

**Disability and Inclusive Education:
A United Kingdom Perspective**

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Introduction

Earlier this year, the UK national football coach, Glen Hoddle, achieved widespread media coverage (and subsequently lost his job), because of a [London] *Times* newspaper interview where he expressed the view that disabled people are paying for their sins committed in a previous lifetime. Without questioning an individual's prerogative to re-interpret the meaning of reincarnation, these events highlight the moral paradox of a developed Western society approaching the millennium with high ideals, but dragging behind it the detritus which is produced by ignorance and entrenched attitudes.

We live in a society which is trying to recognise, through policy and legislation, the rights of disabled people to equality of treatment, access to resources, and enhanced opportunities for education and employment, within a broad framework of lifelong education. But positive attitudes, acceptance, and regard cannot be legislated for.

We also live in a time when any new resourcing of services (education, crime reduction, social services, neighbourhood renewal) is subject to cost-benefit analysis and competing priorities. A national figure loses his job because of outspoken opinions which are deemed to be offensive to disabled people. Openly discriminatory and derogatory opinions evoke the indignation of a society which has a collective public view (as distinct from what people feel privately) that we should pursue the moral high ground of a less divisive community. In the UK we are still, however, uncertain about how to change intractable, deeply-held attitudes. It is also the case that government policies frequently muddy, rather than clarify perspectives on disability, particularly with regard to educational inclusion.

In this article we focus on some recent policy guidelines and legislative changes introduced by the Labour government in the UK, in response to a 20-year period of inertia, particularly with regard to education systems and procedures which affect individuals with learning differences and educational disaffection. We also look at those sustained pressures and opinions likely to impede progress towards a truly inclusive society, and what strategies may need to be developed accordingly. Some of the arguments presented are based on current government information and policy statements; others are founded on small-scale research projects undertaken recently in local education authority (LEA) districts in the UK. The paper addresses why "inclusion for success" is an important principle and what makes inclusion work; and discusses the evidence base for the impact of inclusion on schools and children. A central issue is whether UK national policies on educational inclusion are effective in the face of competing pressures on resources and a long history of inequality and oppression for disabled people and their families.

The Social Construction of Inclusion or Exclusion

We take inclusion in education to mean making sure that individual access requirements are met for enabling all individuals to participate together in local centres of learning. In the UK, as in many other western contexts, society excludes disabled people from a whole range of activities which non-disabled people take for granted. Educational inclusion should also be seen in this wider context of social inclusion generally. Government measures in the UK are attempting, with varying degrees of success, to tackle issues of social inclusion through action to improve housing,

reduce crime, encourage employment, and support local communities (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). One example of this "joined-up" thinking across services is the Home Office initiative to tackle literacy difficulties in offenders by improving screening and intervention programmes in Probation Services. Arguably, offenders who are unable, because of illiteracy, to participate in everyday transactions (such as reading a newspaper, using a bank account, applying for jobs), in consequence experience a lack of identity with society and a greater inclination to offend. Here, literacy is inextricably linked with the potential for, and processes of, social participation. But in order to tackle the root cause of criminality, a shift in thinking is required of those who believe that social intervention with offenders should be punitive rather than educative (Webster et al, 1999).

The failure of integration (or reintegration in the case of offenders) as a concept turns on the assumption that people who are different can be expected or coerced to fit in, on the host's terms.

For disabled individuals, the prevailing dynamic in much policy and practice is that the well-being, status, and rights of all people have to be measured against normality. Hence, official perspectives have habitually characterised disabled individuals in terms of loss or incapacity. Social imagery of individuals with impairments assumes people are burdened by their disability and wish to be normal, or treated as though they were. And, typically, families with a disabled child experience major impositions from professionals (doctors, psychologists, social workers, teachers) in terms of decision-making, educational and economic opportunity.

In the UK context, it is increasingly accepted by educators and disabled individuals alike, that knowing how disability is defined, by whom, and in what contexts, is the key to understanding the processes through which individuals are restricted, categorised, and controlled. Many children are kept outside of the contexts of mainstream education because of the way disability or "difference" is socially constructed. At one level, this may reduce to problems of physical access to public buildings for wheelchair users or the sensori-impaired. At another level, a child with learning or behaviour difficulties may be excluded from a classroom on the grounds that the well-being of other children could be compromised because of increased demands on the teacher's time, and a lack of resources. At a more serious systemic level, the issues involve access to housing, family support, appropriate careers' guidance, and employment. Equality of opportunity for disabled individuals thus reflects power relationships and the struggle for choice, access, rights and full participation.

