inclusive education.

There are many ingredients to successful inclusive education from trained inclusive teachers and accessible schools, to the right kind of policies and action plans at national level, but without getting the support of the local communities, and changing attitudes where there is stigma about disabilities, there will never be true change.”

## MALI

### Testimony of Mariam, mother of Oumou



“My name is Mariam. I’m Oumou’s mother. She is nine years old and she is wearing a prosthesis. Thanks to HI’s project, my daughter was given technical assistance and was able to go back to school. Oumou had to stop going to school because her prosthesis was defective and no longer fit her. My daughter had grown a

lot and neither her father nor I could afford to get a new one made for her. When Oumou was identified by the HI team’s community awareness officer, they had to raise our awareness and talk it over with us before we finally agreed to enrol her in school again. My husband and I never thought she would be able to study again.

But, fortunately, as part of the Inclusive Education in the Sahel project, Oumou was given a medical diagnosis and then a new adapted prosthesis was made for her. She can walk again now and go to school! Without this support, there is no way she could have gone back to school. Now our daughter goes to school like all her friends, and in the same school as them. She has moved up to the next class.

As for myself, I’m more aware and I’ve been trained in the importance of education for children with disabilities. I’ve learned a lot about disability and the benefits of sending children with disabilities to school. I’m a community awareness officer now and I go out and talk to children and their families.

My husband and I are very proud of our daughter, and we will continue to educate other parents of children with disabilities so they understand disability is not a life sentence, and that they too have the right to go to school like all other children.”



## NEPAL

### Testimony of Susillah, who was born deaf, gains independence through sign language



Susillah, 9, lives in a remote area in western Nepal. Susillah was born deaf and is not able to speak. With support from HI, Susillah attends school with other children in her village where she learns sign language. She's become one of the best students in her class.

Susillah, 9, lives in the remote mountains of Mugu

District in Far western Nepal. This region, regularly cut off from the rest of the country for several months due to a harsh climate and inaccessible roads, is one of the poorest in the country. Many families support themselves by growing their own crops and produce.

Susillah was born deaf and is not able to speak. Since she was five, she has been attending an inclusive school supported by HI. The association trains teachers by encouraging them to adopt teaching methods and educational tools adapted to the needs of children with disabilities. These teachers give specific lessons to Susillah and her friends who are also deaf in order to help them improve their sign language skills.

Other children in the school also learn sign language so that they can communicate with one another. Teachers also tell parents how important it is for their children, both with and without disabilities, to go to school. "Often, parents of children with disabilities are stigmatized and feel very shameful," says Julia Mc Geown, HI's Global Inclusive Education Specialist. "They tend to keep their children at home, sometimes hidden. HI fights against these prejudices and stigmas and wants every child to have access to education."

Thanks to HI, Susillah and her friends feel included in school activities and among their peers. Together, they play ball and other games. And when Susillah is asked what she prefers, she answers, "learning sign language and reading." Her teachers confirm that she is one of the best students in the class.



## SIERRA LEONE

**Amie is now feeling more supported in school, and is learning to read and write, with some modifications and adaptations.**



Amie is an engaging and lively 7 year old girl who is keen to go to school and join her friends in the classroom. She lives in a rural area in Sierra Leone, where she lives in a small hut with no running water. She attends SLMB Primary school in Mano Junction, Kenema. This is one of the model schools that has been developed as part of the Girls Education Challenge Transition project. The school has been renovated with accessibility modifications including ramps, accessible toilets, wider doorways, larger windows to improve the light source in the classrooms, and painted brightly to

make it easier to see for students with low vision.

Amie was born with a physical disability, and she has weakness and coordination difficulties affecting all her limbs, specifically her right hand and arm and left leg. This means that she finds walking difficult and finds it difficult to use her hands. Her left hand is more affected than her right, but she still has trouble gripping a pen in either hand for example. Humanity & Inclusion run a number of education projects in Sierra Leone including one as part of the girls' education challenge fund. As part of this project, Amie has been allocated an itinerant teacher called Abdul . Itinerant teachers have been trained to work with different children with disabilities who have been identified as needing support in the classroom. Abdul visits Amie at school twice a month and pays weekly home visits to check how she is getting on at home. He also organises a community meeting once a month to make sure Amie's parents are on board. He worked with both Amie's teacher and parents to develop an individual education plan, and during the monthly meeting they discuss how that is going and what needs to be updated and changed, in order to support her progress.

Amie is now feeling more supported in school, and is learning to read and write, with some modifications and adaptations, thanks to the help offered by her itinerant teacher. She is also feeling more encouraged that she will be able to succeed which is increasing her confidence. The community meetings have helped her parents and teacher to understand why she has the difficulties that she has, and how they can support her. Her parents are very pleased with her progress and now are more committed to supporting her to stay in school.