

Transferring the Notion of Good Practice  
when Working with Pupils with Emotional,  
Behavioural and Social Difficulties  
in a Cypriot Educational Context



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By

Stella Tryfonos

**CAMBRIDGE**  
**SCHOLARS**  

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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To my granddad, who was a great inspiration to me.



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## ABSTRACT

Pupils who present with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) at school have been the focus of extensive study, research and reports for many years in England. These have focused on exploring the nature of BESD, contributing factors relating to school and the schools that have shown evidence of good practice when working with these pupils. This work has reflected the situation in the English education system. In Cyprus, however, answers to questions about how best to educate pupils who may demonstrate BESD remain elusive.

In 2003, the Cypriot government approved a policy prioritising the education of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The policy instituted 'Zones of Educational Priority programme' as it is an area-based initiative. The schools joining this programme and working under the policy have been selected based on the areas in which they are located and the local populations' socio-economic and educational status. Additionally, many of the pupils registered in these schools present with BESD. Despite this fact, up to the time the research described in this book was conducted, the issue of good practice when working with these pupils seems to have been neglected by Cypriot researchers and educational authorities.

The study reported here was begun in 2008 and continued in 2009. It involved two primary schools operating under the Zones of Educational Priority policy in Cyprus and is a case study of what 'good practice' is perceived to be in relation to pupils with BESD. For the purposes of this research, 22 semi-structured interviews were carried out, as well as 29 lesson observations.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BERA	British Educational Research Association
BESD	Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties
CAMHS	Child and Adolescence Mental Health Services
CERE	Centre for Education and Research Evaluation, Cyprus
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EAZ	Education Action Zones
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
ECforRML	European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
EFA	Education For All
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPD	Educational Psychology Department
ESC	Educational Service Commission
EU	European Union
ICE	International Conference on Education
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
LEA	Local Education Authority
MEHER	Ministry of Education and Higher Education Research, France
MOEC	Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus
MOEPASE	Permanent Team of Work for the Promotion of Literacy and School Success
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe
PEN	Priority Education Network
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SWS	Social Welfare Services
PIO	Press And Information Office, Cyprus
PICy	Pedagogical Institute Cyprus
TA	Teaching Assistant
ZEP	Zone of Educational Priority (term as used in Cyprus translated in English)





# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **Introduction**

The issue of ‘good practice’ when working with pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) has been widely investigated in England – an overview of which is given in this chapter. In Cyprus, however, it is still not nearly so widely known about and has not been researched to any great extent. This book therefore explores the situation in the Cypriot education system and it is hoped that the findings will contribute to an expansion of the knowledge concerning this issue in Cyprus. Related to this is a key aspect of my investigation, which is that it documents Cypriot teachers’ and associated professionals’ own perceptions of aspects of this issue, which are clearly important but have not been sought previously.

This book is the result of a qualitative study that was undertaken between 2008 and 2009 and almost five years’ work before, during and since that time. The motivation for the study was to help good practice to be achieved when working with pupils with BESD. The findings are presented and discussed to:

- enable teachers to meet the challenges of working with these pupils more effectively
- contribute to a better understanding of the nature of this issue
- help those with personal and professional interests in working with these pupils and schools to be ready to accommodate their needs.

### **1.1 The term ‘behavioural, emotional and social difficulties’ (BESD) in this study**

The research that was undertaken for the purposes of this book made extensive use of the term ‘Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties’ (BESD), so it is important to define at this point who the pupils with BESD are in the context of this study. This is especially important as the

study was conducted in Cyprus, where the term has not been officially adopted and applied so knowledge of the nature of these difficulties can be rather vague.

In Cyprus, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) considers pupils with BESD to be those whose needs fall into the categories ‘mental disorders’ or ‘disruptive behaviour’, accompanied by emotional and/or learning difficulties (MOEC, 1992). Provision of support for these pupils is allocated according to the guidelines of the 113(I) law for the education of children with SEN (MOEC, 1999).

