



**INCLUSIVE
EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION**

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Case Study Visit Report:

Zaleo School, Madrid, 16–18 November 2016

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full version
ECE:	Early childhood education
EU:	European Union
IECE:	Inclusive Early Childhood Education
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAG:	Project Advisory Group
SEN:	Special educational needs



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Agency gratefully acknowledges the generous help, support and warm welcome provided by the hosts in Madrid and Zaleo School, in particular María José Ruíz, country National Co-Ordinator, María Yolanda Muñoz Martínez and Ana Díaz Cappa. Thanks also go to the school's educational and support staff, and the children and parents, all of whom gave up their time to meet with us in Madrid.

Finally, the Agency would like to acknowledge the key role of the PAG members and national experts who took part in the visit and provided additional support.



PREAMBLE: THE IECE PROJECT


This report on the case study visit to Madrid and Zaleo School, Spain, is part of the Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE) project, conducted by the Agency from 2015 to 2017. The project includes a total of eight such visits in different European countries.

The project's overall goal is to identify, analyse and subsequently promote the main characteristics of quality inclusive ECE for all children from three years old to the start of primary education.

Thus the project focuses on the structures and processes that can ensure a systemic approach to providing high-quality inclusive ECE that effectively meets the academic and social learning needs of all the children from the school group's local community.

The project started off with a focus on the five thematic areas for improving ECE that were raised by EU and OECD working groups for this field (EU, 2014; OECD, 2014):

- Access to quality ECE for all children. From the perspective of the project, this principle refers to facilitating access for all children in the community, with particular concern for the most vulnerable, such as children with disabilities and SEN, immigrants and newcomers, and other at-risk children and families.
- Workforce quality. This principle calls for the employment of appropriately trained staff with access to continuous training and adequate working conditions, appropriate leadership, support staff inside and outside the school, and adequate resources and positive parent, interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration.
- Quality curriculum/content. This principle underlines the need for a holistic and flexible curriculum and pedagogy that promote child wellbeing and learning in all aspects of development – cognitive, social, language, emotional and physical – and enable children to be meaningfully and actively engaged in a safe but open and stimulating environment.
- Evaluation and monitoring. This not only refers to how children's development and learning is monitored, but also to the ECE provision's level of effectiveness to meet established quality standards that ensure a quality learning environment for all children.
- Governance and funding. This principle considers how public funding and leadership models are used accountably to ensure that a quality ECE service is



available to all children and is managed with a constant focus on enabling each child's holistic growth and learning.

Project activity and project outputs will include:

- A literature and policy review providing the conceptual framework for the project and including a review of international and European research literature and policy papers on ECE.
- Country reports providing information on policy and practice in inclusive ECE for all children at national level.
- European practitioners' perceptions of and practices for inclusive ECE: a qualitative analysis of descriptions of 32 examples of inclusive ECE provisions.
- Detailed reports of the eight selected case study sites, including analysis of the key project themes investigated.
- Recommendations designed to meet policy-makers' needs: the project synthesis report will draw on evidence from all project activities; the key issues/factors facilitating quality inclusion in ECE will be analysed and translated into recommendations.
- A self-assessment/self-reflection tool for the ECE setting.



1. INTRODUCTION: SELECTED CASE STUDY VISIT OF THE IECE PROJECT

This report provides information about the case study visit that the Agency team conducted in Madrid, Spain, in November 2016.

Zaleo School was selected, along with seven other sites, from examples of inclusive practice in ECE submitted by national experts and Agency Representative Board members. The eight selected examples were willing to be visited and studied by a project team in order to understand the quality features of inclusive ECE provision.

In order to support the countries in identifying examples of inclusive practice in ECE, the Agency team, in collaboration with the PAG members, established criteria that the example provisions were expected to meet. These criteria, which were also used to select the eight examples, were:

- Relevance of the site
- Clarity of the information provided
- Evidence of the following:
 - respect for diversity;
 - promotion of participation and engagement;
 - holistic curriculum;
 - skilled workforce;
 - collaboration and partnership;
 - smooth transitions;
 - quality assurance;
 - self-evaluation to inform improvement.

The selected examples also needed to reflect diverse geographical locations across Europe.