A social model of disability is concerned with the cultural contexts in which people act and the relationships between individuals and groups across different social environments (Barton, 1998). Perceptions of the experience of disability held by the non-disabled will frequently represent disabled people as victims of tragic circumstances who have suffered loss or impairment, dependent on others to help meet their needs. Children may be represented by the media as heroic for overcoming obstacles to achievement. Alternatively, individuals may be described as disaffected if they exhibit emotional or behaviour difficulties which prevent them taking part in schools alongside "normal" peers. These emotive or (more frequently) negative images may be sustained by experts or professionals. However, the social model recognises that disability is not caused by an individual's physical or sensory impairment, or his/her emotional or intellectual condition. Rather, it is the environmental and attitudinal barriers which exist in the education system and in society as a whole, which create disability. To put this another way, disability is imposed upon impairment by forms of social organisation, which involve isolation and restriction.

In the UK education context an interesting phenomenon, fueled by the interest of psychologists and educators in the ever-more-precise diagnosis and labeling of developmental and learning difficulties, is the proliferation of "blue chip" conditions, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, or the autistic spectrum. In some instances, the growing use of labels is promoted by parent lobby-groups in order to access resources, whilst some parents find diagnostic categories therapeutic in the sense of providing some form of confirmation and explanation of their children's difficulties. This can also be interpreted as an increase in the

prevalence of developmental anomalies, or as a growing sophistication in techniques of assessment and identification. However, a social model views this process in terms of professional expansionism. With the rising number of children diagnosed with highly specific learning difficulties that are considered to be constitutional in origin, exclusive educational practice is being legitimised, whilst the status and role of experts is simultaneously increased.

The Rationale for Educational Inclusion

Approached from an ideological stance, inclusive education is an inalienable human right for all children, whatever their differences, to be educated together. Policy documents in UK education contexts, such as the mission statements published by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) which act as an administrative buffer between central government and local schools and services, typically cite international law. The United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, and what has come to be known as the UNESCO Salamanca Agreement (1994), call on the international community to endorse the equal right of disabled and disaffected children and adults to membership of the same groups as everyone else.

Inclusive education is also promoted as good practice by many LEAs on the basis that research has demonstrated improved social development and positive academic outcomes for both disabled children and their mainstream peers (Ainscow, 1995). For the disabled group, peer ratings and measures of self-concept are generally higher for those included in mainstream. The mainstream peer-group develop more positive attitudes and actions towards disabled pupils where they have been educated together. The number of reciprocal social relationships often increases dramatically. Where teachers work harder to make the curriculum more relevant for disabled pupils, arguably a more stimulating learning experience is provided for all leading to raised achievement generally. Where mainstream pupils and staff are questioned closely about whether the presence of disabled pupils in class has any detrimental aspects, these are usually dismissed as marginal. The most important shift is highlighted in recent research in terms of enhanced expectations and more positive attitudes from staff, parents and pupils (Thomas et al, 1998).

There is a common-sense logic to the argument that if you want disabled people to play a useful lifelong role in society, then it helps if they have not been cut off from the mainstream early on. Negative stereotyping and entrenched attitudes are sustained by a society that encounters disabled people only in special circumstances and not in the familiar transactions of everyday life. If this logic is pursued, then there is no convincing argument for meeting any individual's educational needs in segregated provision. The corollary to this is that educational inclusion means a shift in resources from separate special school sites to mainstream settings.

Policy, Legislation, and Inclusion in the UK

It is fair to say that in the UK context, it is the political activities of disabled-people's pressure groups, together with parental lobbies, which have had most impact on the collective awareness of disability issues. Hitherto, central government policies have done little to shape inclusive school cultures, flexible curricula, or differentiated approaches to teaching and learning. The UK Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s had an over-riding ambition of reducing local (LEA) control over public services such as education. Schools were variously accused of failing to meet the needs of society by teaching pupils things they did not need to know and by lowering standards in literacy and numeracy. Complaints were made that school leavers could not carry out basic numerical operations, write a letter, or read well enough to be of use to employers.

Pressures to improve accountability resulted in the Education Reform Act of 1988, designed to raise academic standards for all children by exposing schools to market forces. The National Curriculum, together with its assessment and reporting arrangements, set clear objectives for schools and offered regular feedback to parents about how well their children, and therefore

their chosen schools, were performing. Parents have been given the right, so the Government argument runs, to choose the schools which best fit their children's needs. Good schools will expand through popular choice; failing schools will be identified and special measures taken to get them running satisfactorily. The language of accounts imposed on schools (baselines, targets, performance indicators), together with evaluation of performance at all levels of the system (pupils, schools, teachers), is reinforced by a system of inspection and the publication of league-table results for all maintained sector schools.

