

The child with special needs



The child with special needs By courtesy to Education Act, Equality Act, Children Act (1989-2004) and other provisions such as the post of Special Education Needs Coordinator at schools in the UK, today one can inarguably say that gone are the days when children with special education needs were not diagnosed at an early age, or if diagnosed, were not given the benefits that their situation called for. In the aftermath of the introduction of the Revised Code of Practice on Special Education Needs (January 2002), a framework has been provided for developing strong partnerships between parents, schools, local education authorities (LEAs) and health and social services. It is designed to meet the children's special education needs, also allowing their participation in the decision-making process as much is possible. The SEN code of practice lends practical advice to LEAs in carrying out their duties to identify, assess and arrange for children's SEN. A SEN toolkit is given to all SEN providers to help them in the discharge of their responsibilities. It is also obligatory on schools to have Special Education Needs Coordinator to make provisions for the special children. The SENCO is assisted by a body of teachers who help him device strategies to defeat the hurdles to a child's learning process and ensure that the child is able to reach the targets set for his improvement. SENCOs work in association with curriculum-coordinators at the school and ensure that the learning requirements of all children with SEN are given equal emphasis and priority. However, there is a gap between theory and practice, and this gap is wide enough to ponder on and question the very effectiveness of the legislation and other provisions in place. There remain large gaps in the outcomes achieved by children with SEN as a whole. Whereas in 2009, 50.7 per cent of all eligible pupils achieved 5ACEM, only 16.9 per cent of those with SEN did

so. And at age 11, whereas the great majority of children without SEN nowadays achieve national expectations, only about one third of those with SEN do so. Besides that, the attainment gaps for children with SEN are not narrowing as much as some other gaps- notably the gap for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This suggests while the Government policies and legislation for the uplift of socially under-privileged children have worked, they have not yielded the desired outcome in the case of children with special needs. Particularly in the case of classic autism, the child has impairments in the areas of communication, behavior, and socialization. In addition, many individuals also experience sensory processing and regulation issues. But it seems the government is rather neglectful about the issue of classic autism. There is no national register of sufferers, though National Autistic Society (NAS) estimates it is about 500, 000 or 1 per cent of the population. Still worse, there is no government data whether this figure is increasing, and if it is, then how alarmingly. The latest NAS research reveals that fewer than half of severely affected adults were diagnosed before the age of five and almost one in five was not diagnosed until 16. This is despite the fact that if autism is not diagnosed at an early age, the chances of it being effectively handles are shaply diminished. A research by Parents Autism Campaign for Education (PACE) shows that one in five children of school age suffering from autism are not able to avail themselves of any benefits from the local authority to fund their education (The Telegraph). However, recently The Government has publicly acknowledged that the condition is becoming more prevalent, and hence the Medical Research Council is funding one of the largest studies of autism ever and the Department for Education and Employment is looking at ways to improve the

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system in education to accommodate the affected children. But overall, the reasons for the failure to effectively handle autism could be that the rights granted and policies framed for such children have failed to understand the actual needs of the children. It must be remembered that while in the case of people without disability, granting of a right alone is adequate, in the case of children with special needs, that right has to be moulded case by case to accommodate the emotive reflexes in a child and give him the maximum benefit. This calls for special training of the persons responsible for guaranteeing the rights and also an involvement on part of the parents. Parents can have important bearing in the child's learning as they are likely to have knowledge and information about their children that may not be traced at the school-level. Hence, there has to be definite and mandatory day-to-day communication between the parents and the trainers at school, focusing on: explaining the work or support that has already been given, how this has had a positive impact on the child or enriched his learning, the causes of concern that are not yet addressed, and no less the provisional strategies that need to be formulated to address the SEN (Farrell 2003, p. 135). Add to that, the training of the teachers responsible for SEN has to be transformed from being a perfunctory short-term course into a full-fledged expertise attained at universities. There should be a research group at the university level that should determine from time to time the nature of research and programmes necessary to improve and assist the cause of SEN. Although the Children Act 2004 aims at bringing all local government functions of children's welfare and education under the statutory authority of the local Directors of Children's Services and creating a contact point database, much need to be done for its effective management and

execution. In my opinion, all local authorities should set up machinery for the coordination of services for young people with special education needs during and for some time after transition from school to further or higher education, training or employment. Collaboration between voluntary organisations and further education establishments should be developed with a view to increasing opportunities available to children with SEN after they have left school (Warnock, 1978). Reference Farrell, Michael (2003). Understanding special educational needs. RoutledgeFalmer. Warnock, H. M. (1978). Special Educational Needs: A report Breaking the link between special educational needs and low attainment: A report The code of Practice and Statement of Special Educational Needs, [<http://www.dyslexia-parent.com/statement.html>] Children Act 2004, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children_Act_2004] SENCO, [<http://www.specialeducationalneeds.co.uk/UsefulInformation/SEN-EducationInfo/SENCO.html>] Education Act, [<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents>] Warnock Report, [<http://sen.ttrb.ac.uk/viewarticle2.aspx?contentId=13852>] The Telegraph, 2011. [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/children_shealth/4706903/Suffering-in-silence-no-more.html]