A team of Agency staff, PAG members and country experts visited Madrid and Zaleo School, from 16 to 18 November 2016. The visit provided opportunities to hear first-hand about developments in the city and the pre-school's ECE provisions, to observe classes and to interview different stakeholder groups: manager, teachers, support teachers, parents and children. Interviews were conducted according to a schedule to provide consistency across the eight project case study visits. In addition, relevant documents on national and regional policy and practice were collected prior to and during the visit. All visiting project participants provided first impressions at a forum on the last day of the visit and then submitted written feedback about the inclusive



features of the ECE provision at Zaleo School. All these sources of evidence have been used to draft this report.

An analysis of all the above data led to the identification of three main themes in how Zaleo School is enhancing the inclusivity of its ECE provision:

- 1 Family involvement
- 2 Holistic approach
- 3 Shared vision of inclusion.

These are described in detail in Sections 3 to 5 of this report. Section 2 gives an account of the background of inclusive provision within inclusive education in Spain and in Zaleo School.



2. THE CONTEXT

2.1 Inclusive education in Spain

The principles of the Spanish education system are equity and quality.

The principle of equity ensures that the system pays attention to all the diverse learners' educational needs throughout the whole education process.

Teachers, education centres and the regional administrations implement these measures.

Teachers encourage a type of education that is inclusive by using all the resources available to them. These include appropriate methodological approaches, reinforcement of curricular contents, teaching and learning strategies and so on.

The types of measures that are implemented in mainstream educational centres include:

– **Ordinary measures**

They have an impact on the school's general organisation and focus on:

- the organisation of the learner groups;
- strategies that favour universal accessibility and enable learners' active participation in their learning process;
- tutor and guidance action;
- the use of spaces;
- co-ordination and teamwork between the different professionals and collaborators at school and in the classroom;
- external stakeholders' participation in social and educational actions;
- guidance, training and family mediation actions that favour families' involvement in their children's education process.

– **Extraordinary measures**

The implementation of these measures requires prior detection and diagnosis of the learners' educational needs, followed by a psycho-pedagogic assessment report that will lead to:

- more specific actions;
- the use of more specialised resources, not only by the classroom teacher but also with the support of specialised teachers.



Learners with a specific need for educational support can be schooled in:

- a mainstream educational centre;
- an educational centre that gives priority to the schooling of learners with specific educational needs;
- special education centres.

Pre-primary education (0–6 years) is organised into two cycles of three years each. The first one (0–3 years) is on a voluntary basis for families, where the purpose is to give educational assistance and attention to ECE. The second one (3–6 years) is voluntary, free and constitutes the first level of school education.

The Ministry of Education establishes minimum curricula for both the first and second cycles. Autonomous communities are responsible for deciding on additional curriculum contents and for arranging materials. Each autonomous community pays its own teachers and gives grants for school management and materials.

Attention is paid to diversity in pre-primary education.

– **Ordinary measures**

The methodology regarding pre-primary education is inclusive and focuses on prevention, with the following features:

- highly experiential and visual;
- it encourages hands-on activities through games, songs, rhymes and workshops in a motivating way;
- it may implement project-based work focusing on a specific topic that is usually prevention-oriented, such as:
 - identification of emotions;
 - phonological awareness;
 - basic skills for co-existence, etc.

– **More specific educational measures**

Whenever tutors detect a learner with any kind of SEN, the following procedure is applied:

- The learner is transferred to the Education and Psycho-Pedagogic Guidance Body for Early Childhood.
- An assessment report is carried out, which usually stipulates ‘slow maturity development’, since children under the age of five cannot undergo any type of psycho-pedagogic assessment.



- A meeting is held with the tutors and the families.
- Guidelines are provided to work with the child both at home and in the classroom.
- Specialised teachers, such as therapy teachers or hearing and language therapists/teachers, are involved.

(More information about the inclusive education system in Spain is available in the country report, in the description of the example and in Spain's national overview: www.european-agency.org/national-policy-and-provision/Spain).

2.2 Zaleo School

Zaleo state mainstream pre-school opened in 1985. It teaches the whole pre-school stage (first and second cycles) to children between 3 months and 6 years. It has six classrooms for learners from 0 to 6 years.