The cumulative effect of these government innovations has been an unprecedented centralisation of resourcing and intervention with respect to the content and administration of education. One example - the introduction of a Literacy Hour - prescribes in detail how teachers will approach reading for all children in all LEA primary schools with an unremitting emphasis on grammar and word-level work such as systematic phonics.

It might have been thought that a new Labour government of 1997 would have reduced this central control in education. However, the mandatory force of the National Curriculum, along with a set of policies which make schools compete against one another in the market place, the publication of league tables, and open parental choice of schools have all been retained. In fact, the present Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, has strongly reiterated his support for the school inspection system and the public shaming of teachers and schools which are seen to fail. What has also been retained - the unintentional backwash of much of this legislation - is the reluctance of schools to welcome pupils who do not contribute to academic league-table positions and who are expensive in terms of adaptation or support. Many parents of pupils with learning or behaviour difficulties, therefore, particularly those excluded from school, have faced stiff reluctance in gaining acceptance or re-acceptance of their children in mainstream schools.

This highlights, in terms of the UK context, how pressures towards exclusion within the education system counterbalance other policies designed to promote inclusion. The Labour government, in its documents *Excellence for All Children* (DfEE, 1998) and *A Programme of Action* (DfEE, 1999a), has signalled a fundamental reappraisal of both the way special needs are approached and the way an inclusive vision for all children is being adopted. From 1999, all LEAs are required to publish information about their policy on inclusion in their Education Development Plans. These plans must also specify ways of reducing the amount of learning time lost to truancy as well as specific targets for achieving a step-change in the scale of truancy and exclusion from school. LEAs must also produce a specific mainstream behaviour policy.

Plans have been announced for 6,000 schools in England to have homework and study support centres. New measures have been announced and guidance issued on multi-agency efforts to reduce disaffection, particularly in pupils from minority ethnic groups. LEAs can bid for money to render schools accessible, physically, to disabled pupils. A key government initiative entitled *Investing in Young People* has set the task of developing a broader, work-related curriculum from age 14 years, and a new "education maintenance allowance" will be piloted this year to encourage more young people to stay on some form of further education course. The DfEE has also highlighted as steps forward staff training and the publication of standards for teachers who work with children with special needs.

The government says it is committed to shifting resources from "expensive remediation" to "cost-effective prevention," and from "procedures" to "practical support." It has indicated its commitment to "comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people," ensuring that all children are included as "equal partners in the school community." The government has also recently announced a number of broad measures towards fulfilling its civil rights agenda for disabled people including the establishment of a Disability Rights Commission and the implementation of provisions within the Disability Discrimination Act. These moves will give new rights in the areas of employment, access to goods, facilities, and services. Amongst other things, the legislation will require schools, colleges, and universities to provide information for disabled people and require service providers to make reasonable adjustments for greater accessibility. A National Disability Council will advise on sources of discrimina-

tion for disabled individuals or groups. Finally, and very recently, the government has recognized the need to move from simply making statements about access and inclusion for disabled youngsters to actually deciding how this can be achieved. The very first overt reference to how the National Curriculum is to be revised, in order to create a more inclusive framework, was made in May 1999 (DfEE, 1999b).

National policy documents in the UK reveal a government that is committed to civil rights for disabled people, to the reduction of truancy and disaffection, and to the raising of achievement for all children within an inclusive vision, but without the full conceptual underpinning and reach, for example, as shared by disabled groups themselves. The future of special schools is defended, though they are expected to develop "practical links" with mainstream, whilst special needs are still located within the children and their conditions, rather than within the curriculum, arrangements for teaching, or the organisation of schools. Intervention is aimed at preventing failure, or normalising special needs, rather than adapting to individual differences. This retention of much of the old language, concepts, and associated understanding of how social exclusion and special educational needs arise or should be met, itself poses a barrier to inclusion.

Educational Inclusion for Success

It is now well-accepted, at least by educationists, that the most complex place in the education system is the classroom. Schools bring children together for significant chunks of time and are characterised by an intensity of social transactions. As such, the classroom is a powerful socialising influence, and an agency of cultural transmission which shapes attitudes, expectations, and behaviour. Inclusion for success starts from a recognition that society can break down the barriers of ignorance and prejudice by educating all children together from the outset. Non-disabled people also have the right to experience learning environments where they meet with difference, where all people are welcomed, and where different requirements for learning are anticipated and resourced.

