

## **Secondary school "Kushtrimi i Lirise" Durres, Albania** **"An Ongoing story" by Mirela Hoxha, teacher**

The education system in Albania is inclusive. Therefore the well-being and progress of every student in our small school is our primary goal. We actively promote positive attitudes and mutual respect between groups and communities, different from each other. We believe that improving the quality of education for the most vulnerable groups of pupils raises standards across the whole school. We have achieved that standard. But we strongly want to maintain that standard high, and that was the reason why we choose to work on the issue of "Tackling discrimination".

Participants of this project were students, parents and teachers. We all actively promoted equality and diversity through the curriculum, by creating an environment which reflected respect for all. We implemented an annual program in 3 periods.

We used a range of teaching strategies that ensured we meet the needs of all students. We taught about difference and diversity and the impact of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination through citizenship and across the curriculum.

We used materials and resources that reflected the diversity of the school, population and local community in terms of race, gender and disability, avoiding stereotyping. By including the contribution of different cultures to world history we promoted positive images of people.

All teaching and support staff promoted an inclusive and collaborative ethos in their classrooms. They challenged prejudice and discrimination dealing fairly and professionally with any prejudice-related incidents that occurred.

Parents assisted schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children. They volunteered to support students and school. They were also involved with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities. They were part in school decisions and activities through school councils as well.

We all are aware that schools can play a key role in reducing discrimination and so act as agents of change. Still, schools face challenges when implementing their teaching strategies. The main challenges that teachers in our school have experienced are the lack of qualified assistant teachers for disabled and special need children, developing an Individual Education Programme (IEP) due to our lack of knowledge and understanding the way IEP should be developed. These challenges were improved by personal training and teachers of our school became supportive assistant teachers for their colleagues.

This project strengthened the collaboration between teacher–students–parents. It clearly demonstrated the power of partnering between students, staff and community to tackle discrimination.

Our challenge as educators is whether we walk the walk. Our students are witnessing our collaboration. So, we need to show our students that we value the ideas, opinions and contributions of those we work alongside in every way. The more we collaborate with each other, the more we collaborate with school community, the more likely we are going to succeed in tackling discrimination.

If we desire a society of peace, we must teach our students to be free to speak and make sure they are safe to learn.