

Disabilities: barriers to participation



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Exclusion Inclusion Disabilities

Overcoming barriers to participation

From Exclusion to Inclusion

In the United Kingdom, discussed by Shah (2005), segregated or special schools were the most common form of provision for pupils with disabilities, despite the fact that the cost of special education per child is too high for most countries. Governments are now recognizing the need to develop a more affordable system which will provide quality education for all children, additionally, legislation is clearly moving towards an increasing emphasis on inclusion.

In Scotland the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (Department for Education and Employment, 2001), which amends the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), deliver a stronger right to a mainstream education for disabled children unless this is conflicting with the parents wishes or the provision of efficient education for other children.

One of the main aims proposed in the recent White Paper, Removing Barriers to Achievement (DfES, 2004) is to reduce the number of special schools and encourage more mainstream schools to adopt fully inclusive practices. In addition, by reducing the number of residential schools and reallocating resources to local provisions and service, disabled children and young people can be educated closer to their homes and families.

But it is argued that, even with the worldwide trend towards inclusion and the increasing participation of disabled children in mainstream schools,

special education still has an important role and, for some students, is still the best option.

However, others need to be put in situations in which they have opportunities to succeed and develop self-esteem and confidence. (Shah, S, 2005)

There has been much debate over recent years concerning the provision of segregated special education for pupils with disabilities. There are both arguments in favour of inclusion and against.

Advantages of segregated education

Cited by Shah (2005), Barnes (1991) and Middleton (1999), argue that special education is promoted to parents of disabled children as a safe option to the hustle and bustle of mainstream schools, which may otherwise be too stressful. Some researchers claim that separate schools offer the best opportunities for disabled students, for instance, Jenkinson (1979) argues that with smaller classes and higher teacher pupil ratios, special schools allow concentrated one-to-one attention and tuition which can be delivered at a level appropriate to each child's needs.

They are perceived as more supportive, both physically and socially, and less threatening to students with disabilities, encouraging their feeling of security and enhancing their self-esteem by avoiding continual comparison of their achievements with other students. According to Pearse (1996), segregated institutions are an essential element of the social and psychological independence of disabled children.

Moreover, being supported in an environment free from the involvement of mainstream barriers allows the children to explore and develop a sense of self. Cook, Swain and French (2001) propose that disabled students are likely to build positive social relationships more easily in segregated institutions where they not only share common goals and interests, but values, goals and ways of viewing the world. In mainstream school, where a disabled child requires support, Watson et al. (1999) suggest that successful social integration with peers may be hindered.

They found that for some disabled people, the physical location of the helper could work against their acceptance among other children in the class. Allan (1996) suggests that the child's interaction can be brought to the attention of the staff, as disabled children are more carefully monitored than their non-disabled peers: All children are the object of analysis within schools, but for pupils with special educational needs, the observation reaches further.

They are observed, not only at work in the classroom, but also at break times. The way in which they intermingle with mainstream peers or integrate socially is often viewed as equally important, if not more so, than their attainment in mainstream curriculum goals. (Shah, S, 2005)

Criticisms of segregated education

Shah also discusses arguments against segregated education; Alderson and Goodey, (1998) argue that reports which suggest that students have a higher self-esteem or do better at special schools are worthless if self-esteem depends on being in an artificial, sheltered world. Barnes (1991) argues that being in a protective, segregated environment holds back

disabled individuals from society. Dr John Mary and the British Council of Organizations of Disabled People (1986) believe that special education is one of the key routes for distributing non-disabled views of the world and making sure that disabled school leavers are socially isolated.

The outcome of this isolation is that disabled people accept social discrimination and lack the skills needed in adult life. This argument is supported by Jenkinson (1997) and Fuchs and Fuchs (1998) who feel that the deficiency of suitable behavioural role models, and the removal from the general way of life of childhood and adolescence contribute to isolation in the community. Barnes, (1991) also argues that by producing socially and educationally disabled individuals, the special education system maintains discrimination practices in all other areas of social life, particularly employment. Dunn (1968), also had the same views, in that, a segregated placement is responsible for people with disabilities being negatively labelled and excluded from society.

He goes on to say that labels have damaging effects on both teacher expectations and the student's own self-concept. Another major criticism of segregated education is that an isolated curriculum that focuses on specific educational needs stops students from learning a wide range of subjects offered in mainstream schools. Jenkinson (1997) argues that the small number of staff in special schools, along with their considerably limited, curricula expertise, restricts the range and content of the curriculum.

She feels the lack of training and experience of most special school teachers in the secondary curriculum to be a growing obstacle as students with

disabilities move into adolescence. An article entitled Special School Shame (Disability Now, January 1997) reported on a study, conducted by the Alliance for Inclusive Education, which evidenced that special schools are less likely than mainstream schools to enter their students for public examinations.