Many schools integrate disabled children by bringing them onto their premises, but on the school's terms. Pupils are welcome if they can benefit from what is already on offer: the school does not anticipate changing accommodation, the curriculum, or how children are supported to meet their diversity of requirements. This is more properly described as integration or inclusion for failure. Inclusion for success, in contrast, seeks to adapt systems and structures to promote effective learning and personal autonomy; fully involves young people in these processes; holds high expectations for all pupils; and actively works to change buildings, attitudes, values, language, imagery, and role models, fulfilling whatever access requirements are necessary to enable individuals to take part on an equal basis with others.

Bristol LEA, which employs the majority of the authors of this paper, has launched an inclusive education plan with a 15-year time scale. Examples from other parts of the UK, such as the London Borough of Newham, show that LEAs which embarked on inclusive education policies some years earlier, take this length of time to achieve their goals: inclusion for success is a "gradual instant." At the heart of this progression is the issue of resources. Over time, reallocations of money, equipment and staff expertise may be transferred from separate special-school sites into mainstream settings. When developing new provision for children with additional needs, inclusive mainstream options can be taken rather than establishing new, separate, special provisions. Because adequate resourcing underpins the confidence with which mainstream teachers feel able to approach the inclusion of disaffected and disabled learners, as money becomes available and opportunities to bid for external resources present themselves, LEAs can seek to invest in resources aimed to facilitate inclusion.

Special schools have a different role to play in the inclusive education vision. Staff of these schools will be expected to work increasingly on mainstream sites, both directly with children and also with mainstream teachers in implementing more inclusive arrangements. Nationally, experience also shows that there may continue to be a need for regional provision for very specialised, complex requirements.

In order to move forward, LEAs must provide for all staff a rolling programme of training, both for existing teachers and support services (psychologists, visiting special needs teachers, advisers) and for those newly employed. Governor training programmes on inclusive education also need to be regularly offered. LEAs also have the task of examining and developing schools' curriculum policies in order to ensure that schools differentiate learning experiences appropriately within the framework of the National Curriculum. It is now well-recognised that physical resourcing and professional development training, important though they are, will not of themselves change attitudes towards disability. This latter process seems to entail that teachers and the non-disabled work with disabled individuals on a day-to-day basis over time. In this way, insights are gained into the experience of disability, fear is dispelled, differences are accepted for what they are, and the focus shifts from the disability to the person. Furthermore, as mainstream teachers accept wider responsibilities for all pupils, more attention is paid to teaching and learning, rather than to pupils' "conditions." Direct experience of inclusive education is a more powerful basis for teacher development than is professional training.

Some brief case-study examples demonstrate what schools can do to promote inclusion for success. As part of the requirements for the Bristol professional qualifying programme for educational psychologists, trainees undertake research commissions related to LEA Development Plans. In one research commission, an evaluation was carried out of the placement of 53 children with autistic spectrum disorders in mainstream schools in the county of Somerset in the south west of England. From parent and teacher interview data, the factors which were felt to be most facilitative of successful placements did not relate to severity of children's behaviour patterns. Instead, critical issues included staff having resources and training to pursue specific programmes; continuity of help as children progressed through the system (with learning-support assistants moving with the child from primary to secondary school); and regular and frequent communication between parents and teachers which is not simply focused on problems. The most significant factor relates to channels of communication which exist between families, teachers and professionals. When these communication links were hierarchical in structure, there was rigidity in practice. When schools had well-articulated networks, characterised by fluid and open communication, problems could be easily dealt with.

In another trainee commission, Bristol LEA, as part of its commitment to actualising inclusion for all disabled and disaffected children, requested a survey of pupil perspectives. This was seen to be a significant, but hitherto largely untapped evidence source when planning mainstream school systems. It signals a more active role for individuals more frequently on the receiving end of decision-making. Fourteen pupils who had moved from special to mainstream school settings because of behaviour difficulties were interviewed in order to determine what were the key elements which worked best for them. Summarising the data, the majority of the pupils expressed a preference for practical lessons which did not principally involve writing, whilst positive teacher attitudes were also powerful motivators. In a further study, the impact of a resource base for disaffected pupils within a mainstream secondary school was evaluated and interviews were carried out with staff, pupils and parents. One of the key features which contributed to the success of this resource was the fact that it led to agreed plans for individuals and thus a consistency of approach towards managing behaviour as well as learning across teachers which was negotiated and revisited with those concerned. Preventative work by resource staff, such as in the area of anger and conflict management, also reduced the number of incidents which lead to exclusion.