In contrast, the authorities in England have shown a continuous interest in the issue of BESD for decades and, in the literature, it is possible to track developments in the definition of BESD as well as the support provided for pupils with these difficulties. The meaning of the term can be seen to have changed significantly over the years, from early on when it changed from EBD to SEBD and, since, the educational authorities, as well as researchers, have addressed BESD not only in terms of definition and provision but also ‘good practice’ when working with pupils who present with these difficulties.

The adoption and use of the term BESD in this study accords with the latest developments in understanding and definition given by the English Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2008). Although changes in the term’s wording over the years were made to serve specific purposes and attract attention from different professionals (Cole and Knowles, 2011), as it has been adopted and applied in this study, BESD can best be described by the meaning attached to the new wording in the recent guidance (DCSF, 2008: paragraphs 54 and 57):

54. The term BESD covers a wide range of SEN. ... children and young people whose behavioural difficulties may be less obvious, for example, those with anxiety, who self-harm, have school phobia or depression, and those whose behaviour or emotional wellbeing are seen to be deteriorating.

57. ... their difficulties are likely to be a barrier to learning and persist.

and by Cole and Knowles (2011: 19):

Behavioural difficulties mainly caused by disrupted or unusual emotional and social development ...

It should also be noted that the term BESD is used throughout this book to denote the identification of the behavioural difficulties applied to pupils (aged 6–12 years) in the subject schools of the study. These pupils had been identified by teachers as having behavioural difficulties but not

been referred to the Educational Psychology Department (EPD), had been referred but were awaiting official confirmation of this identification or had been identified and received statements issued by their local education authorities (LEAs) and the District Committee (as denoted by the provisions of the 113(I) 1999 and 185/ 2001 laws). In the cases where teachers had referred pupils to the EPD and requested that an assessment be conducted, they had followed the steps required by the Cypriot law of 1999 (MOEC, 1999) and the code of practice (MOEC, 2003a), but official identification had not been granted at the time the data was being collected.

## **1.2 Good practice when working with pupils presenting with BESD**

As mentioned in the previous section, the subject of this study has not been investigated extensively by researchers and neither has the MOEC taken steps towards establishing the grounds that would enable schools and teachers work effectively with and provide appropriate learning support to pupils who present with these difficulties.

Also, it was not until after a discipline-related incident in Cypriot schools, in 1997, that the issue of behaviour and discipline in schools raised concerns to the educational authorities. This issue, as Angelides (2000: 55) stated, 'escalated into a crisis' with the involvement of different educationalists and politicians and resulted in the adoption of regulations for addressing disciplinary issues at schools. Despite the seriousness of the incident no further examination of the issue has been conducted by the educational authorities. Moreover up until the publication of the 2008 National Report on Education, the MOEC had not taken any serious action to address issues concerning behaviour of pupils of primary school age and most official documents refer to such difficulties using different terms and rather inconsistently (see Chapter 2).

In England, however, addressing the issue of difficult behaviour included efforts to provide definitions and to find ways to work with these pupils effectively. The early references to 'maladjustment' were replaced since the early eighties and the English Department for Education now focuses on how the needs of these pupils are to be better understood and addressed in an inclusive way, in mainstream education as much as possible. The progress that has been made, has led, gradually, to the expansion of research focusing on practice. The notion of 'good practice' has been added to the literature on BESD and the focus of research has

been placed on examining effective ways to work with pupils within mainstream education.

The issue of good practice is investigated in this study by using a framework developed based on a number of studies initiated by the EBD Research Team of the University of Birmingham (Cole et al., 1998; Daniels et al, 1998a; Visser, 1999; Cole et al., 2001). This framework provides schools with an understanding of good practice and illuminates elements that contribute to effective school practices when working with pupils (Visser, 1999). Aspects of this framework are discussed further in Chapter 2.

