

# Special Education in Casis School

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Casis School, in Austin, Texas, has for some years been developing special facilities and an over-all program for meeting the needs of all children, but especially of boys and girls classified as exceptional. M. G. Bowden is principal of Casis School, Austin Public Schools, Texas.

THE NOVEMBER, 1946, issue of *Educational Leadership*<sup>1</sup> pointed out that the University of Texas and the Austin Public Schools had entered into an agreement establishing a cooperative research and demonstration project in elementary education. The program was begun September 1, 1946, in an old elementary school building, Wooldridge School, located near the campus of the University of Texas, and the project was moved from that location to new facilities in Casis School on January 29, 1951. New facilities were essential to the full operation of the agreement as it had projected for the school the inclusion of both the physically handicapped and the gifted as well as the so-called "normal" children in its program. Facilities in the old building were inadequate for the full program.

Foremost among the purposes accepted for the project was the desire to establish a good school for children where they would have ample opportunity to learn at rates commensurate with their maturity and capabilities. By establishing the school as a regular public school, it was hoped to provide a realistic and practical setting for

observation by teacher-training students and teachers who were already practicing in the field, thus providing an opportunity for real leadership in elementary education in Texas. In addition, three other purposes were officially listed in the agreement. These were: (a) To promote and to facilitate the cooperative study of various types of problems arising in the elementary school program in Austin; (b) to encourage and facilitate various types of research studies in elementary education which may or may not have direct implications for the Austin public schools; and (c) to provide an elementary laboratory school which should have the following special functions: serve as a special center for demonstration of innovations in curriculum, methods of teaching, school organization, and administrative practices; serve as a special center for observation by University students and other interested persons; and teaching by University students.<sup>2</sup> The latter pertains especially to the areas involved in special education.

## Facilities Are Carefully Planned

Plans for Casis School were formulated over a period of some fifteen

<sup>1</sup> Henry J. Otto, "Experimentation in Elementary Education," *Educational Leadership*, November, 1946, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130

months following the appointment of an architectural firm to initiate the plans.<sup>3</sup> The architects, Page, Southerland, and Page, worked with committees of teachers, principals, parents, specialists, and administrative personnel in designing the facilities for some 550 children from kindergarten through grade six from a designated area in Austin, plus approximately 90 exceptional children from the entire school district, these boys and girls to be transported to Casis School from all over the city.

Three criteria were the basis for planning the facilities, just as they had been in setting forth the purposes of the cooperative agreement in 1946. First, the school should provide an outstanding program for children's education. While buildings in themselves do not make good schools, they have much to do with facilitating or hindering good educational programs. The building design was then to permit the fullest expression of a good educational program. It was thought too that the building should be a model structure so that those anticipating new elementary schools could come and get ideas for their own building plans. The third, and most important one from the point of view of this article, was that the school should serve all types of children; hence the school was designed with special provision for the education of exceptional children.

The product of the intensive cooperative planning is a building of

modern one-story design built on one level so as to eliminate the necessity for stairs or rises in the building that might prove to be barriers to crippled children. Hand rails, extra wide doors, clerestory natural lighting, toilets in connection with each classroom provide special facilities for all children and especially those who are deviates from the norm physically. Three connected units form the plant—the administrative wing housing the principal's offices, the cafeteria, auditorium, children's playroom, teachers' lounge, conference rooms, health room, and book-room; the regular classroom wing; and the special education wing. There are twenty classrooms and a library in the regular wing of the school; six classrooms and some eleven offices and special rooms are in the special education wing. The outside construction is of brick, steel, and reinforced concrete; the interior is finished in glazed tile, birch plywood, asphalt tile floors, pre-finished acoustical tile ceilings, and lighted by a combination natural, fluorescent, and incandescent lighting.

The building, as already pointed out, was jointly financed and planned by the Austin Public Schools and the University of Texas. The total building contains some 61,000 square feet with approximately 1000 square feet allocated to each regular classroom. The regular classroom contains such facilities as shelving for books, work benches, drinking fountains, chart file, vertical file, easel and cabinets, wardrobes, tackboard, chalkboard, and map rail. The doors are wide enough to admit wheelchair-borne children; the furniture is movable so as to permit grouping and re-arrangement.

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<sup>3</sup> Henry J. Otto and J. W. Edgar, "Demonstration Center for Elementary Education in Texas Is Joint Project of Public Schools and University," *The Nation's Schools*, June, 1950.

