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# MALAWI EARLY GRADE READING ACTIVITY

## *Disability Education Resource Guide (DERG)*



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# **Malawi Early Grade Reading Activity**

## **Disability Education Resource Guide (DERG)**

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## Table of Contents

Abbreviations .....	iv
SECTION 1: Introduction .....	5
SECTION 2: Children with Special Needs—Who Are They?.....	6
Basic Principles in Special Needs Education .....	6
SECTION 3: Identification and Assessment.....	7
First Steps in Getting Support.....	7
Where to start .....	7
What does assessment include?.....	7
SECTION 4: Education Services for Children with Disabilities in Malawi.....	8
Specialist Teaching Provision by Itinerant Teachers.....	8
Roles of itinerant teachers: .....	9
Where Do Children with Disabilities Receive Their Education in Malawi? .....	9
SECTION 5: What Is the Role of Parents of Children with Disabilities?.....	13
SECTION 6: What Is an Individualized Education Plan?.....	14
Members of the IEP Team.....	14
Background Map .....	15
Review of the IEP .....	15
Role of Parents.....	15
Pupils' Involvement in Their Own IEPs .....	15
Summary Points on IEPs.....	15

## List of Tables

Table 1. Schools Serving Children with Special Needs in Malawi.....	9
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**Abbreviations**

EGRA	Early Grade Reading Activity
DERG	Disability Education Resource Guide
HI	hearing impaired
IEP	individualized education plan
LD	learning disabled
LEA	Local Education Authority
SNE	special needs education
VI	visually impaired

## SECTION 1: Introduction



*Visually impaired learners in a resource room  
(Photo credit: Augustine Kanyendula, Perkins  
International)*

Welcome to the Disability Education Resource Guide (DERG)! This guide is a product of USAID's Malawi Early Grade Reading Activity (EGRA) and will serve communities, educators, and families as they provide for all the children and young people in this country who are disabled or are identified as having a special educational need. The Guide provides detailed information about the schooling and specialized programs, services, and supports available to disabled and special needs youth in Malawi.

This Guide provides particular information for families—who have consistently called for better support for their children and themselves. It will aid the families of the most-disabled children, who are providing 24-hour care from birth, and the families of children struggling at school, who don't know where to turn for help.

The Guide will also serve teachers as well, both regular and specialist, and the many skilled staff from the health and social care professions who strive to understand the individual needs of every disabled child or child with a special educational need and to give these children the best possible services and support.

The Guide is initiated and developed as part of the Malawi EGRA as a starting point to help all those working with Malawi's youth understand how the education system works, and to show them what support is available for students with disabilities so that parents or teachers can make informed decisions about the education of children with disabilities in Malawi.

Information covered in the Guide includes the following:

- Who are children with special needs?
- How to identify and assess children with disabilities for special learning needs.
- Education services for children with disabilities in Malawi.
- The role of parents of children with disabilities

We hope the information in this DERG will help educators and parents feel more informed and more confident when making decisions that affect the education of children with disabilities.

## SECTION 2: Children with Special Needs—Who Are They?



*All children have a right to quality education. (Photo credit: Augustine Kanyendula, Perkins International)*

Children with special educational needs are children first and have much in common with other children of the same age. All children with special educational needs have learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than it is for most children of the same age. These children may therefore need extra or different help from that given to other children of the same age. Special educational needs may arise from four different areas of disability:

- Physical
- Sensory
- Mental health
- Learning disability

Special educational needs may arise from conditions that cause a child to *learn* in a way that is different from the way

other children learn. It is also important to understand that a child with a disability may not necessarily have any special educational needs arising from that disability. Compared to his or her peers, a child with special educational needs finds it more difficult to learn or to adapt socially. S/he may have difficulties

- doing school work;
- reading and writing;
- communicating with others; or
- learning in school due to limitations in sight, hearing, or physical mobility.