### **1.3 A link between pupils with BESD and schools located in Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP)**

Apart from my personal and professional interests in the focus of this study a key motivation for it was the previous experience gained from working in a primary school in Cyprus where a number of pupils presenting with behaviour difficulties were not integrated effectively in the school life –mainly due to the challenges they presented to the school with their behaviour. The rationale for specifically exploring how good practice is perceived by teachers and associated professionals in two ZEP schools in Cyprus is twofold.

First, it is generally agreed that ‘education is the key to a better future for all children’ (DfES, 2004: 2), but how is this to be achieved when working with pupils presenting with BESD in a school which operate under the ‘priority education policy’?

The ‘Priority Education Policy’, under which the two Cypriot primary schools that are the subject of this study operate, was launched around nine years ago and has as its objectives raising educational standards, securing access to schools and enhancing educational opportunities for those living in disadvantaged situations. While this policy was only relatively recently put into effect in Cyprus and there are anecdotal accounts suggesting the achievements of ZEP schools, there is little reported evidence that takes into consideration the perspectives and views of teachers and professionals working in these schools. Furthermore, I could find no evidence that suggested how these schools are addressing the difficulties of pupils with BESD. Yet, pupils with BESD attend these schools (Papadopoulos, 2002, 2003b; Spyrou, 2004; Spinthourakis et al., 2008). Also ‘behavioural problems’ and ‘social problems’ were among the selection criteria set by the MOEC for districts and schools to be considered for the Priority Education Policy and be included in the ZEP

schools programme (MOEC, 2005). Taking this into account, it was important, for the aims and subject of this study, to carry out the research in these rather than other schools.

Second, despite the fact that the behavioural difficulties of pupils in primary education make Cypriot teachers' work very challenging, as Angelides (2000) notes, the issue is generally overlooked by Cypriot researchers. Moreover no research was found investigating practices developed in schools for working with these pupils or exploring the experiences and perceptions of teachers on this matter. Further, the revised Education Law of 2008 (MOEC, 2008b) does not make any reference to changes in SEN education. This means that no further developments in terms of SEN education, including BESD, have been introduced since the revised SEN law in 2004 (MOEC, 2004b). As ZEP schools are intended to help disadvantaged pupils, many of whom present with BESD, this, too, pointed to carrying out the study in ZEP schools.

## **1.4 The research problem, aims of this study and emerging questions**

As noted above, the motivation for carrying out this study was born of personal and professional concern for the learning of pupils of primary school age with BESD in Cyprus, plus the need to expand knowledge in this area, as it has not been adequately explored by researchers, particularly in ZEP schools. All of this led to the following main research problem for this book being formulated as follows:

How 'good practice' when working with pupils presenting with BESD in school is perceived by practitioners: an exploratory case study of two primary ZEP schools in Cyprus

Having established this as the subject of the study, I then set out to achieve the following aims:

- carry out an exploratory case study and develop awareness of a field that is largely unexplored in Cyprus
- explore the practices that have been developed for working with pupils with BESD (that is, identifying it, carrying out an assessment and reaching decisions about what sort of support should be provided)
- explore, through the perceptions of participants, whether or not elements of good practice – population, people, provision and place – have a bearing on achieving good practice in the subject schools

- raise awareness of the shortcomings of current practices, with examples from the two subject schools.

The initial intention was to undertake a piece of research that would elucidate the stated research problem and the following questions emerging from this.

- What meaning is assigned to the phrase ‘good practice’ by teachers and associated professionals working with pupils with BESD?
- What are their perceptions of the elements of ‘good practice’ (that is, population, people, provision, place) when working with these pupils?
- Are there any issues emerging from current practices?

The objective of the first two questions is to establish teachers’ and other professionals’ understanding of ‘good practice’ with reference to their work with pupils who present with BESD. In the process of answering these questions, I also sought to gather general information regarding different elements of good practice, such as:

- the procedure for identifying and supporting children with learning, emotional and/or other difficulties (MOEC, 2004c) and how this procedure is implemented in the two schools for supporting pupils with BESD
- which people would be involved (such as teachers, headteachers, educational psychologists (EPs), SEN teachers, teaching assistants (TAs) and so on), including information about teachers’ personal and professional qualities, training and the classroom level practices
- establish the nature of existing support partnerships in order to address the needs of these pupils –key professionals and family
- establish initiatives developed at school level that have been shown to be effective with pupils with BESD
- examine perceptions of the role of place – the school and classroom – in fostering positive behaviour and a motivation to learn.

