

From the early days of the pandemic in Israel, Ofek Liyladenu reorganized its services and adapted them to emerging needs on the ground. In mid-March Israel went into lockdown and we managed to conduct surveys among parents on the situation (early April and early May). The main finding were:

1. Most parents reported that there were no regular personal contact with low vision support teachers, nor in-person teaching or meetings. Communication was limited to receiving written materials and what'sapp messages.

2. Many children found the use of ZOOM challenging and technical training and instruction were unavailable.

3. Regular and subject teachers were not aware of making teaching accessible via ZOOM, e.g. early preparation of materials, silence participants etc. In addition the lengthy use of screen caused pressure on the eyes, headaches etc.

4. Many of the teachers were not aware/familiar with Ministry of Education guidance.

5. There were hardly personal workplans for the visually impaired children.

6. On many occasions assistive technology remained in school.

7. Distance learning was not supported with personal assistance.

8. Parents reported lack of clarity regarding Matriculation exams, e.g. what would be the format, scope etc.

In conversations with the Ministry of Education most issues were addressed.

With the ending of the lockdown and return to somewhat routine in the education system we conducted another survey and additional issues came up:

1. Adaptation of exams formats in distance learning were not adapted for visually impaired children.

2. Physical and spatial changes to schools environments were not introduced and familiarized properly to students with visual impairments.

3. Partial return to routine extracurricular activities, e.g. after school clubs and courses, caused distress and frustration.

In general the uncertainty and restrictions of physical contact and touch created anxiety and emotional regression.

With the opening of the new school year in September the education system was better prepared and low vision support teachers were regularly supporting the children. Latest development is a second lockdown of three weeks ago and we are following and monitoring the situation.

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