### Basic Principles in Special Needs Education

The basic points to keep in mind while reading through this Guide are the following:

- All children, including children with disabilities, have a right to an education that is appropriate to their needs.
- Views of parents should be taken into account, and the wishes of the children with disabilities should be listened to.
- Children with special educational needs should get a broad, well-balanced, and relevant education.



*Mobility aids, like this wheelchair, provide classroom support for children with disabilities. (Photo credit: Augustine Kanyendula, Perkins International)*

## **SECTION 3: Identification and Assessment**

Teachers or parents who identify a child as one who has difficulty learning must consider certain areas to plan appropriately for the child's education. To find out more about the child and how he or she learns, a teacher may look at the following areas:

- Social or behavioral skills
- Communication skills
- Learning skills
- Physical or sensory skills

A doctor's diagnosis of a specific condition or disability does not provide enough information for planning the child's individual educational needs. No two children are exactly alike. Children identified with the same diagnosis often have different abilities and learning needs, and they will require different supports.

### **First Steps in Getting Support**

#### ***Where to start***

If a child is having difficulty learning, the first step for parents is to talk to the classroom teacher to determine what might be causing these difficulties and to determine if there are any small changes that can be made to improve the situation. Teachers can use a number of informal methods to identify learning needs, including:

- Talking with the child
- Observing the child in the classroom
- Analyzing the child's class work
- Doing an informal reading or math inventory
- Administering screening tests

Many districts have school-based teams that might include special education teachers, counsellors, administrators, and regular classroom teachers who are knowledgeable about learning difficulties and learning strategies. Teachers may consult with the team to develop strategies to address the learning needs of individual students. If it is apparent that school-based strategies aren't enough, the teacher, in consultation with parents, will make a referral for a specialized assessment. Written informed parental consent is required before any specialized assessment of a child's abilities. Informed consent means that parents have a clear understanding of the activity or assessment that they are granting consent for. Parents have the right to refuse consent for any proposed specialized assessment. If this happens, the school must document the reasons for the refusal and the actions taken to resolve concerns.

#### ***What does assessment include?***

A variety of assessments may be used to determine a child's intellectual, social, emotional, physical, sensory, communication, and/or behavioral development. A child's development could be assessed in one area or in various combinations, depending on the child's needs.

An assessment has three general purposes:

1. To find out if the child has a special learning need
2. To identify the child's strengths and needs
3. To identify appropriate programming and services that will meet the child's individual needs



*Children with disabilities learn better in an inclusive environment. (Photo credit: Augustine Kanyendula, Perkins International)*

There are a number of ways parents can be involved in the assessment process. Parents can gather information that may be useful, including medical reports, notes on recent behavioral changes, and observations about their child's learning needs, such as how he or she behaves and learns in different settings. A number of assessment procedures include forms for parents to complete. Completing these forms will ensure the data reflect parents' perspectives. When assessment results and additional information have been compiled, the school will contact the parents of the child and arrange for a meeting to explain the results, discuss recommendations for further action, and get parents' input on any related decisions.

#### **SECTION 4: Education Services for Children with Disabilities in Malawi**

Malawi is signatory to a number of world declarations and has put in place policies

that aim to ensure that the country can provide equal educational opportunities to all learners. Malawi offers special needs education in primary and secondary schools in three different ways:

1. **Designated special schools.** These are schools that are dedicated to serving a particular special needs population, for example hearing impaired students. Malawi has six special schools for the deaf.
2. **Integrated resource centers/units in mainstream schools.** These are mainstream schools or institutions that integrate the special needs students into the general student population. In these schools, children with disabilities learn together with their non-disabled peers in the same classroom with support from both regular and specialist teachers.
3. **Itinerant teaching program.** In this program, specially trained teachers travel among schools in a certain zone to provide services for students with special educational needs. More detail is provided below.