The aim of the final question listed above is to ascertain how the practices that have been developed and are being used already are perceived by the teachers and others and whether or not there are any aspects which are not working or could be improved.

Exploring the practices of a school can potentially produce a vast amount of information (Cole et al., 1998), but, by focusing purely on how ‘good practice’ is perceived in relation to the practices developed as a result of working with pupils who present challenges due to BESD, it was hoped that this would make the amount of data generated manageable.

Bearing in mind the aims of the research and the questions stated above, as well as the primary research problem, the study was designed, after an extensive appraisal of the relevant literature, to conform to high standards of ethics (that is, anonymity and confidentiality were to be maintained).

## 1.5 Constraints

The extent to which the research reported in this book achieved its proposed aims and shed light on the research problem was constrained by:

- the transferability of the term and concept ‘BESD’ from the English educational context to the Cypriot situation
- the willingness of the ZEP schools’ staff to participate in the study.

In relation to the first constraint, the term and meaning of BESD and, thus, phrases such as ‘pupils presenting with BESD’ employed in this book derive mainly from English literature, as it presents the clearest picture in terms of identification, assessment and procedures regarding providing support for pupils at school. Transferring this term, though widely embraced in England and other countries (Winzer, 2005), to the Cypriot context had to be done with due caution, however. This was necessary because it is not very well known or much used in the Cypriot education system. Thus, it was important, when it came to conducting the research, to take this into consideration.

As Winzer (2005: 21) highlights the use of the term BESD varies considerably from one culture to another due to the ‘complex problems that pervade the entire field of EBD’ and the widely differing belief systems around this issue. Winzer (2005: 28) also points out that:

As the constructs have questionable validity, even in their original Western context, translation to other cultural contexts is treacherous. Behaviour must be understood within indigenous belief systems.

Similarly Angelides (2000: 57) argued that:

every definition is very subjective and is based on the culture and experiences of those who try to define misbehaviour.

In the case of this research, although cases of pupils displaying BESD have been reported in Cypriot literature (see Angelides, 2000) and the Cypriot education system seems to be challenged by the presence of pupils displaying such difficulties in schools, the use of the term BESD in the MOEC's documents and policy remains vague. Also teachers are not familiar with the term as it is not used in educational policies or SEN legislation (from reviewing official policies: MOEC, 1999, 2001, 2003a, 2004b). Perhaps among the few direct references to pupils with behavioural difficulties in the Cypriot literature is a paragraph in the 1992 circular (MOEC, 1992) that identifies different categories of special educational needs (SENs) and makes constant reference to 'adjusting difficulties' (MOEC, 1992:83) that may be the outcome of a wide range of factors. The BESD that some pupils display are identified by the 1992 circular under the heading 'Behavioural Disorders' (MOEC, 1992: 83).

In relation to the second constraint listed above (as it is further discussed in Methodology Chapter), although the gathering of data for this study relied heavily on participants' views (as one of the methods used was interviews), the process was not without difficulties. A major constraint was a variability in how willing members of the schools' staff were to participate and be recorded while being interviewed. There were cases of teachers, especially in one of the two schools, who initially consented to participate, then refused and of other teachers who did not show any interest in participating at all. This made the whole process of data collection extremely difficult.



# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

This chapter offers a background understanding of the issues addressed by this study, as well as findings relating to different aspects of good practice when working with pupils with BESD.

