

Developing an inclusive education system in Japan:

The case of Yamaga City, Kumamoto

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The purpose of this paper is to describe the present situation of inclusive education after the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2014 in Japan. Specifically, the Developing Inclusive Education System project conducted in Kumamoto prefecture was chosen as a case study in this paper. The DIES project in Yamaga City, Kumamoto was implemented with an emphasis on building inclusive education system within the school cluster of a middle school area. Three stages of support provision for reasonable accommodations of students with special needs. From this case study, it was suggested that the role of newly set the reasonable accommodation coordinator was to strengthen collaboration with the welfare sector to ensure the smooth transition of a child with special needs and to collaborate with professionals in disability related field,

Key word : Inclusive education system, Japan, Kumamoto, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe the present situation of inclusive education after the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2014 in Japan. A government-aided project for the development of inclusive education system conducted in a rural city in Kumamoto prefecture over a span of three years is discussed as a case.

The history of Japan's special education began in 1878 when the first school for the deaf and blind was established. The compulsory special education system for children began in 1979. In addition to special education in special schools and special classes in regular schools, another program of resource rooms were established in 1993. Resource rooms provide individual or small group lessons for several hours a week to students with milder disabilities

Based on the partial amendment of the School Education Law in 2007, Special Needs Education (SNE) at regular classrooms in the regular schools was legally implemented. Also it started focusing on students with Learning Disabilities (LD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and High Functioning Autism (HFA). The 2007 SNE reform was a significant step towards inclusive education in Japan.

After the 2007 SNE reform, there were several major

changes to education system for students with disabilities: (1) appointment of a SNE coordinator in a school (kindergarten up to high school), (2) employment of the support assistant for SNE in regular schools, (3) additional role for Schools for SNE to provide advice and supports to students with disabilities at local regular schools, (4) hearing of parents' opinion by the local education board at the time of school placement and (5) comprehensive teacher's SNE certificate system.

Out of children under compulsory education (six year's primary and 3 year's middle school), 0.7% (68,661) attended Schools for SNE in 2014. In addition, 1.8% (187,100) attended SNE classes in regular schools and 0.8% (83,750) received their special support services in the resource rooms in the regular schools (Ministry of Sports, Science, and Technology: MEXT, 2016).

Recent Policy Changes for Inclusive Education in Japan

Japan signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007 and finally, after some of compliance efforts, ratified in 2014.

One of the issues on the road map towards ratification was inclusive education system of the Article 24, CRPD. A special committee was set up in the Subdivision of Elementary and Lower Secondary Education of Central Council for Education in 2010. A report titled "Fostering

Special Needs Education to Establish an Inclusive Education System for Realizing a Cohesive Society” was released in 2012.

The reports states five points; (1) creating an inclusive education system, (2) guidance and decision about schools for enrolment, (3) enhancing reasonable accommodation and the preparation of a fundamental environment, (4) preparation for diverse place of learning and promotion of collaboration among schools, and (5) raising the expertise of teachers. Thus, Japan has made a decision to aim at forming an inclusive education system for building a cohesive society (MEXT, 2013).

The following year, in 2013, MEXT commenced a model project named “Developing Inclusive Education System (DIES)” (MEXT, 2014^a). To implement this project, 65 local municipalities, schools and educational institutes in Japan were selected to pilot this model project. The purposes of this project were: (1) to consolidate good practices of providing reasonable accommodations to children with disabilities; (2) to implement exchange and cooperative learning platform; (3) to conduct researches utilizing resources from the school clusters. Yamaga City was one of those designated municipalities to implement this model project.

Education in Yamaga City

Kumamoto Prefecture (KP) is located in the center of the island of Kyushu and has area size of 7400 m² and population of 1800 thousands (Fig. 1). KP has large

agricultural, forestry, and fishery areas. Yamaga City, located in the northern part of KP, has area size of 300 m² and population of 55 thousands. The northern part of KP including Yamaga City is not directly affected by the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquakes.

The total population of Yamaga City is 55,750. There are 17 elementary and 6 middle schools with around 4100 students. Also there are 3 prefectural and 1 private high schools. There were no schools for SNE until 2013 when a branch of prefectural school for SNE was set up in a prefectural high school premise in Yamaga City. Finally, there are 27 kindergartens and day care centers.