According to the sample statistics, only 6 of the 85 special schools in the study (7 per cent) proceeded to compete in national exams. The reasoning was based on the assumption that children in special schools were unable to learn as well as their peers in regular education.

Shah has also discussed inclusive education and cites a number of authors for example, Barnes (1991) has argued that inclusion plays a crucial role in the fight towards the abolition of discrimination and of disabled people being accepted as citizens of the social majority, he suggests that being educated in mainstream schools is positively related to the successful transition of people with disabilities into employment and wider society, although, being placed in mainstream school does not necessarily mean experiencing total inclusion.

Inclusive education is more than just placing a disabled person in a mainstream school and providing extra support. Inclusion requires major changes within society to allow everyone to take part, interact and make choices. Young disabled people are less likely than their non-disabled counterparts to pursue academic subjects of their choice due to restrictions imposed by the physical environment. Burgess, (2003) believes that even

now, mainstream schools are not fully accessible, as those responsible for developing inclusion still often think of accessibility as ramps and rails.

Burgess also points out that discriminatory attitudes among teachers in mainstream schools have also been confirmed by UK education inspectors. A survey by the Department of Education and Science (DES), published in 1989, noted that the attitudes of some staff were patronising, while others were reluctant to work with disabled pupils. T

hese attitudes were likely to be reproduced in the attitudes and behaviour of non-disabled students towards their disabled peers. The result of such attitudinal prejudice among peers may be critical. Haring, (1991) argues that peer acceptance is a primary outcome of schooling, with important outcomes for the quality of life of students with disabilities. (Shah, S, 2005)

As Shah discusses arguments in favour of, and against segregation, it becomes clear that there are a number of authors that support both viewpoints, for example, Jenkinson (1979) argues that with smaller classes and higher teacher pupil ratios, special schools allow concentrated one-to-one attention and tuition which can be delivered at a level appropriate to each child's needs, yet, at the same time, she also says that the small number of staff in special schools, along with their considerably limited, curricula expertise, restricts the range and content of the curriculum and feels the lack of training and experience of most special school teachers in the secondary curriculum to be a growing obstacle as students with disabilities move into adolescence.

Barnes (1991) stresses that one of the principal functions of segregated education is to protect disabled children from the rough and tumble of the normal environment, at the same time, arguing, that being in a protective, segregated environment holds back disabled individuals from society.

These contradictory views lead to the belief that the authors feel that special schools do have their place in society, but not to the detriment of those attending, as in the past. People are different and diverse, and what is suitable for one may not be suitable for another, in that, total inclusion in a mainstream school may be damaging for some pupils but more beneficial for others.

Perhaps this is where mainstream schools which have a special unit can be beneficial. This can be construed as partial inclusion. Pupils attending the special units can have access to the mainstream curriculum, and social interaction with their more able peers, at the same time, those who simply could not cope with mainstream institutions have the benefit of the caring special unit, where they can still have access to a similar curriculum as that offered in mainstream, and feel protected and less vulnerable.

Partial integration is often seen as combining the best of both worlds in special education: the student has access to special curriculum and small classes in the special school, while also having the opportunity to socialize and participate with non-disabled peers in extra-curricular activities that are not available in the special school. (Jenkinson, 1996, p 107-108)

The school in which I work is one of 14 secondary schools within the Local Authority which have a special unit.

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Local Authority and school level

Within the local authority in which I work, there are 4 special schools and, 14 secondary schools and 28 primary schools which have a unit for pupils with additional support needs.

A primary or secondary school is identified as having an integrated special unit/class if the sole or main purpose of any class or other unit forming part of the school is to provide education specially suited to the additional support needs of children or young persons selected for attendance at the class or unit by reason of those needs.

The School

The school is a large rural secondary comprehensive school with a long tradition of excellence, and positive relationships with the local community. The school is sited in a wooded setting, once the grounds of a Castle. In 1979 the school catered for only 500 pupils; today more than 1, 200 pupils attend the school and are supported by over 100 teaching staff.

The school aims to ensure that all pupils, regardless of circumstance, be given every opportunity to succeed and attempt to achieve their full potential.

The school Inclusion Policy states it is the intention to include as many children as possible into some aspects of a mainstream school day. The school can cater for all students in the catchment area except those who require daily hospital residential care.

For a small number of pupils inclusion could mean that they are in the same school as mainstream children, have their break times and their lunch times
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with mainstream classes, and attend mainstream subjects taught by a mainstream teacher as part of their S. E. N. class. They would also be able to attend activities arranged for their year group such as induction days, assemblies and trips.

For other pupils it will mean that they are included into mainstream classes for part of their week. Some pupils will be mostly taught in mainstream, with one or two subjects in the Additional Support department, and vice versa. The decision of how much inclusion or when inclusion is suitable will be made at each student's annual review; or on their entry into the Special Education Department.

