

Every child has the
right to a mainstream
education



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Every child has the right to a mainstream education. This is an entitlement for the parents of special needs children, for them to be able to access this, if they believe it to be the correct decision for their child. Many things need to be considered when doing this such as whether the individual child will be able to cope in this type of school environment and whether their ability will allow them to progress along with their peers. This is something which I believe is not the correct decision for every child as I have witnessed pupils who struggle day in day out with issues such as the playground environment, forging relationships with peers and some who are unable to cope with the unpredictability of what can be the normal school day.

Inclusion is important, though it is not necessarily the right choice for every pupil. Inclusion is regarded as ‘successful education of all students (whether with or without disabilities, disadvantages) in the same schools and classrooms, celebrating the resulting diversity, including various abilities and cultures (DFES).’ The era of mixed ability groupings means teachers need to include every child regardless of need and ability through differentiated work, extra support and with a range of activities to suit all needs. The Government’s aim is for ‘every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being. Every child matters and they do within the classroom and school environment.’ (Every Child matters). Education needs to be personalised so every child can learn to the best of their ability and access resources and materials in lessons, and for most cases this happens. There are many occasions in which I have witnessed, however, where special needs pupils

fall short of being included all of the time and are given activities which neither stimulate nor challenge them. These are the pupils which perhaps need the most help to progress. They need to be suitably challenged so they may progress in some way, however big or small. Ofsted (2004) suggested that schools should make sure that 'pupils with SEN in mainstream schools are able to play a full part in school life, and receive a curriculum and teaching relevant to their needs' (p. 9). Pupils can often get lost in large mixed ability groupings and this is where a child may feel excluded as the teaching is not always relevant to their needs. This paper shall focus upon inclusion and the experiences of pupils on the autistic spectrum in mainstream schools.

Significance for my Practice

Every school I have been in has at least one child on the autistic spectrum. This is inevitable now in mainstream schools due to inclusion. Each child I have seen has Aspergers syndrome, high functioning autism. These children are clever and generally are placed in good sets. Educationally these pupils can advance and do well. Socially, however, these pupils struggle and they face difficulties on a daily basis. I am involved with some of these pupils at my present school so the significance for my practice will be vast.

Understanding the research in this area and carrying out my own research will allow me to draw conclusions which I can then apply in school, to help these pupils and to in turn make other teachers aware, to allow benefit for these pupils across the school as a whole.

Historical Background

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The Education Act (1944) established the grounding that a child's ability should be measured on age, aptitude and what they are capable of. SEN children were categorised by their disabilities. Although the act was groundbreaking for the whole education system, ' it was the 1970's that the focus of the individuals own need began to be addressed (Parsons, 1999). Research into special educational needs occurred more frequently in the 1970's after the Warnock Report (1978) which found that 20% of children could have SEN but 2% may need support above what mainstream schooling could offer them. Since then a great deal of research and investigation has been done in all areas of special needs. The government has made a number of ' acts' over the years to ensure this happens, the most recent one being the Special Needs and Disabilities Act (2001) which protects students against discrimination. In 2005 however, Baroness Warnock criticised SEN in the UK and has suggested that small specialist provision is needed and that the bullying of SEN children in mainstream schools is inevitable. The claim fails to include that small specialist provision is still available should parents seek this. Specialist provision is now also within some mainstream schools which have specialist units within to cater for more complex needs. Further literature, which is discussed later backs up this claim to some extent.

Autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) are ' a range of related developmental disorders that begin in childhood and persist throughout adult life' (NHS, 2010). ' It causes problems and difficulties with social interaction, impaired language and communication skills and unusual patterns of thought and physical behaviour.' There are three main types of ASD; autistic disorder, aspergers syndrome and pervasive developmental disorder. The National

Autistic Society (NAS) claim that 1 in 100 pupils have ASD and that all schools should be autism friendly with fully trained teachers. This I believe should be the case but with numerous policies and an extensive range of needs within SEN alone, it is difficult to ensure all teachers are trained in everything. This is perhaps where there should be a number of specialist teachers, rather than have all teachers specialise in everything. This however, suggests that in a typical secondary school there could be more than ten children with this disposition. Aspergers (high-functioning autism) is common in most secondary schools and the experiences of some pupils are difficult ones.