#### **Specialist Teaching Provision by Itinerant Teachers**

Itinerant teachers are usually qualified school teachers with some formal training in the education of children with special needs. Itinerant teachers aim to be a support to

the child, regular teachers, and parents. Their support service can begin shortly following the birth of a child with special needs and can follow that child through schooling, as appropriate. In addition, itinerant teachers can provide a teaching service for the pre-school child in the home if such assistance is considered necessary.

Each itinerant teacher has responsibility for a particular zone of the country and travels to meet the children, teachers, parents/guardians, and other professionals involved with the child as necessary.

### ***Roles of itinerant teachers:***

- Travel around local mainstream schools and communities to offer advice, resources, and support to learners with special needs, their teachers, and their parents
- Give advice to schools regarding suitable teaching methods and classroom management strategies to support children with disabilities
- Conduct assessments and give advice regarding equipment commonly used by children with various impairments
- Sensitize parents on the importance of sending children with disabilities to school



*A visually impaired girl uses a hand frame as an assistive device. (Photo credit: Augustine Kanyendula, Perkins International)*

### **Where Do Children with Disabilities Receive Their Education in Malawi?**

There are schools throughout Malawi that can accommodate children with special educational needs. Most districts have at least one school that provides services for either visually impaired (VI), hearing impaired (HI), or students with learning difficulties (LD)—and some will have resources for all three. **Table 1** provides a list of schools in Malawi that serve children with special needs, according to district and category of impairment, and type of school.

**Table 1. Schools Serving Children with Special Needs in Malawi**

Education Division	District	Name of School/Resource Center	Type of School	Category of Impairment
Northern Education Division	Karonga	St. Mary's Boys Primary	Boarding Mainstream	VI
		Nyungwe Primary	Boarding	VI

Education Division	District	Name of School/Resource Center	Type of School	Category of Impairment
Central Eastern Education Division		Karonga School for the Deaf	Boarding	HI
		Bandawe School for the Deaf	Boarding	HI
	Nkhata Bay	St. Maria Gorretti	Boarding	VI
		Kalambwe Primary School	Mainstream	LD
	Rumphu	St. Denis Primary School	Mainstream	LD
	Mzimba North	Ekwendeni Primary	Boarding	VI
		Kafukule Primary School	Mainstream	LD
	Mzuzu City	Chiwavi Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Mzuzu CCAP Primary School	Mainstream	LD
	Mzimba South	Euthini Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Kaphuta Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Embangweni School for the Deaf	Boarding	HI
	Kasungu	Chilanga Primary School	Boarding	VI
		Chisuwe Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Santhe Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Mtunthama Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Chankhanga Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Nkhamenya School	Mainstream	LD
Nkhotakhota		Nkhotakhota Local Education Authority (LEA)	Mainstream	VI
Salima		Salima LEA	Boarding	VI

Education Division	District	Name of School/Resource Center	Type of School	Category of Impairment	
Central Education Division	Dowa	Kaphatenga Primary	Mainstream	LD	
		Mvera Primary School	Mainstream	VI	
		Dowa Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Mponela Primary School	Mainstream	HI	
	Ntchisi	Malema Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
	Lilongwe Urban	Chinkhuti Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Shire Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Lilongwe Demonstration Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Mchesi Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Ngwenya Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Biwi Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Chankhandwe Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Lilongwe Government Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Mkukula Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Chimutu Primary School	Mainstream	HI, LD, HI	
		Kawale Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Mtsiliza Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Kaliyeka Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Lilongwe Rural East	Bunda LEA	Mainstream	LD
			Kalumbu Primary School	Mainstream	LD
			Nathenje Primary School	Mainstream	LD
			Nkhoma Primary School	Mainstream	VI
		Lilongwe Rural West	Njewa Primary School	Mainstream	LD
			Chitedze Primary School	Mainstream	LD
	Kalolo Primary School		Mainstream	LD	
	Mchinji	Nambuma Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
		Kamuzu LEA Primary	Mainstream	LD	
Dedza	Kamwendo LEA	Mainstream	LD		
	St. Joseph	Boarding	LD		
	Dedza LEA	Mainstream	LD		
	St. Joseph Demonstration	Mainstream	LD		
	Thete Primary	Mainstream	VI		
Ntcheu	Muwa School for the Deaf	Boarding	HI		
	Gumbu Primary School	Mainstream	LD		