## Provision for Exceptional Children

The newly completed Casis School incorporates facilities for four types of exceptional children and hopes through its general facilities to provide for the fifth type. Facilities in the building make it possible to work with children with significant hearing losses, speech deviations, vision impairment, and orthopedic crippling. In addition, through careful planning and instruction, it is hoped to care for the needs of the gifted, as well as normal child in the school's regular program for children. The facilities include accommodations, described in more detail below, for sight conservation, auditory and speech training, speech correction, physical and hydrotherapy, rest facilities for lowered vitality cases, special rooms for clinical work, and facilities for occupational therapy. Special offices and examination rooms provide opportunity for private conferences, testing, examinations, and work space for teachers.

Insofar as exceptional children are concerned, Casis School has from its opening aimed to provide as normal, yet challenging, an environment as possible. The school has deliberately tried to bring the exceptional child into wholesome contact with the so-called normal child so that his own adjustment, and that of the normal child, can be made with the least amount of delay and difficulty. In addition to the objectives normally held for children, the Casis faculty hopes to assist the exceptional child to (a) develop to the best of his ability, and to the degree that his physical impairment permits, the talents that he pos-

sesses, (b) overcome or reduce the extent of physical or emotional limitation, and (c) become a happy, well-adjusted individual who can take his rightful place among the so-called "normal."

Before describing in some detail the selection, admission, guidance, and dismissal of special education children in the school, it should be pointed out that the Casis School program is a part of a long-term special education program in the Austin Public Schools which has included instruction of the home-bound, hospital-bound, mentally retarded, and special help for speech and hearing cases through a systematic organization of itinerant teachers operating in all the public schools. Casis School takes the cases referred to it through a special reviewing committee and returns to the regular schools those cases who, in the judgment of the committee, no longer need special help or those who cannot profit from the use of special facilities. Casis School has available to its staff the consultative services of supervisors in the Austin Public Schools, the Austin Child Guidance Clinic, and staff members of the University of Texas. On the staff of the Austin Public Schools is the general supervisory staff operating under the director of curriculum and, in addition, a trained special education supervisor and guidance specialist functioning under the director of pupil personnel.

## Admission Requirements

Children who fall within the stated requirements for special education in the categories already mentioned and who are residents of the Austin



*Austin, Texas, Public Schools*

*Exceptional children work together with the "normal" children in planting and caring for the school garden which is a part of the science training the children receive in Casis School, Austin.*

Independent School District are eligible to apply for admission to Casis.<sup>4</sup> All applicants must be educable; that is, possess an IQ of 70 or more. Once application has been made, supported with professional recommendations regarding educability, extent of deviation, and eligibility for special instruction, psychological tests are administered by the school's psychometrist and the child's file completed by the special education supervisor. The children and their parents then interview the reviewing committee which meets biannually for the purpose of reviewing applications and making recommendations regarding cases who previously have

been enrolled and referred to them by the staff of the school. The reviewing committee consists of a psychiatrist, two psychologists, two pediatricians, two ophthalmologists, two otologists, two orthopedic surgeons, and two speech correctionists. The principal, staff of the school, and the special education supervisor sit as nonvoting members of the committee. Applications are passed upon in terms of the school's capabilities and facilities for helping the child and in terms of the need of the individual in terms of others who are needing special help. The school's facilities are limited. All special education children are admitted on a trial basis and are subject to review at any subsequent meeting of the reviewing committee. Each child's physical program of rest, physical or

<sup>4</sup> See "A Guide for Organizing and Providing Special Education for Exceptional Children," Bulletin 520, Texas Education Agency (Austin) November, 1951, for State approved special education criteria.

hydrotherapy, or activity are prescribed by his own private physician or osteopath. The educational program of the school is prescribed by the school through its various staff members.

Children who are accepted for special admission to Casis are placed initially either in special groups such as the orthopedic, hearing, and sight-conservation group, or, if they are able, they are placed in the regular classroom with the children of the normal wing. Children of these special groups are given opportunities for association with normal children as soon as they are able and to the degree of their ability. The children of the regular wing are systematically informed of the things that are done for children in the special education wing.

#### **Special Instruction Is Scheduled**

Special instruction by the speech correctionist is given children with speech problems. Except for periods of speech therapy, most of these children are housed full-time in the regular classroom where their educational work is guided by the homeroom teacher with such assistance from the speech correctionists as seems necessary. Speech training for cleft palate cases, aphasics, cerebral palsied, stutterers, articulatory cases, hard of hearing, those with delayed speech, etc., are scheduled by the speech correctionists with the help of the homeroom teacher at regular periods for lengths of time which are consistent with the maturity and severity of the problems. The speech correctionist has a private classroom and rooms in which to work with children. She has special equipment with which to work.