ASD was first identified by Kanner (1943) as a specific pattern of abnormal behaviour. He identified this as being rare but made no attempt to define the amount of people who may have had this. Though the study is very dated, it is still highly influential today and has been a stepping stone for all future research. It is still also relevant to society today as people show the same symptoms as identified and therefore is still of huge importance. Other studies have shown differing prevalence rates of this, including Lotter (1966) who identified a frequency of 4.5 per 10,000 children with autism in an empirical study that was carried out which was epidemiological in nature. This developed the findings from Kanners research, nevertheless further research by Wing and Gould (1979) identified a rate of 15 per 10,000 of children who had social interaction, communication and imagination difficulties. This was the 'triad of impairments.' Patterns of a repetitive nature were also identified which is common today in most children was ASD. The children in the study were not that of the autism Kanner had

described. Wing and Gould identified these being part of a broader spectrum of needs. These needs together were identified in 20 per 10, 000 children. The prevalence rate is difficult to trust as many people portray elements of ASD yet are not defined as such. Experience has shown this. With prevalence rates, not all of the population can be tested and therefore the rate should be taken as an estimate.

Asperger (1944) focused on a group of children who had similar behaviours to what Kanner (1943) had described as autism, but whom had enhanced abilities. Asperger presented four case studies of children. In these children he identified some patterns of behaviour and abilities and consequently named these 'autistic psychopathy.' These behaviours resulted in 'a lack of empathy, little ability to form friendships, one-sided conversation, intense absorption in a special interest and clumsy movements.' Asperger went on further to explain how these children displayed a great understanding and depth of knowledge on their favourite subject. These claims are great and wholly unjustified on merely a study on only four boys. Further research is hinted at within the text but as the paper only identified four case studies it should be regarded as a small scale study. It is common now also for girls also to be associated with being diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, which is a significant point that Asperger missed. The behaviours identified are some which I have witnessed and which are consistent with my experience. Children with Aspergers syndrome can talk in depth on their favourite topic and can completely change the course of a conversation they are in to talk about this. They can often have one sided conversations on this and are not necessarily talking to anyone in particular on their specialist subject.

The limitations of this research lie with the time, these were studies that were done during World War II and therefore behaviour due to trauma from the war could have indeed impeded the true behaviour that matched the child. It could be argued though that there were indeed many other children who presented with these behaviours and abilities, but an in-depth study of just four ensured significant detail and strengths in assessing a range of behaviours over a period of time, which consequently could be later relayed onto other children with a similar disposition. The considerable delay in the translation of this paper led to Western understanding decades later; his findings are now regarded and accepted worldwide. Aspergers syndrome is indeed a social construction and the paper should be taken as such but noteworthy research which will be discussed later now backs up the claims made in this paper.

What could be regarded as another influential study is done by Wolff (1995). Having studied Asperger syndrome for over 30 years the findings are most definitely worthy to a great degree. The studied children were of average or high ability who were impaired in their social interaction but who do not have the full picture of the triad of impairments. However, these children represent the most subtle and most able end of the autism spectrum; are higher functioning. ' The majority become independent as adults, many marry and some display exceptional gifts, though retaining the unusual quality of their social interactions.' There is great debate on why to even include these children in the autistic spectrum. Wolff suggests that ' these children often have a difficult time at school and they need acknowledgment, understanding and acceptance from school staff as well as parents.' Is this

the best option for these children though? To identify them as different and therefore facilitate them to a life of indifference as they live with this brand upon them. This makes the research lose some credibility as there should be more justification than they have a difficult time at school. Other children have difficult times at school, for many other reasons.

Research Theories and Findings

A good proportion of studies have been completed on including pupils in a mainstream school with autistic spectrum disorders. These studies differ in terms of their methodologies and findings. With a huge proportion of pupils in the UK facing difficulties with communication, social interaction and imagination, studies for mainstream schools focus upon high functioning autism in the form of Aspergers syndrome. It is more common to find pupils with Aspergers syndrome in mainstream schools as their intellectual level is greater than those with pure autism.

Inclusion and Autism; Pupil Experience

Humphrey and Lewis (2008) looked into the views and experiences of a pupil with ASD in a mainstream school. Through a small scale study it found that 'the inclusion of pupils with Aspergers syndrome in mainstream schools presents challenges and opportunities for the various stakeholders (e. g. teachers, pupils, parents and peers) in this process.' The study was purely the views of pupils and their experiences though it is often witnessed by teachers that issues at home equate to problems at school. As a result, it may have been appropriate to include teachers' views to ensure the

participants were portraying behaviour that was usual. Inclusion is fraught
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with difficulties, with the whole range of needs that exist in mainstream schools at present. A report shows 1000 examples of inclusion in education from members of NAS, Barnard et al (2000). The findings claim that parents with a child in an autism specific provision were twice more likely to be very satisfied than those who had a child in a mainstream school. It shows that views decline through the later school years, the older the child becomes. The survey was completed by over eight hundred respondents, with half of the children being in a mainstream setting. A majority proportion of these children had statements. Findings are primarily based on opinions of parents but the views could be contested as they do not attend school with their child. The parental opinion on what they think their child should have may exceed the needs that their child actually holds. In a mainstream school I am working in children with ASD are supported in a variety of ways and are making good progress. There are issues that these children struggle with but they are guided through these with help from staff in school and through external agencies support.