One of the salient features of SNE in Yamaga City is the high rate of students learning in SNE classes in the regular elementary and middle schools. According to the Yamaga City Education Board, in 2013, there were 100 (3.7%) students in elementary schools and 43 (3.0%) students in middle schools, totaling 143 (3.4%) students who learnt in SNE classes. These percentages of students attending SNE classes were apparently higher than prefectural average: 2.3 % in elementary and 1.9 % in middle schools, and the total 2.2 %¹⁾ as well as national average of the total 1.6% (MEXT, 2014^b).

The branch school of a SNE school mentioned before has only high school. As a result, in Yamaga City, students with disabilities who are under compulsory education have tried to learn in the SNE classes in nearby schools rather than commuting to remote schools for SNE or in some cases staying in a dormitory of the school or home for children with disabilities.

Secondly, the rate of students who were suspected of

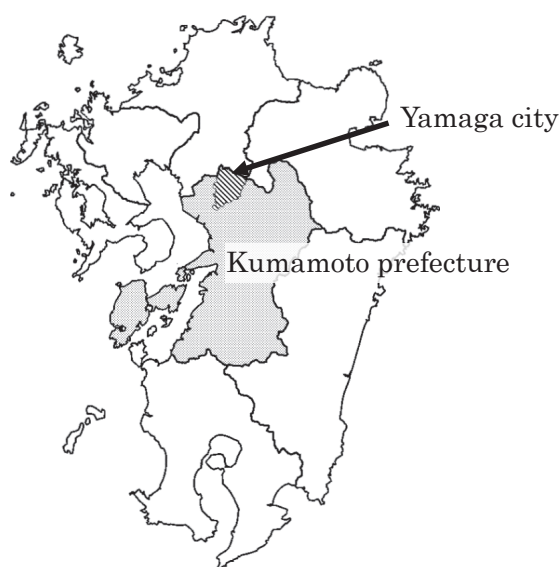


Fig.1 Location of Kumamoto Prefecture and Yamaga City in the Kyushu Island

Table 1 Members of the SNE Coordination Committee (Yamaga City, 2015)

Sector	Post	
Education	Principals	Kindergarten (1), Elementary (1), Middle school (1), Prefectural high school (1), Private high school (1), School for SNE outside the city (1)
	Municipal officers	City Board of Education (1), Department of Compulsory Education, KP (1)
	SNE coordinators	SNE leader coordinator (2), SNE coordinator in a school for SNE (1), SNE coordinator in a prefectural high school
Health	Medical doctor (1), Public health nurse (1)	
Welfare	City welfare board (1), City child welfare board (1), City day care center (1), Private day care center (1), Care and rehabilitation center for children with disabilities (1)	
Labor	Public employment security office (1)	
Advocacy	Parents' organizations	Te-wo-tsunagu Ikusei-kai, Yamaga branch (2)

having developmental disabilities by regular teachers was 9.1 % in elementary schools and 12.1% in middle schools in Yamaga City (Yamaga City, 2015). This was notably higher than the national average, 6.5%, of the results of MEXT National Survey in 2012²⁾.

DIES Project in Yamaga City

Outline of the DIES Project in Yamaga City

Yamaga City implemented DIES project with a focus of utilizing resources in school cluster. Yamaga City Education Board set up the SNE Coordination Committee to implement this DIES project. Table 1 shows the members included in this committee from education, health, social welfare sectors and advocacy organizations.

Also, two newly established posts were introduced. Firstly, a leader coordinator was appointed from SNE coordinators in each middle school area. SNE coordinators are teachers who are also in charge of coordinating special needs education inside the school and with outside

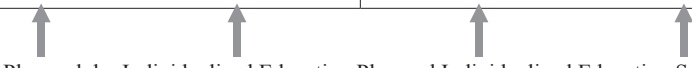
professionals. When this DIES project started, there was at least one SNE coordinator in a school appointed by the principal. Secondly, a reasonable accommodation promotion (RAP) staff was appointed in each middle school area. An interview with RAP staff was conducted by authors and their experiences will be discussed later in this report.

Hereafter, DIES project in Yamaga city is described in four main areas: school cluster, incremental support in providing reasonable accommodations, incremental case meeting, RAP staff before the last section on a case of one middle school area is discussed.