Education Division	District	Name of School/Resource Center	Type of School	Category of Impairment
South Eastern Education Division		Nsipe Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Nsiyaludzu Primary School	Boarding	VI
	Balaka	Kankao Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Mzimundilinde Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Mmanga Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		St. Louis Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Mpirisi Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Phalula Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Fere Primary School	Mainstream	LD
	Mangochi	Nkope Primary School	Boarding	VI
		Chimwala Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		St. Augustine Primary	Mainstream	LD
		Koche Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Chigwenya Primary School	Mainstream	LD
St. Louis Primary School		Mainstream	LD	
St. Teleza Primary School		Mainstream	LD	
Zomba	Domasi	Boarding	VI	
	Chikamveka Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
	Ndangopuma Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
	Makungulu Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
	St. Joseph Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
	Mponda Primary School	Mainstream	LD	
Shire Highlands Education Division	Blantyre (Rural)	Aquaid Dawn	Mainstream	LD
	Blantyre (Urban)	Nkolokoti Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Kapeni Demonstration Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Naizi Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Bangwe Primary School	Mainstream	LD
		Zingwangwa Primary School	Mainstream	LD
South West	Chikwawa	Makande Primary School	Boarding	VI

Education Division	District	Name of School/Resource Center	Type of School	Category of Impairment
Education Division		Lengwe Primary School	Mainstream	LD
	Nsanje	Mpatsa Primary School	Mainstream	VI
		Lulwe Primary School	Mainstream	VI
		Montfort Demonstration	Boarding Mainstream	VI, LD
	Chiradzulu	Maryview School for the Deaf	Boarding	HI
		Chisombezi Deaf-Blind Centre	Boarding	HI, VI
	Thyolo	Mtambanyama	Mainstream	LD
		Luchenza	Mainstream	LD
		Mountain View School for the Deaf	Boarding	HI
	Mulanje	Njedza Primary	Mainstream	LD
		Chimwa Primary	Mainstream	LD
		Chingoli Primary	Mainstream	LD
	Phalombe	Nazombe Primary	Boarding	VI
		Migowi Primary	Boarding/ Mainstream	HI
	Neno	Neno Primary	Mainstream	LD

## SECTION 5: What Is the Role of Parents of Children with Disabilities?

For parents, being an informed and contributing member of a child's learning team means

- participating in decisions that affect the child's education;
- giving written and informed consent for any specialized assessments;
- being fully informed of the school's and district's programs;
- providing relevant information that could affect the child's learning and behavior at school;
- receiving information on the child's learning and growth from teachers, head teachers, and other district staff;
- having access to information in the child's school files, including results of specialized assessments and reports;
- being consulted before the child is placed in a special education program;
- receiving reports on the child's progress at regular intervals during the school year;

- providing written authorization for any additional services the child might need;
- being consulted on and giving informed written consent to the child's individualized education plan (IEP); and
- questioning decisions that may not best serve the child's learning needs, and working with the team to find a better solution.

## SECTION 6: What Is an Individualized Education Plan?

An IEP is a written document that specifies the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, based on a thorough assessment of the student's strengths and needs—that is, the strengths and needs that affect the student's ability to learn and to demonstrate learning.

An IEP contains information about the

- pupil's strengths and needs;
- pupil's current level of performance;
- pupil's priority learning needs;
- resources and personnel involved;
- implementation of the plan; and
- date of review of the IEP.