The most severe of the orthopedically handicapped children are grouped together initially and are taught by a specially trained teacher in a classroom designed for that purpose. This room is immediately adjacent to the physical and hydrotherapy rooms, so that the physical therapist has immediate and convenient access to the children for physical training. Across the hall are the occupational therapy and dormitory rooms which are necessarily easily accessible to the orthopedically handicapped. Transfer from the orthopedically handicapped room to the regular room is gradual and is done following conference between the teachers concerned. Therapy continues as long as there is need for it and is changed or discontinued upon the recommendation of the child's private physician.

An attendant is employed to assist the teacher and physical therapist in taking care of the physical needs of children. She supervises the dormitory, cares for the tanks, towels, shower, and other equipment, assists with the children in the cafeteria, and rides the school bus with these children.

Children with hearing problems are cared for in much the same way as the orthopedically handicapped ones. These children are helped by the auditory training and speech reading teacher in the stimulation and training of their residual hearing, learning of visual cues to facial expressions and lip movements, learning the use and care of individual hearing aids, acquiring new vocabulary, etc. Here again sound amplification and other special equipment are provided children in a room designed for this purpose. Children from the hearing room are "graduated"

as soon as possible from the special room to the regular wing.

The sight conservation room in the building will be opened for pupils next fall. Here facilities are provided children and the same general policies will prevail. Large type books, special desks, controlled lighting, especially designed maps, globes, and other materials and equipment are to be provided.

Actually, exceptional children are fundamentally similar to normal ones. These children differ mainly in degree, depending upon the severity of the defect or deviation. Some special handling of the children is necessary because these so-called normal developments have been arrested due to disease or injury. Frequently, these children have other complications which

limit the amount of educational progress which ordinarily could be expected of them. These limitations are brought about by such factors as limited environment, delayed and limited language experiences, over-protection and pampering, long periods of illness, restricted association with "normal" children, brain injury, and/or physical impairment. These same physical limitations are frequently accompanied by mental frustration, anxiety, insecurity, and feelings of inferiority.

These factors pose serious problems for special and regular teachers in their guidance of the special education child in his educational development. In addition to the mental outlook of the child toward his own capabilities for achievement, the teacher often is faced



*Austin, Texas, Public Schools*  
*Children receive auditory and speech reading training in the hearing room of the Casis School, Austin Public Schools, Texas.*

with academic retardation and social problems in children. Specifically, some of the problems are these: loud talking by children with severe hearing losses, extreme physical limitations on the part of the cerebral palsied or post-polio cases, delayed reading due to limited experiential background, teasing or overprotection by other children, etc. In addition, there is the added problem of getting acceptance of special education pupils by the so-called normal ones.

### **Progress Is Being Made**

Significant progress is being made by children in all areas in spite of certain limitations, such as class size in the regular wing, case load, and the seriousness of some of the physical problems. This progress, which is evidenced by behavioral changes and in educational achievement, is due to the skill of performance of the special teachers, close cooperation between the special education and regular staffs, and the cooperation of parents with teachers. The employment of the attendant and custodial help in maintaining the efficiency of machinery and plant has contributed significantly to the success of the operation. Some of the specific, additional ways through which advancements have been made are the following:

- Close cooperation and sharing of information between regular and special teachers in the on-going program.
- Active program of conferences between special and regular teachers.
- Systematic inclusion of parents in

the program through planned observations and conferences.

- In-service training of staff through planned faculty meetings bringing in specialists in the field as consultants.
- Constructive advice given by physicians in the education and therapy administered to children.
- Special and technical assistance given by the special education supervisor and the Austin testing and guidance personnel.
- Reduction and elimination of any stigma that may be attached to physical limitation through careful preparation of children by the regular teachers.
- Active orientation of the regular child as to the problems of the physically handicapped and as to the need for social acceptance of the special education pupil without teasing, pity or over-protection.

The project begun at Casis School is a new venture for its staff. Even with an especially well-designed and equipped building, much needs to be learned in effecting the best type of organization for instruction and constant attention needs to be given to evaluating the program as it moves along. One real asset which this and other schools have is the splendid cooperation which parents are willing to provide and the growing reservoir of resources available in physicians, psychiatrists, specialists in special education, community guidance personnel, service clubs, and a host of others in providing the equipment and know-how for the adequate guidance of exceptional children.

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