

Special needs children in the uk



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Special Needs Children

Introduction

The essay will examine a number of policies and initiatives that have received attention from the UK government. There have been changes in the policies surrounding the country's curriculum. Issues surrounding this policy reform will be examined in detail. Current trends in education policy have promoted inclusion. This means that children with special needs have been incorporated into mainstream classes. Post compulsory schooling is also top on the education agenda. Besides this, recent education policy has been surrounding issues of school's marketability. All these issues will be examined and the subsequent impact of those policies given. (Besley and Ghatak, 2003)

Inclusion of special needs children

Before the introduction of policies around this area, there was an eight year old girl; Victoria Climbié who died under mysterious circumstances. There was therefore a need to make sure that interests of all children were safeguarded regardless of their nature. (Gipps and Stobart, 1997)

The main Act passed surrounding the issue of inclusion was the 'Every Child Matters Policy' in the year 2004. The purpose of this Act was to ensure that all the children in the UK were adequately encompassed in the education regardless of the fact that they had special needs. It was passed with five aims;

- Protecting the social and economic well being of the child
- Ensuring that all children contribute positively to society

- Ensuring that children received enjoyed good health
- Ensuring that children were safe

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The spirit of the Act is that most children should have the opportunity to learn together whether or not they have disabilities. Most of them had been placed in special schools where they were rather isolated. Most of them lacked the ability to socialize and fit into the rest of the world. But through inclusion into mainstream schools, children with special needs have been able to improve their social skills. Psychologists also claim that a mixed environment is more conducive for children's learning rather than when they are isolated. Their self esteem also receives a boost because they feel that they are good enough to learn with other children.(Blanden Gregg and Machin, 2005)

Benefits of inclusive education are not only felt by those children with special needs alone, they are also beneficial to normal children. This is because they learn that children with special needs are not so different from them. It eliminates the fears and stereotypes that come are associated with special needs children. (Gipps and Stobart, 1997)

However, there is a need for teachers to prepare well for these special needs children. Failure to do so will result in poor adjustments by the child and surrounding classmates. It is also the responsibility of all stakeholders in the field of education to readjust their systems such that children with special needs can fit in well. It has been emphasised time and time again that mainstream schools should not expect children with special needs to adjust

to their programme. Instead, the opposite should occur.(Machin and Vignoles, 2004)

This policy has increased the availability of resources towards the education of children with special needs. It has also exposed children with special needs to better teaching facilities and skills. Consequently, it has improved their performance and contributed to the attainment of their potential. (Besley and Ghatak, 2003)

Marketability in schools

In the early nineties, it had been found that most children above the age of sixteen had low retention rates. This normally applied to those who came from low income households. Most of them would drop out and join the market without ample knowledge to make it out there. Even those who were encouraged to stay ended up performing very poorly because they seemed not to have an interest in schooling. There results were clear evidence that something needed to be done to increase their numbers. It was found that in the late eighties, close to sixty seven percent of the students who sat for the GCSE exam got marks that fell below the A to C grade. It was therefore necessary to introduce a system that would encourage students to tackle the whole journey and complete it. (Kingdon and Stobart, 1998)You can get expert help with your essays right now. Find out more...

The government introduced the Education Reform Act of 1988; it was designed to encourage schools to admit more students. The government started funding schools directly rather than through the use of local government. Schools that admitted more students were liable to greater

funds than those with lesser numbers. Parents were also given the choice of deciding which schools they would like to take their children. This was one of the most evolutionary policies because it allowed them to make the choice for themselves. (Gibbons, 2005)

Alongside choice, parents were also given the choice of deciding who would be representing them in school boards. Schools were expected to be more accountable to parents by giving them more information about themselves. In light of those changes, the government introduced league tables. These were publications of students' results in the newspapers highlighting the performance of those at the age of sixteen. It provided information about the best schools so that other non performing schools would be encouraged to improve. (Le Grand, 1993)

Overall, the reform was aimed at making schools market themselves. They were not allowed to fall out or fail in the creation of a good market standing. As the years went by schools have a sort of quasi market in which their fate lies in their own hands (Gibbons, 2005)

The main impact of this reform is that overall retention rates in the education system have increased. There have been more students completing their education and many of them are pursuing higher education. However, when one examines this issue critically, they realise the highest number of students getting retained in good schools come from privileged backgrounds. When schools market themselves, parents with higher income sources are able to afford the best schools because it is very likely that those very schools have the resources and personnel to achieve good

performance. Consequently, this policy has brought about some elements of inequality in the UK education system. Most people from low income backgrounds lack the ability to afford good schools as seen from statistics. This has brought about social-economic disadvantages among members of the education community.(Le Grand, 1993)

Despite these social problems, one must not ignore the facts on the ground; the number of students passing the final exams has increased. Whether some of them are coming from certain backgrounds does not undermine the increase in numbers.