First, since both schools in this study, are mainstream primary ZEP schools, literature concerning the philosophy of a concept which was adopted as matter of policy in Cypriot education, ‘priority education’ (PIO, 2006), is examined. The ZEP programme, as part of this policy, was piloted in 2003 and then fully adopted by 2006. It was difficult to find Cypriot literature exploring issues relating to the programme, but, importantly, the Pedagogical Institute has produced an extensive report on the first evaluative study of ZEPs and the head officer of the EPD, who introduced the ZEP programme in Cyprus, has provided copies of letters sent to the MOEC and the extensive plan for the ZEP programme. These helped to build an understanding of how ZEP schools operate in Cyprus and the provisions of the programme that concern pupils with BESD, as well as an insight into the schools currently participating in the ZEP programme.

Second, this chapter then focuses on developments in the field of BESD and what support is provided for children in both the Cypriot and English educational contexts. As much information has been collected as possible to portray how the needs of these pupils have been defined and addressed over the years and what practices are currently used to help them. Towards the end of this part of the chapter, the discussion focuses on the developments that have led to the concept of ‘good practice’.

Third, this topic is explored further in relation to advising on a framework for good practice. Various research findings on subjects relating to this framework are also discussed.

## **A. The Integration of ‘Priority Education’ in the Cypriot Education System**

### **2.1 The impact of international developments in education on Cypriot education**

Following the 1989 United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989), in 1994, UNESCO adopted the Salamanca statement and accompanying Framework of Action (UNESCO, 1994). According to these documents, schools should be able to accommodate all pupils, regardless of their individual characteristics or conditions.

The adoption of the Salamanca statement and of the Framework of Action gave birth to a new concept, that of inclusive education. This highlights important principles concerning children’s education, such as having respect for individual traits that pupils may have. The documents also pointed out that among pupils whose condition(s) necessitate safeguarding are those from ‘ethnic or cultural minorities’ (UNESCO, 1994: 6, 3) or ‘from other marginalised groups’ and whose ‘social and emotional’ conditions cause concern to schools and their teachers.

The principles set out in the UN Convention (UN, 1989) and the Salamanca statement resulted in the reconceptualisation of education at an international level and formed the grounds for the introduction of a number of initiatives (Burnett, 2008a). In the almost 23 years since the Convention, significant progress has been made towards implementing its principles and those of the Salamanca statement, including accommodating the needs of as many pupils as possible in mainstream education and creating opportunities for all to receive an education and to reach their best potential.

Cyprus was not an exception to this development. Hesitant movements towards this state, beginning early in 1980, gradually led to the endorsement of the 113(I) law in 1999, which marked significant progress in the education of children with SENs (Phtiaka, 2006; Batsiou, Bebetos, Panteli and Antoniou, 2008). During this time, behaviour difficulties were acknowledged by the Cypriot MOEC, for the first time, through the 1992 Circular (MOEC, 1992). There is no evidence, however, to suggest that pupils with BESD were included in these developments.

## **2.2 The structure of the Cypriot education system and of primary education**

An extensive appraisal of a wide spectrum of documents, including those produced by the MOEC concerning mainstream and special education, circulars, UNESCO reports (MOEC, 1992, 1999, 2004, 2008, 2010; UNESCO, 1995) and relating to the development of inclusive and intercultural education, provided an insight into the influences and challenges, national (cultural and social) and international (world education, the EU, political developments), that the Cypriot education system is exposed to and which have provided the impetus for change (Angelides, 2004; Hajisoteriou, 2010).

Based on this literature, it can be claimed that the integration of Cyprus to the EU in 2004, the education-related conventions discussed in the preceding section (UN Convention for the Rights of the Child, 1989; UNESCO, 1994) and the reports that had been conducted evaluating Cypriot education (UNESCO, 1995) formed the chief grounds for the 'Educational Reform' (MOEC, 2004a) and shaped the MOEC's present inclusive philosophy.

Cypriot education, based on this philosophy, focuses on two major priorities:

- 'the development of the Active Democratic Citizen'
- the establishment of:

favourable conditions for coexistence and cooperation, respect among people of different cultural backgrounds, intellectual and physical abilities, as well as combating intolerance and xenophobia in a world of increasing interaction between cultures and persons' (UNESCO, 2008d: 1).