Humphrey is a leading researcher in the field, with a number of studies looking into the effects of inclusion for pupils. Humphrey (2008) identifies that the number of students with ASD being educated in mainstream schools is growing, though educational experiences of these students are unfounded. What's more, the article found that ' pupils with ASD are more than twenty times more likely to be excluded from school than those without special educational needs.' This implies that pupils are unable to cope suitably in this setting yet reasons for the exclusions are not explored. The paper identifies strong strategies for behaviour and such, yet without the reasons

of why these people are excluded the suggestions on improving behaviour are speculative. Literature also draws upon the debate of whether inclusion in mainstream education is the best route for all special needs children. Wang (2009) identified through a critical analysis that certain difficulties may occur by allowing ASD children into mainstream education. It also notes on how inclusion is worth striving for and how disadvantages can be resolved by training educators appropriately. Much research in this area pertains that it is teachers who need to understand more and in turn need to implement different strategies. This shall be discussed further later. Tobias (2009) found that ' by providing students with a mentor figure and by meeting the needs of the individual rather than applying blanket policies to groups of students with ASD,' that these were strategies to support and aid in inclusion which worked well and were consequently perceived as such. This on the other hand, is one isolated example and was a small scale study of just fifteen participants and research in this respect is limited. Most studies seem to take the view that experiences could be improved; bullying was found to be a major issue within literature.

Peer Understanding and Bullying

A significant number of researchers have identified the need to ensure peer understanding to allow ASD students to be included in the activities associated with school life. Many reports account for many students with ASD being bullied by peers, either because they know they are different and have ASD or because they are seen as different and cannot handle social situations as well as others may. Humphrey and Lewis (2008) identified the fact that much research had suggested these pupils make easy targets for <https://assignbuster.com/every-child-has-the-right-to-a-mainstream-education/>

bullies. The symptoms associated with ASD make these pupils 'stand out' from their other peers so this statement could be suggested from observations, the research needs to identify why this is as it found almost all pupils reported being bullied at different levels of severity and frequency. This also seemed to occur regularly. Research on this suggests that it is boys in particular who suffer in school settings. Granzio et al (2006) confirm that the "oddness" of pupils with Aspergers syndrome led to verbal abuse and social exclusion on a daily basis from peers. From this it may be reasonable to suggest that social exclusion could lead to other problems in a child such as the child becoming depressed due to social rejection as 'around one-third of school time is spent outside the classroom' (Nelson, 2004). This therefore is an area where more research needs to be done; in particular in that of social integration.

Norwich and Kelly (2004) recognise that those with special educational needs are more likely to be bullied than other pupils. When thinking of the difficulties faced by children with ASD; particularly that of social and communication difficulties it is not surprising the rate and frequency that bullying occurs. The World Health Organisation (2007) suggests that 'social difficulties are exacerbated if dyspraxia or developmental clumsiness is present, which is often the case.' Students therefore need to develop an understanding of ASD pupils to allow them to develop some compassion to how they must feel on a day to day basis. Humphrey (2008) established from previous research that 'students need to understand a little about why students with Asperger syndrome have such "quirky" behaviours. A little understanding and knowledge can go a long way to show other students how

to assist easily, rather than ignore or taunt this student'. Most research in this area suggests that more knowledge is needed, whether it is for the pupils or school staff.

A further study looks into the relationships with peers and the use of the school environment. Wainscoat et al (2008) found through a case control study that Aspergers pupils, in comparison with controls engaged in fewer social interactions, spent breaks and lunch times in adult supervised areas of the school, reported having fewer friends and therefore likely to be the targets of bullying. This once more shows recognition in the fact that experiences of these pupils within mainstream education are not all good. This is one of the few quantitative studies yet provides little understanding into reasons behind the findings compared with the qualitative studies. It provides strong evidence to support these claims through statistics but the structured interview could have included some open questions to allow participants to elaborate. The literature discussed shows pupils are isolated, often bullied and somewhat unhappy. This suggests mainstream education is perhaps not the best place for all students. There also seems to be a social stigma attached to these pupils as research suggests 'quirky or odd behaviour.' With up to '1 in 270 students at secondary mainstream schools having SEN related to an ASD,' Barnard et al (2002) this accounts for a huge proportion of pupils who may be having the same difficulties. This calls out for a greater need for more research in this field to ensure ASD pupils are getting the support they need to deal with these issues and how these issues are dealt with in mainstream schools.