For Zaleo, educating in diversity means adopting a model which facilitates learning for every child from different family, personal and social situations to give an educational response which allows each of them to optimally develop all their abilities. All of them have the opportunity to express themselves, create, communicate, diversify their learning and develop all kinds of competences (artistic, creative, researching, reading, musical, digital, etc.) through educational settings recreated inside and outside the school by the teachers, using every language and resource appropriate to their age.

The protagonists in the teaching-learning process in Zaleo are not only the learners, but also teachers and families.

Zaleo's main projects are:

- Sharing Education and Learning with Families (S.E.L.F.)
- Art in infant education
- Science in infant education
- ICT in infant education
- Outdoor learning.

The percentage of learners with specific support needs ranges between 5 and 10%, (depending on the school year). This necessitates close co-ordination with other external resources, such as the Area Early Intervention Team. Therefore, diversity in the school prompts it to adopt a model which facilitates the learning of every child, from different family, cultural, personal and social situations.



There are 14 teachers, a specialist in English (who is shared with another school) and six administrative and services staff. The school leadership team comprises the headmistress and a secretary. This team believes that education is an instrument for personal and social development.

The development of the school's own innovative and creative project mainly entails:

- Continuous staff training
- Teamwork
- Social commitment
- A free and open space where it can include work with families and the educational, social and cultural agents surrounding it.

About 85% of the families are of Spanish origin and 15% are from other nationalities. Their socio-economic level is middle income.

More information is available on the Zaleo School website:

www.educa.madrid.org/web/eei.zaleo.madrid/index-nueva.htm



3. THE SETTING'S HIGHLIGHT (THEME 1): FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Sharing Education and Learning with Families (S.E.L.F.) is one of Zaleo pre-school's key principles and main projects. It represents its social commitment to working with families towards a comprehensive education for their children. It hopes to open new doors to culture and their surroundings in an innovative, interactive and caring environment that helps the children to learn, grow happily and be active participants in society.

S.E.L.F. aims to:

- encourage the role of families as active educational agents in the integral education of children and involve them in the teaching-learning processes;
- recognise the local community and be recognised within it;
- develop new competences (for life and curricular ones) in their pupils which would not be possible without other agents;
- improve co-operation and relationships between families and the school;
- promote the feeling of contribution on a joint project between families;
- encourage mutual recognition of the role of both families and teachers in the task of education;
- open the school's doors to everyone who wants, needs or can share knowledge about something with them (adults and children);
- promote the idea that the school should also be a place for adults' lifelong learning;
- give a better response to learners' needs.

The implementation requirements include:

- Creativity
- Flexibility
- Open school in contact with social and cultural environments
- New methodological approaches
- Listening to families
- Mutual respect
- Accepting suggestions
- Families (other agents) are present in day-to-day school life
- Understanding that organisation is the best tool for achieving inclusive goals



- Introducing changes gradually.

At the beginning of every year, the school has a meeting with parents and asks if they would like to be involved in workshops. Many parents realise that they have skills and knowledge they were not aware of. The school needs to plan well in advance to involve parents and give them opportunities to be engaged. The frequency of parents' involvement can be daily, weekly, monthly or once a year. The aim is to create a community and be together. Their policy is that families are not a nuisance, but a valuable resource for the learning process.

Once a year, on a Saturday morning, the school invites families to see and experience how it interacts with the children. The school is not afraid of families and wants to include them in the educational community.

It has identified and distinguished the roles of teachers and families.

Teachers' roles involve asking families about their abilities and offering their knowledge to put into practice an activity with children (time, groups, materials and pedagogical help). Each proposal is assumed by a staff member, who is responsible for helping and supporting the family during the experience, looking for agreements, completing an activity report and conducting an evaluation.

Families' roles involve thinking about their own abilities, deciding what knowledge they can share, working with any group in the school, designing their own activity or workshop, sharing information with the support teacher and writing their own opinion.

Regarding this new approach, teachers' main fears and concerns include:

- Will we be judged?
- Will we be able to let families be the centre of attention?
- Will we be able to accept their proposals?
- Will children accept their presence without any problem?
- How can I help them?
- Will families want to join in and be part of this new approach to learning?