Fig. 2 shows the school cluster model in each middle school area. By looking at this figure, it is clear that each middle school area has a meeting of personnel all together from kindergarten or day care center up to middle school and has collaboration with the school for SNE, high schools and a prefectural education center as well as medical, welfare sectors.

Table 2 shows the incremental support in providing reasonable accommodations. Three stages of support provision are available based on the educational need of a student. In

Table 2 Providing Reasonable Accommodations: Incremental Support (Yamaga City, 2015)

Stage to provide supports	Class-wide support in regular classrooms	Individual support in regular classrooms	Support in the special setting
Type of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Class teaching in easily understood form - Accommodating learning environments - Universal design for learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of materials and aids which meet the student's needs - Modification of teaching forms - SNE assistants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual assistance in regular classrooms - Resource rooms - SNE classes
 <p>Plan and do: Individualized Education Plan and Individualized Education Support Plan</p>			

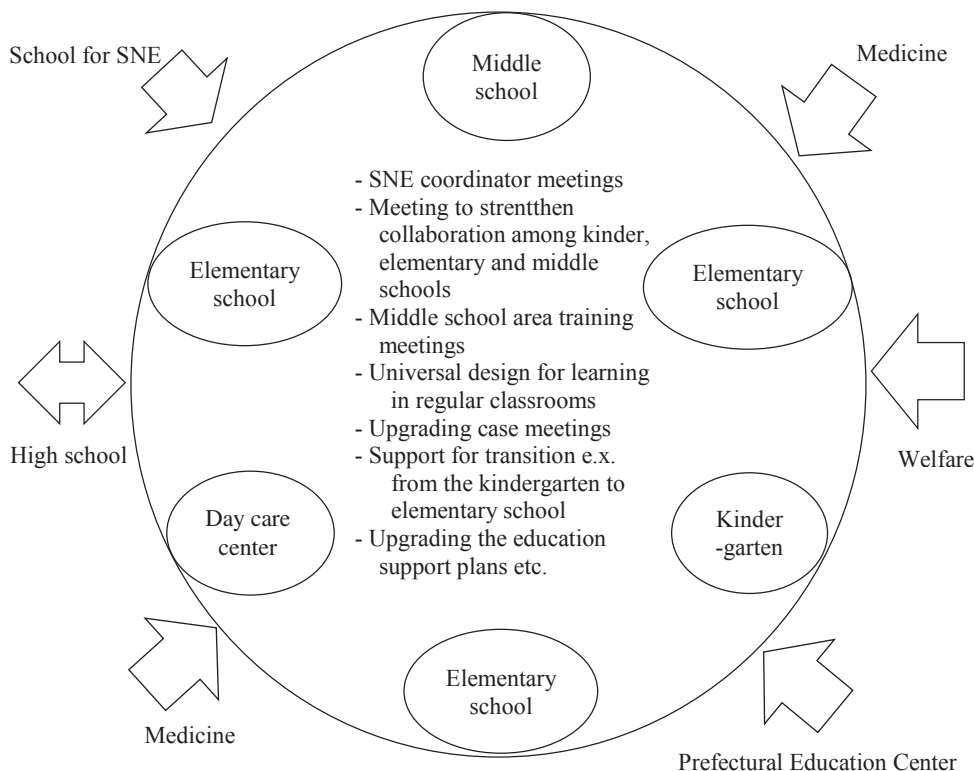


Fig.2 The School Cluster Model in Each Middle School Area (Yamaga City, 2015)

any of these stages, the Individualized Instruction Program (IIP) that includes precise plans to teach the particular student, and Individualized Education Support Plan (IESP) for collaboration with related organizations in the longer term should be carefully planned. According to the statistics released by Yamaga City Education Board, the rate of the implementation of these IIP and IESP programs were lower in kindergartens, 67% in the first year as compared to 100 % at elementary and middle schools. However, in the second year, 100% of kindergarten had successfully completed implementation of both plans under DIES project (Yamaga City Education Board, 2015).