Teachers' Perceptions

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Ashburner et al (2010) compare teachers' perceptions of students with ASD to their perceptions of typically developing students with regard to their capacity to perform academically and to regulate emotions and behaviour in mainstream classrooms. This was a case control research design and participant bias, in respects to the participating teachers is highly prominent in this research. It was based on teachers' ratings from teachers whom already possessed views and opinions on the children's aptitudes, abilities and more importantly temperament. This, on the other hand, means they had a truer perception of the child that a researcher would not have had and therefore results are plausible. Ashburner et al propose the research findings were concurrent with prior research which ' suggests that students with ASD exhibit significantly higher levels of behavioural and emotional difficulties at school than their typically developing peers.'

Jordan (2008) claims that ' teaching pupils with ASD is hard. It is hard for just the same reason that students with ASD find it difficult to learn in our current school system. Just as these children have no natural intuitive ways to understand their teachers, teachers, in turn, have no natural intuitive ways of understanding students with ASD.' Teaching is made more difficult by the fact that no child with ASD is the same and strategies that work on occasions, may not do on every occasion. This is what I have found in my practice. This is where Every Child Matters comes into play and is particularly important, where each child needs support to enjoy and achieve.

Jones et al (2007) conducted a review of needs and services for young people with Aspergers syndrome. It identified that within education many children, parents and carers will meet people in their school lives whom have <https://assignbuster.com/every-child-has-the-right-to-a-mainstream-education/>

no knowledge of Aspergers syndrome, teachers included. Thirty five children took part in the review and the majority (68%) would have liked their school to be different. Although this is based on ASD children, it goes without saying that most children would like school to be different and therefore more specifics need to be recognised. Within the survey bullying was also identified, yet this was something which school staff failed to mention. Research in regards to teacher understanding comes across not only in research that is based solely on the teacher, but also from research on peers and pupils themselves with ASD. This shows there is a greater need for teachers to be more aware of the whole range of need associated with ASD, not just Aspergers syndrome which is commonly found in mainstream setting.

Conclusions from the research

The general consensus from the research identified is that inclusion and autism is improving, but improvements still need to be made. There is limited research into social integration of pupils into mainstream schools, which considering the estimated prevalence rate is quite alarming. A significant number of researchers have also identified the need to ensure peer understanding, as well as a greater awareness of ASD for teachers. The majority of the research identified bullying as an experience within school. The percentages of this are soaring and it is something which I believe schools needs to research promptly. Bullying is identified in the research from accounts by the pupils, yet teachers' perceptions on this seem somewhat different. Research falls short of statistical evidence and a lot of it

is qualitative, but this provides in depth explanations and good quality accounts of experiences within mainstream schools.

Part B

In analysing the different research studies it seems appropriate to start from near the beginning and look at where new and relevant research stems from. In this respect there will be a focus on Aspergers syndrome (Asperger, 1944).

The paper by Asperger (1944) is highly pertinent in understanding a range of autism that may occur in a person. It continues on from the work done by Kanner (1943). A great deal of evidence is collected, including that of family history. The research methods, however, are somewhat lacking. The testing that Asperger conducted on these children often failed in providing any useful analysis and was therefore disregarded. Intelligence tests were conducted where these included construction tests where the child would copy from memory, rhythm imitation, memory for digits (repetition for six digits was expected at the age of ten, one boy who was six thus proved to be above average), memory for sentences (this could not be evaluated) and similarities between different things were tested. Analysis focused on memory for digits, along with observation and parental examples of abilities. The latter is a difficult one to reprehend as parents often believe their child to be above average of other children of a similar age and this for that reason is only their opinion. It is essentially qualitative data in the respect that most of the research is carried out through observations and opinions. The data is essentially more rich with lots of detail and therefore of good quality. The justifications for the intelligence tests were on the basis that the child carrying out these tests were observed and therefore judged on <https://assignbuster.com/every-child-has-the-right-to-a-mainstream-education/>

communication and ability. This fundamentally enhances the reliability of the tests as there was a plausible reason behind carrying them out, rather than just purely to measure intelligence. The tests however were adapted to the personality of the child so conclusions from these as a whole need to be somewhat justified more. This was essential in terms of ethical issues to put the child at ease but each of the data sets collected are detached from each other, as each case study had a different method. The research is highly subjective and researcher bias is great due to the nature of the observations. The case studies, however, provide enough detail through comprehensive descriptions to justify the claims made. Overall, this paper has provided a good grounding for all research conducted today in this field and is highly important. The research methods conducted are limited but further research and advancements in technology since 1944 have allowed a greater picture of Aspergers syndrome to be developed over time.