As part of this philosophy, many aspects of the National Curriculum have been changed (MOEC, 2010). The changes made focus on modern pedagogical methods of teaching and learning, on practices which help pupils to understand their individual learning styles, and on practices which encourage and support creativity and critical thinking (MOEC, 2003a). The introduction to the 'Priority Education Policy' (PIO, 2006) and ZEP programme as part of it are extensions of this philosophy and further examples of the shift in Cypriot education. These show that the efforts of the MOEC are directed at not only helping pupils with SEN but also students from disadvantaged backgrounds and bringing about equal opportunities in education, combating educational and social exclusion (MOEC, 2008d).

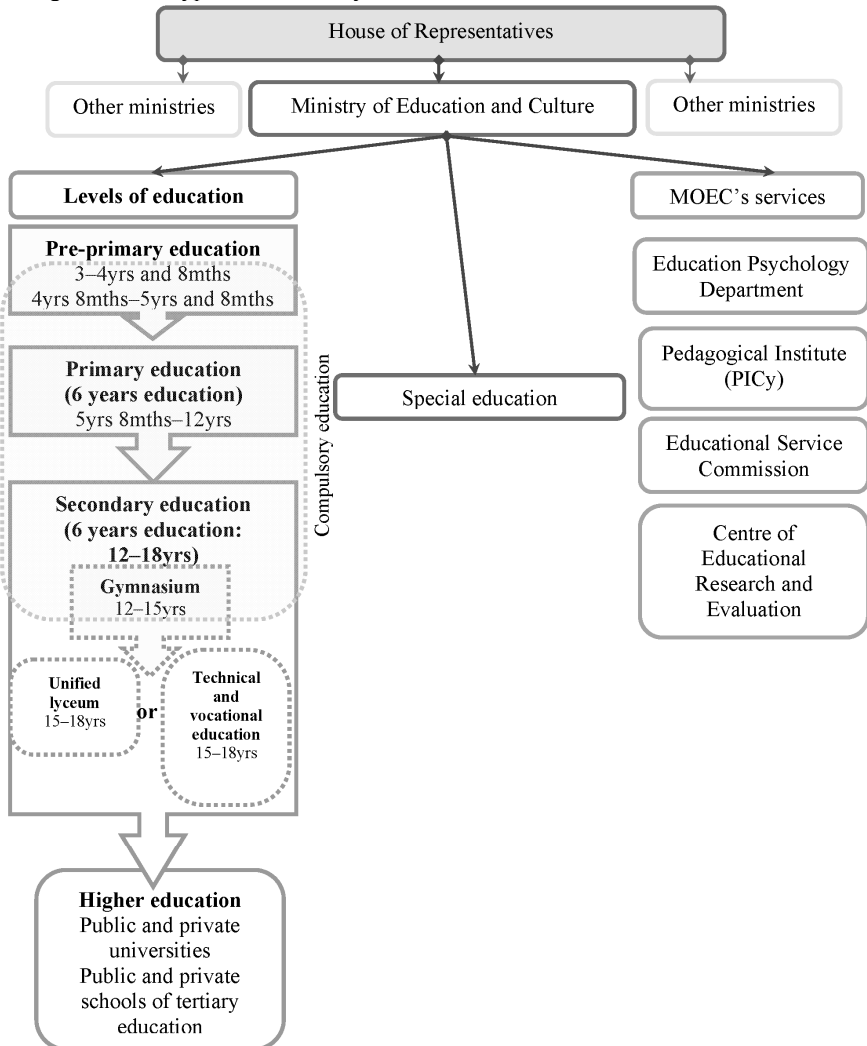
Regardless of these improvements, however, the education system is still highly centralised and conservative (Yiasemis, 2005; Hadjisoteriou, 2010). Decisions concerning policymaking, allocation of funds for education, as well as the operation and distribution of services by the MOEC, depend heavily on the House of Representatives (Yiasemis, 2005). The MOEC is responsible for enforcing educational policies, employing teachers, evaluating their work (via the Educational Service Commission (ESC), which reports to the Ministry), providing in-service training courses as well as the distribution of resources. Thus, decisions regarding school staff is sometimes made without having taken into account the existing conditions in the schools to which the teachers are being appointed or transferred. Such decisions are, instead, based on a combination of criteria, such as promotion credits and status, years of employment and so on. Yiasemis (2005) comments, with regard to this, that it is impossible for the ESC to be aware of the individual needs of schools at local level and so appoint the appropriate personnel. That is because despite the changes in the philosophy of education, the structure of the education system itself remains unchanged since the Ministry of Education was founded in 1965 following the Cyprus Constitution (MOEC, 2003a).