Table 3 shows the three stages of incremental case meetings. Though the school staff understands fully of the

importance of case meetings regarding a student with SNE, it creates a burden on teachers especially with their schedules. Therefore in DIES project, short case meeting participated by teachers who are directly involved with a student with special needs was first set up as an initial meeting. Then the results of this short meeting will be further discussed at the SNE Case meeting of the school SNE meeting in the same school and then escalate to the SNE coordinator meeting in the middle school area.

Finally, experiences shared by RAP staff who were introduced for the first time under the DIES project are discussed. According to Yamaga City Education Board (2015), there were seven RAPs appointed for DIES project. There were five retired teachers (two former principals

Table 3 Incremental Case Meeting (Yamaga City, 2015)

Stage	Short case meeting in a regular school	SNE Case meeting at the school SNE meeting in a regular school	Middle school area : SNE coordinator meeting
Members to attend the meeting	- Classroom teacher - Teachers and staff involved - SNE coordinator - RAP coordinator	- School administrator - Classroom teacher - Teachers and staff involved - SNE coordinator - RAP staff - Caregiver	- SNE coordinator - RAP staff

of elementary and middle schools in Yamaga city, one from the prefectural school for SNE, two teachers in the school for SNE and SNE class in regular schools), and two former administrators of education board (KP and another city). RAP staffs were employed on their part-time basis³⁾.

DIES Project in Kahoku Middle School Area

Kahoku middle school area is located in the northern end of Kumamoto prefecture. This area was itself a municipal town until being merged into Yamaga City in 2005. This is a mountainous area, with more than half of the area is covered by forest.

In Kahoku middle school area, there is only one elementary school that was merged by three elementary schools in 2013. There were 147 students in the elementary and 80 in middle school in 2015. The newly constructed building of the elementary school is connected with the middle school. This leads to closer collaboration between these two schools. In addition there are three day care centers run by the city. These day care centers are also planned to be merged into one center and will be managed by a welfare cooperation.

RAP staff appointed for Kahoku middle school area, from the beginning of DIES project, was Ms. Suzuki (pseudonym). She assumed the responsibility as the head of parents' association before at a school for SNE in KP. In addition, she played a role as a member of the education board in another city of KP.

The followings are some activities what Ms. Suzuki had done for strengthening collaboration in this school cluster.

Firstly, Ms. Suzuki tried to strengthen collaboration with the Child-rearing Support Center. She paved the way to transfer the meeting to the one participated by teachers in elementary and middle schools and herself.

Secondly, Ms. Suzuki was responsible to coordinate the case meeting with day care centers. According to the Child Welfare Law Article 39, the purpose of day care centers is to nurture a child who does not receive any day care. As mentioned before, in Kahoku middle school area, there was no kindergarten but three day care centers. Therefore, it was necessary to ensure smooth transition for children with special needs from day care centers to elementary school through periodical case meetings.

Finally, Ms. Suzuki was involved in strengthening collaboration with professionals outside school and when necessary outside the city. For example, she tried to reinforce cooperation with professionals such as KP Northern Support Center for People with Developmental Disabilities

and researchers in Kumamoto University in addition to a school for SNE designated to Yamaga city by the education board of KP.

For example, with cooperation with researchers in Kumamoto University, Ms. Suzuki conducted trainings on problem solving through Applied Behavioral Analysis for teachers from elementary and middle schools and day care center staff. Also, in addition to getting suggestions from prefectural Kumamoto School for the Deaf, Ms. Suzuki consolidated information on transition of students with hearing impairments from two adults with hearing impairments arranged by a researcher in Kumamoto University.

Conclusions

In this paper, the present situation of developing inclusive education system in a rural city in Kumamoto prefecture is fully described. The DIES project in Yamaga City was implemented with an emphasis on building inclusive education system within a school cluster in the middle school area. To provide reasonable accommodations for students with special needs, three stages of support provision were implemented. Also case meetings were held based on the three incremental stages starting from short meetings of people who directly taught student with special needs. In a case of one middle school area, RAP staff played the role of strengthening collaboration with the welfare sector that ensures the smooth transition from day care center to elementary school and with professionals in disability-related field.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

- 1) Education Board, Kumamoto Prefecture: List of Schools. (Elementary school, Middle school) (2013/2014) (as of 1 May, 2013) <http://kyouiku.higo.ed.jp/page2030/001/page5006/> [in Japanese] (Retrieved 20 September, 2016)
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