Inclusive Education in Germany

Inclusive education in general means that all students, regardless of any physical, mental, social or personal capacities and abilities, are welcomed and allowed to participate in regular schools in their neighborhood. Since 2009, with the ratification of the UN Disability Rights Convention, Germany has obliged to represent and defend the rights of disabled people. Therein, especially article 24 concentrates on the education of disabled students. By degrees, the individual federal states in Germany are striving to change their legal regulations and school laws in order to guarantee equal participation and individual support in school. Therefore, they currently develop new programs, redesign schools and classrooms, work on the training of teachers and cooperate with other professions in order to suit the individual needs of each student. Inclusive schools in Germany try to promote and focus on the student’s strengths, aim to develop a school culture of respect and belonging and make an effort to offer an educational program all children can benefit from. Therefore, many schools are changing or developing new concepts or guidelines which aim to reduce exclusion, discrimination and barriers to learning so that differences between children are seen as resources for learning. Since Germany has established and still consists of a highly differentiated system of schools for children with special needs in various supporting sectors like for example for vision, hearing, learning or physical and motoric development, it required and still requires tremendous structural and systematical steps to achieve a change of perspective.

Today, six years after the ratification of the UN Convention, the educational inclusion of children with handicaps is not yet completely implemented in regular schools. Although disabled students legally have the right to attend a regular school, the school is allowed to mention reservations if the school’s personal, material or spatial conditions cannot fulfill the children’s individual needs. This slows down the progress of inclusive learning and demand that many German schools have to modify, develop and change their attitudes towards a human-rights based approach. Moreover, it requires a regular cooperation of everybody involved in the education of children. Apart from the right to be educated at a regular school it also has to be mentioned that all children with handicap also have the opportunity to go to a special needs school if this is their will.
The recommendations of the Education Ministers’ Conference (KMK) as well as international influences, like for example the Salamanca Declaration of the UNESCO have certainly expedited the development of inclusive learning in Germany but it will still be the task of the individual federal states to introduce collaborative learning and make it a matter of course.