As Figure 1 shows, all levels of education, as well as services for schools, such as the Educational Psychology Department (EPD) and the ESC, are under the authority of the MOEC. There are pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher levels of education, as well as special education.

The compulsory education of all children begins at the pre-primary level and continues with children entering the compulsory phase of education which begins with primary education and is completed when children reach the age of 15 years old and have completed the three years of gymnasium of secondary education (see Figure 1). ZEP schools which operate under the 'priority education policy' work, in broad terms, in similar way as any other primary school (-six-year education programme, same curriculum guidelines).

Following there is an overview of the structure and operation of primary education (section 2.2.1.) with an emphasis on the 'priority education' (section 2.2.2.) since the field of investigation is located in primary schools operating under the 'priority education policy'- ZEP schools.

Figure 1. The Cypriot education system



Source: [www.moec.gov.cy](http://www.moec.gov.cy)

and <http://www.moec.gov.cy/odigos-ekpaideusis/documents/english.pdf>

### 2.2.1 Primary education

Following one year of pre-primary education, which is obligatory for

children aged four years and eight months to five years and eight months, children can be registered for primary education, which constitutes the first level of education. Both pre-primary (four years and eight months to five years and eight months) and primary education (five years and eight months to twelve), according to MOEC (2003a; 2010), are free, compulsory and under the authority of the MOEC which is responsible for the endorsement of legislations, policies and allocation of funds.

Figure 2 shows the structure of primary education in Cyprus and the different levels of it. Figure 2 also shows the place of ZEP Schools in the Primary education structure. Any primary school which fulfils the conditions and features that are described in subsequent sections can join in the ‘primary ZEP schools’ programme. Pupils registered for primary education are expected to complete it by the age of 12, having worked through 6 grades (Grades Α–ΣΤ). Pupils attending ZEP schools, such as any primary school, must complete the same education programme (see Figure 2).

The cornerstone of primary education is (MOEC, 2010: 32):

the balanced development of children’s personality, with the creation of favourable conditions for the conquest of knowledge, the development of equitable attitudes and the cultivation of skills, rendering them capable of undertaking future responsibilities and action in the continuously changing world.

The curriculum and the standards set for primary education are developed by the ‘Committee for the Development of the National Curriculum’ and the ‘Office for the Development of the National Curriculum’. The office was established in 2009, having been endorsed by the House of Representatives (PICy, 2010; decision reference 67.339, 11 June 2008), and works in collaboration with the committee and the Pedagogical Institute under the authority of the MOEC.

The new curriculum that was formulated is based on a 5-day schedule (with 7 lessons each day, each 40 minutes long) and covers subjects such as Greek and English, mathematics, music, physical education and religious education (MOEC, 2010). For pupils of primary school age whose native language is other than Greek and ‘whose level of knowledge does not allow them to attend school comfortably’ (MOEC, 2010: 37), additional support is provided as part of the curriculum.

The principles and standards set in the National Curriculum are delivered in the same way across the whole of Cyprus, although, in some cases, depending on the school type, there might be some variations. Such variations are present in the timetables of ZEP schools.