This means that parents and professionals will decide together what is most appropriate for each child. Whatever decisions are made can be altered as and when appropriate. Each pupil's needs will be assessed every year to ensure that past decisions are still appropriate. All students in the S. E. N. Department will have an IEP and annual review meetings will be held to discuss progress.

The support for learning team in the school consists of: Additional Support Needs (ASN) Department, Learning Support Department (LS), Sensory Impairment Department (For Visual and Hearing Impairment), Promoting Education Pupil Support (PEPS), and Auxiliary Support.

Additional Support Department: Support of pupils who are not full time mainstream because of mild to severe and complex learning difficulties and / or who for significant emotional, psychological or other reasons are unable to attend large mainstream classes.

Learning Support Department: Support of pupils in our associated primary schools and secondary mainstream pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties and other Learning Difficulties. Supplementary Studies in S1 and S2 provides support with Literacy and Numeracy and Support Studies in S3 and 4 provide support with Standard Grade mainstream subjects.

SFL Room 3: Support of mainstream pupils on the Autistic Spectrum who cannot access mainstream classes full time because of social and communication difficulties. Also used for Alternatives to Exclusion work.

Promoting Education Pupil Support Department: Support of mainstream pupils with significant social, emotional and / or behavioural difficulties. This support is mostly in class but also appropriate 1: 1 and group support provided within the PEPS department classroom

Pupils may be supported across all subject areas and this can be in a variety of ways:

- Working with a Support Teacher as well as a Subject Teacher in class e. g. a Special Education, Learning Support, PEPS or Hearing Impairment Teacher working alongside the Subject Teacher to deliver the class lesson.
- More intensive support in small groups or on an individual basis with any of the SFL professionals.
- Following a short/ medium or longer term modified timetable to help explore strategies to assist pupils in developing study and learning skills.

- Working totally out with the mainstream class structure in specialised classes for support.
- Support by an auxiliary in a subject class.

In addition to the above, the SFL team liaises with a wide range of outside agencies including: the social work department, the community education team, the educational psychology services, the police, the medical services, family support for workers.

House and Guidance System

Until this year, 1008, each pupil in the school belongs to one of seven House Groups, which are the responsibility of seven Principal Teachers of Guidance. Their role is to know well and support each pupil in their House, providing a focus for the pupil, parents/carers, and staff and outside school contacts. At all times they work towards promoting positive behaviour and positive relationships: working with pupils to set learning targets; reviewing and discussing overall progress and being a regular point-of-contact throughout their school career.

Although the school Inclusion Policy states it is the intention to include as many children as possible, the pupils attending the AS department were placed in a separate Guidance house from the rest of the school. The registration group I was assigned to when I joined the school, consisted of a mixture of 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th years. There is an assembly held every week for each year group. The day and time for the assemblies is announced on a daily bulletin, and the days change each term. The assembly day and time for the 5th and 6th year has never included those pupils from the AS department.

As part of my research I interviewed the Head Teacher about inclusion and he said that when he first started at the school, which was not long ago, he was horrified to find that there was a separate House for the pupils with additional needs.

As from August 2008 there will be a new House System put into place, instead of 7 houses there will be 5. To promote the further integration and inclusion of pupils with additional support needs, all pupils will be assigned to a mainstream Registration Group, and House.

The Head Teacher feels that Inclusion does not just mean integration; it means participation in all aspects.

Promoting education

The school has a whole school positive behaviour policy which provides the framework for classroom practice.

There are school sanctions in place and these are:

- Official verbal warning.
- Move to another seat.
- Letter to parents.
- Send to 'Time Out Room'
- Referral to Principal Teacher.
- Referral to Senior Staff.

A key element of the behaviour policy is that the school does not accept any form of physical, verbal or emotional abuse, e. g. name calling, threatening behaviour or swearing.

The school does recognize positively, that the vast majority of pupils, are a real credit to themselves, to the school and to their parents, and believes this should be recognized. " Well Done" slips are one method available to the staff at to communicate good news about an individual" achievement. Pupils react positively to receiving these and value the recognition they bring.

Pupils within my classroom

The group of pupils I teach are in their 1st year at the school. Their additional needs include; social, emotional, behavioural, and difficulties in learning, understanding, listening, and following instructions.

When incidents do occur in the classroom, the type of behaviour generally falls into one of three categories:

- Muttered or low-key threats, swearing or name-calling, chair/table tipping, refusal to co-operate with a group or another child or an adult, books or pencils swept off a table.
- Aggressive, verbal abuse with shouting directed towards another pupil or adult; objects such as a pencil or rubber thrown at someone or something.
- Physical aggression directed towards another child.

When I first started at the school there were 9 pupils in my class. There are now 14. The additional 5 pupils have been reported as having difficulties in some subjects, and have therefore been removed from some mainstream lessons such as Science and Modern Languages, and placed in the AS Department. This seems to be more like exclusion rather than inclusion!