*IEP workshop participants role play an IEP development team. (Photo credit: Augustine Kanyendula, Perkins International)*

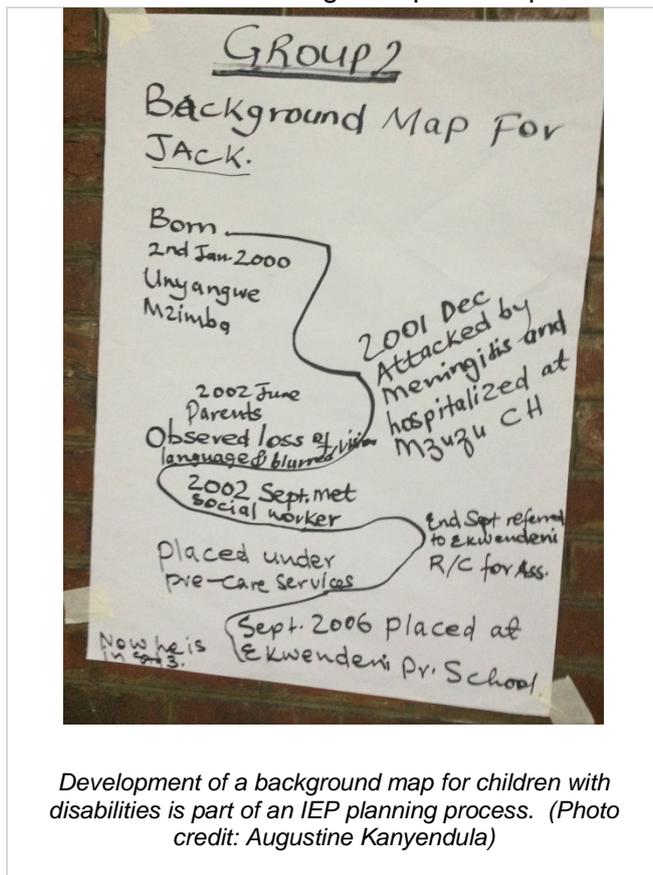
Why have an IEP for pupils with special educational needs? IEPs

- **assist** with long-term planning;
- **promote** sharing of information;
- **provide** for continuity;
- **allow** for allocation/transfer of resource and specialist services as required;
- **highlight** issues for teachers;
- **aid** successful inclusion;
- **provide** structure;
- **ensure** records are kept; and
- **identify** pupil progress at a level commensurate with ability.

### Members of the IEP Team

The IEP development team includes the following members;

- The child's parents or guardian
- At least one of the child's regular education teachers (if the child is or may be participating in a regular education environment)
- At least one of the child's special education teachers
- A representative of the district who is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of the student
- Other individuals at the discretion of the school or parents who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child.



Development of a background map for children with disabilities is part of an IEP planning process. (Photo credit: Augustine Kanyendula)

### Background Map

The Background Map is the first stage in the IEP development, and it involves drawing lines that will connect the child's personal background. The background information traces the child's past, for instance, date of birth, how the child grew up, and places in which the child lived.

### Review of the IEP

It is good practice for schools to review each IEP at appropriate intervals, depending on the needs and progress of the pupil. In any case, however, schools should review IEPs not less than once per year.

### Role of Parents

Parents must be involved in the development and implementation of their child's IEP. Parents bring firsthand information about the strengths of the

child and their concerns for enhancing the education of their child. Parents must

- be consulted about an IEP as it is drawn up;
- receive a copy of the final plan; and
- be informed of any changes to the plan.

### Pupils' Involvement in Their Own IEPs

Pupils can be involved in developing and following their own IEPs, as well. Pupils can

- set their own targets;
- provide information about learning style, skills, and possible interventions; and
- monitor their own educational progress.

### Summary Points on IEPs

The IEP shows

- where the child is;
- where s/he should be going;
- how s/he will get there; and
- how long it will take and how to know when s/he has arrived.

When writing IEPs, it is important to

- collaborate;
- use a whole-school approach;
- involve parents; and
- involve the pupil, when possible.

IEPs should be practical, working documents and should include

- pupil strengths, needs, and abilities;
- priority learning needs and targets; and
- timeframes.