Families' main concerns include:

- What will teachers say about me?
- Will I be able to convey what I want to the children?
- Will teachers want me to come back to the school again?
- How can I help them?



- Will children accept my presence without any problem?

Thanks to families, children can do a number of activities and develop competences that would not be possible without parents' involvement. Some 73 workshops are run by families and support teachers, including moths for life, aquarium, music, theatre, carpentry, volcanoes, art, electronics, robotics, travel diary, pasta making, relationships with the environment, chemistry, classroom library, etc.



4. THEME 2: HOLISTIC APPROACH

In conversations with the headmistress and the staff, they indicated that they take a holistic approach. They believe education is an instrument for children's personal and social development, including physical, cognitive, language and emotional development.

In each classroom or school project, children are offered the opportunity each day to create, express themselves, make themselves heard and felt at school and, most importantly, also outside school. This is by means of activities like exhibiting paintings and sculptures, doing scientific experiments, etc., in libraries, cultural centres, museums, public parks and other areas of the neighbourhood. This enables the school to fulfil its goal: to make today's children visible.

The school has a specific plan for diversity. It is understood as a global and integrative action of the school to adapt the educational response to the learners' characteristics and cater for everybody: those with learning difficulties, those with a higher capacity or motivation to learn, as well as those whose diversity has more to do with their social or cultural environment.

In this way, the school tries to give a global and integrative educational response to all the learners, to establish curricular and organisational measures to adapt the curriculum to the different needs learners may have, to organise the different groups so as to carry out ordinary and specific support measures, and to efficiently use all the resources the school has, with special emphasis on resources from families and the social, educational and cultural background of the school.

Diversity always has to be present when planning educational action in pre-school: children from 0 to 6 years are so different that it is essential to start working with the differences. Every child will learn if they have help. However, this help cannot be the same for the whole group, but will depend on the needs that are detected in each of its members.

From this approach, the school talks about individualisation of teaching, which it understands as the process by which, starting from the analysis of the learners' individual characteristics, it integrates educational action from the concept of the child as a 'global and unique person'.

For the Zaleo pre-school team, educating in diversity means adopting a model which facilitates the learning process of all children. It is therefore necessary to find solutions for organisation, methodology, adaptation of the curriculum, etc., in order to give the most adequate, diverse and creative response which facilitates the optimal development of each learner's competences.



The curriculum focuses on developing artistic, scientific and technological competences and, above all, the learners' day-to-day competences. To this end, the school offers a multitude of projects and classroom activities focused on giving all learners access to learning from different activities and approaches. Some of these projects can be consulted on www.educa.madrid.org/web/eei.zaleo.madrid/index-nueva.htm, which shows the school's strength with regard to the curriculum for all.

Zaleo's organisational structure is:

- Flexible: organisation must be a tool at the service of curricular decisions. It creates a general action framework, but evaluation must be continuous so the detected problems can be solved.
- Functional and participative: organisation should be such that it allows and facilitates the attainment of the planned objectives in each yearly didactic programme, in collaboration with the early intervention team and including the presence of other educational agents in the school, such as the families or others from their social and cultural setting.

More information (in Spanish) is available at:

www.youtube.com/watch?t=16&v=ljtjy5jWDYk



5. THEME 3: SHARED VISION OF INCLUSION

5.1 Strong leadership

The visit participants were impressed by the headmistress's passion, commitment, inclusive policy and values and by the highly motivated and engaged staff. They all share the same culture and vision of inclusion. As the headmistress said, 'More resources and more staff does not mean more inclusion. You need to be 100% confident about inclusion in order to implement it in practice'.

In the conversation, she explained that she believes in a teamwork approach and in close collaboration between families, the school and its surroundings. The quality of interaction with children is not only related to the child–staff ratio and the resources, but also to the culture of inclusion and co-operation with parents and the local community. This collaboration introduces positive changes to the educational contexts and generates new challenges and educational opportunities for the family, the school and society, since they are considered important educational resources which undoubtedly improve the quality of education. She pointed out that inclusion is beneficial for children both with and without disabilities, because they are provided with realistic life experiences that prepare them to live in the community and develop positive attitudes towards others who are different.