In contrast, a recent paper on the views and experiences of Aspergers children in a mainstream school moves away from looking at how these children behave to focusing on how they feel and what their experiences are like. This links to the last paper discussed on what Aspergers is but looks at their perceptions of what Aspergers is, so is not purely from the side of the researcher. Humphrey and Lewis (2010) provide an in-depth analytical paper on how these children cope in school. This is a small scale qualitative study on twenty pupils in North West England. It looks at four mainstream high schools. The research is phenomenological where interpretive phenomenological analysis was used to explore how pupils made sense of their educational experiences. The research was qualitative in its methods;

the study incorporated semi-structured interviews and pupil diaries. The diaries were used for a month which made possible vast amounts and quantities of detail from each participant in the study. This is difficult to analyse and researcher bias will occur to decide which points are valid and are worth mentioning above others. The diaries were also conceived via different methods; either written, orally or electronically. This could yield different results. The participants had a choice but this may not have necessarily been the correct method to enable them to explain in the greatest amount of detail. All participants did not fill in the diary for a whole month period but a number of participants stopped at differing intervals. This led to varying amounts and different quantities of data sets from each participant. The research should have perhaps been carried out on a smaller time scale to allow for full participation. The diaries, on the other hand do provide good detailed responses as opposed to purely using interviews. For example, a participant proceeded to draw images and diagrams depicting his school life which gave a more rounded picture on his feelings and emotions. This level of detail allows for greater understanding of their experiences and therefore enables the research to be reliable due to the high quality that it portrays. The semi-structured interviews then back up thoughts and feelings from the participant which also enables prompts from the researcher, to allow greater explanation on why they think or feel this particular way. The paper is high in terms of validity and there is a small chance the participant may be lying as issues were recorded in the diary and discussed further via this route. The study also adds to input from its participants by allowing them to provide commentary on the findings, which were then incorporated into the paper. This ensures the theme on their views is completely adhered

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to, again adding to the consistency of the methodology. The visual representation of results both allowed for the pupil understanding when they were providing commentary on the paper but it also identifies strong categories and themes in an area where research is wholly limited. Furthermore, this will provide a strong grounding for further and future research in this particular area.

Another study, Wainscot et al (2008), looks at experiences in a mainstream school of participants with Aspergers syndrome, but this focuses more specifically on the relationship with peers and the use of the school environment. Research methods included a case control design where pupils undertook a structured interview on their social interactions that day, at the end of school. This method was justified entirely by suggesting ‘ the alternative approach of using a cohort study could result in an unbalanced sample based on the kind of prevalence observed.’ By justifying the method the paper gains credibility and warrants why the method it chose was to all intents and purposes best for this particular research. Structured interviews provide limited scope for the participant to respond and as a result there was a lack in the depth and quality of answers. For example, a question posed was ‘ did you have a good day at school today?’ This is a yes or no question and reasons behind this answer could be vast. A pupil may not have slept well or simply was not in a good mood, but in terms of the research conducted it could be interpreted as the participant not liking school or anything the researcher interprets it as. This is a quantitative study and as such responses were entered into SPSS database and analysed.

A snowball sampling strategy was used which was again justified as 'the characteristics required of participants are rare.' The control participants were chosen with dyslexia to further investigate SEN as a risk factor for social isolation. The overall number of dyslexic pupils in the study however, turned out to be just three. The research therefore focused primarily on those with Aspergers syndrome and those without. The case-control dyad matched a whole range of variables; age, gender, academic ability, physical size, lessons attended, socio-economic background and ethnicity. The variables were matched where they could be but not all of the case control dyads were. This implies the amount of variables was perhaps too complex to allow for all true matches. The data was collected at different times, in different years to be specific. This implies a lack of reliability as data was collected over a year apart and therefore the researcher did not allow the research to be consistent; this may well have influenced the second data collection period more notably than the first. The study provides a number of limitations but in essence provides good substantial evidence, with a clear comparison between two groups. The researcher could have had more control over the study as opposed to allowing case-control matches by the schools. Again, as with the previous study discussed a need for more research in this field has been acknowledged and suggestions of peer bullying are further recommended.

Barnard et al (2000) carried out a large scale study focusing on examples of inclusion in education from the National Autistic Society's members.

Although this is slightly dated, it is one of a few large scale studies on inclusion and autism that has been conduc