Centralisation

During the early nineties, the UK realised that there was inadequate literacy levels among members of the adult population. Research conducted in this area revealed that this field needed some improvements. Surveys were done among young adults and older ones. The older ones were found to have average rates of literacy. However, the younger adults were found to fall below average levels compared to other countries who participated in the surveys. (Machin and McNally, 2004)

These were the reasons why the UK government decided to change its curriculum. It created a national curriculum that was common to all schools. This was necessary in order to ascertain the same standards were maintained throughout all schools within the country. It was also done to ensure that those standards were high such that students could attain the high levels of literacy.

The UK decided not to leave the duties and responsibilities of making a curriculum to specific schools but has introduced a national curriculum. These changes applied to students between the ages of seven to sixteen years.(Vignoles and Machin, 2004)

Centralisation in the UK education sector has also taken the form of National Numeracy and Literacy classes. These are classes that are supposed to be taught on a daily basis to students in primary schools. They are meant to reinforce good literacy skills. Rigorous methods of assessment for these methods are also available from the government. Its main aim was to ensure that children leaving primary school had basic literacy skills. Tests were also conducted to ensure that students can adhere to requirements. Students are expected to sit for tests at the ages of 16, 14, 11, and 7 corresponding to key stages 4, 3, 2 and one. (Besley and Ghatak, 2003)

The impact of this reform was that parents became more aware about what their children are learning. On top of this, nationalisation of the curriculum has the ability to standardise teaching processes. In the past, the education sector in the UK has had serious problems in recruiting competent and intelligent teachers. This was as a result of the negative mentality associated with the teaching profession (most bright students think it is below them); most teachers may not be very efficient in the teaching process. They therefore require some sort of guide to help them in determining what the right and wrong materials for teaching are. This was the reason why some of them were not choosing the right areas to address. A national curriculum is therefore an aid to teachers who may otherwise not know exactly what to

teach.(Machin and McNally, 2004)Find out how our expert essay writers can help you with your work...

A survey done during 2004 in four hundred schools implementing the national curriculum shed some light on the impact of this policy. It has shown that attainment of literacy has greatly improved and children have better knowledge. However, these schools that showed the highest levels were the ones that observed strict adherence to stipulated requirements. (Hoxby, 2003)

Admission into fields of higher education

During the nineties, the UK government realised that there are few people who pursue higher education. This could be attributed to the fact that most of them had not done so well in their GCSE exam and therefore felt no need to continue. Some of the people who made the choice not to pursue higher education ended up joining vocational schools. This is not such a bad thing when results emerging from it are capable of earning those students respectable jobs in the market. But this was not the case, most students attending vocational training were not able to get good jobs and this left a lot to be desired in the field of education. (Bradley, 2001)

One policy that was passed in response to this need was the improvement of Vocational training. Since UK realised that there were substantial members from student bodies who preferred this system, then they decided to improve it. The government has focused on making vocational training more professional and lucrative in the job market. This has been achieved through introduction of the National Vocational Qualification which was designed to

make this field more streamlined. The policy introduced the issue of apprenticeship where students could attend regular classes but at the same time practice their skills at a work place for a period of three years. This would go a long way in ensuring that students who complete vocational training are highly qualified and have adequate capability to meet the demand of the highly competitive labour market.(Dearden, 2002)

Another aspect of policy within the UK that deals with encouragement of students to join higher education is the issue of Education Maintenance Allowance. This policy was introduced in order to encourage students coming from low income households to continue with higher education. This was a fee given to students between the ages of sixteen and nineteen who came from families that received low incomes. Homes that qualified had to be below a certain criteria designed by the government. The government realized that even if the quality of vocational schools had been improved, this was not enough to increase the numbers of students coming from poor homes. The allowance is continuously increased when students improve their performance thus encouraging them to keep up with attendance and to perform well.(Hoxby, 2003)You can get expert help with your essays right now. Find out more...

These reforms have had several effects on the education system in the UK. First of all, maintenance allowance has been very successful. A survey done on the year 2004 showed that there are 4.5 percent more students who continue onto higher education as a result of the introduction of an allowance. Besides this, it was found that retention rates increased to seven percent among males in their second nature. The research shows that most

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of these students were hindered from participating in higher education because students had insecurities about sources of funding. (Hansen and Vignoles, 2005)

However, the vocational policies passed have not been very effective in bridging the gap between the academically qualified students and students who have passed through vocational training. The problem with this policy is that it has undergone too many reforms, consequently, employers are not aware of the exact curriculum that students follow within those vocational schools. Employers shun students who come from vocational schools because they believe that these students are the weak ones who could not qualify for other formal education systems. Some employers even prefer workers without any qualifications at all. The government should therefore focus on other more productive policies. (Chubb and Moe, 1990)

Conclusion

Education policy in the UK is constantly evolving. The most promising of these policies is that of inclusion of special needs children into mainstream schools. Vocational training policies have not been effective in encouraging students to pursue higher education. However, introduction of a centralised curriculum has improved performance. Similarly, introduction of quasi markets in education have also been highly successful. (Dixit, 2002)

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