She indicated that it is important for the staff to undertake continuous training to be able to respond to the different needs of all the children.

For more than 20 years, the leadership team has supported and encouraged innovation and continuous improvement, which have allowed Zaleo to feature in the top rankings of schools in Spain. It stands out for listening to the needs of its learners and their families.

5.2 Collaboration with the local community

In their discussions with staff and parents, the visit participants were informed that one of the values and principles guiding the educational work is to guarantee integration in the environment through co-operation with the neighbourhood's other services and institutions.

Zaleo prioritises the idea that education must not be limited to educational institutions. It is possible to learn in any space and in society. In order to do so, a connection and co-operation between families, schools and the community are crucial. Parents' involvement in the school and co-operation with local services are considered quality indicators. As the school is small, it uses community services so it is an open school. It develops local learning communities and promotes close collaboration in daily activities with the local community, e.g.: artists, library, park,



cultural centres, etc. The pre-school is a space for creation, discovery and research for children, families, teachers and the environment.

Visit participants were also informed about Zaleo's social and cultural commitment. It has managed to make pre-school learners visible in environments such as the arts and science through the implementation of innovative and pioneering projects.

In recent years, involvement in diverse European and national projects has made its model open, flexible and shared with the whole community.

5.3 Innovation

In the discussions with the staff, the visit participants were informed that Zaleo is a pioneer in including ICT in pre-school classrooms. It has been responsible for launching innovative and creative projects using these resources, as well as for the training of other educational teams in Spain. It has led and participated in European projects to share and acquire new experiences with ICT. It has collaborated with IBM (KidSmart project), the Technical University of Madrid, the Autonomous University of Madrid and BT (in the project 'Learning with ICT in an inclusive pre-school. Rescuing the hidden languages of childhood'), among others, to boost and develop these types of competences in learners from pre-school, adapting to the reality of their environment. This is because the school has to respond to today's societal challenges and prepare learners to understand the world in which they happen to live, making them autonomous to participate and get on in it.

This collaboration helped the school to create an innovative, creative and inclusive curriculum, through the use of ITC.

One of its main ICT resources is Radio Zaleo: six podcasts created with the participation of children and families. That is an important and new way of learning and making families and communities participate. The details are available on the following websites:

www.educa2.madrid.org/web/zaleando/comenius-regio

www.educa2.madrid.org/web/cec/home



6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Zaleo's inclusive ECE model, presented in this report, was observed and appreciated by the participants during the visit and the relevant discussions. It is a holistic early years education approach for all children, irrespective of ability, educational need, culture and gender.

Participants highlighted that it is accessible to the diverse range of all children in the locality. It promotes the participation and learning of all in regular activities.

There seems to be a focus on acceptance of families as educational agents and active family participation in the school and curricular development. There is also an increase in the relationships with the social surroundings (library, park, cultural centres).

The discussions with staff and parents confirmed the focus on better and more efficient use of technologies and improving the ways of communication, as well as greater dissemination of its work via websites, meetings and activities in the local area.

The visit participants stated that the strengths of Zaleo pre-school are: a clear inclusive approach to support diversity; strong and distributive leadership with good collaboration with staff and parents; a very friendly and relaxed atmosphere and climate at school; teamwork approach of staff and parents – difficult to distinguish between staff members and parents; focus on the 'hidden curriculum'; paying attention to the culture and ethos of the pre-school; staff take a holistic view of the child to ensure their learning and care needs are met; a focus on everyone's strengths – children, professionals, parents; new technology is integrated into the pre-school's daily activities; creativity, flexibility, innovation, collaboration – some of the values of the pre-school; focus on 'learning by playing' and 'learning with projects'.

6.1 Areas for further discussion

Zaleo pre-school strives to continue improving its services. The visit participants made some proposals for further reflection on key areas related to inclusivity:

- transition arrangements for children with additional needs (SEN/disability) to mainstream primary schools. Zaleo facilitates learning for all children and enables them to develop all their potential and abilities. However, the transition to mainstream primary education is not so easy. As such, many children have to go to special schools. Extra work is needed to extend the inclusive model to primary education.