One other study, of several undertaken, highlights some of the unexpected barriers to inclusion which arise when schools embrace disabled children, but work too hard and without sufficient insight to make the process a success. Bristol has taken the step of including all young children with severe visual impairment or blindness in mainstream nursery groups. Staff appointed to support these children were observed *in situ*, and their strategies for facilitating play, language, and interaction were analysed. Paradoxically, adults often limited play opportunities by steering the blind children away from certain activities, such as building models, since it was assumed they would not

be able to see their finished products. Rather than making bridges between play partners by explaining to the blind children what the other children were engaged in, adults tended just to comment on the solitary activity of the blind individual. They followed children around to make sure they did not hurt themselves thereby intruding on their personal space. They also required children to re-orientate themselves to the environment each day by setting out toys and equipment in different locations which was the usual nursery practice. All of these issues could be avoided through training, by trying to share the child's perspective, by leaving aside stereotyped notions about what is suitable or appropriate, and by shifting attention away from the child's condition and onto effective learning. This was a good illustration of how we can unwittingly impose secondary difficulties, which are nothing to do with the child's impairment, upon a disability.

Auditing Inclusion

How can we ensure that pockets of good practice in moving towards an inclusive vision are generalised more widely? The most simplistic approach to monitoring the progress of LEAs is through descriptive statistics. Figures for special school placements, for example, reveal the degree of variance in LEA starting points across the UK and over time which gives some indication of the rate of change (Norwich, 1997). LEAs with the smallest and largest proportions of their pupils in special schools (Newham 0.32%; Cornwall 0.57%; Wandsworth 2.67%; East Sussex 2.36%) reveal that demographic factors are not the most significant. Cornwall is a predominantly rural area of low employment whilst Newham is a working class borough in the East End of London, contrasted with the more affluent Wandsworth. Updated figures about to be published by the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE) in Bristol, show that, by January 1998, Newham had achieved a low figure of 0.2 percent segregated placements, whilst Wandsworth had descended to 2.27 percent, with a national average across England being 1.35 percent.

Differences between LEAs in terms of children in special schools largely reflect philosophy, policy and commitment. What these figures do not show is how far individual LEAs are implementing strategic changes in terms of resources, training and the curriculum, in order to promote high levels of achievement by included children. In order to detect systemic change much more probing analyses need to be carried out. In fact, this idea of auditing schools for good inclusive practice has already been undertaken in a number of centres, and builds on work carried out in Australia and North America. In collaboration with a number of schools, LEAs, and university research centres, the CSIE in Bristol has been refining an *Index of Inclusive Schooling* which examines contrasting elements of school experience and gathers evidence from a range of sources, including pupils, in order to review and develop areas of policy and practice.

Any attempt to provide a comprehensive, incisive and formative index of inclusion - which also embraces the notion that educational inclusion is a social construction - must direct attention to environmental and attitudinal issues and the contexts for social organisation which are characteristic of the classroom and other interpersonal settings. At the level of policy, schools must demonstrate how information is communicated, how resources are allocated, how pupils are admitted, how staff are trained in disability issues, and how responsibilities for meeting learning differences are shared amongst all staff. In the learning environment, schools must demonstrate how physical obstacles, rules and routines are modified in order to recognise different access requirements. Within the curriculum, schools must demonstrate how children are enabled to work alongside each other in all areas of school life and how positive steps are taken to provide diverse opportunities for learning which respect different starting points and learning styles. In terms of learning partnerships, schools must show a commitment to close work with parents, staff, other professionals and disabled people themselves, in order to create a climate of openness, collaboration and mutual challenge. Perhaps the most important indicators for the inclusive school are the steps taken to ensure all pupils are reaching their full potential, are active in their own learning, and have realistic perceptions about their own levels of competence.

In Summary

A number of keywords stand out, in the Labour government's current education agenda: *standards, targets, and achievement*. The government has a vision of excellence for all and a commitment to inclusive schooling for children with special educational needs which goes beyond sympathetic acceptance of low achievement in some groups. This paper has considered some of the wider social inclusion issues which are central to that political agenda with more specific analysis of inclusive education. However, the DfEE is holding onto some conceptual foundations which are outmoded and self-defeating.

The challenge is to set high standards for all children as part of the general momentum to raise standards without losing sight of learning differences. Although good *academic* results, for pupils with some form of learning disability in comparison with "normal" peers, are considered to be important performance indicators for accountability purposes, this may be yet another example of the "tyranny of normality" which prevails against the full acceptance of individuals who do not measure up against standard benchmarks. Like many other nations, the UK is committed to an inclusive education policy because it is harnessed to sustaining economic growth through maximising each person's contribution. The central problem remains of how to create school contexts and classroom environments which respond to pupil diversity, embrace those with learning differences, and provide meaningful and challenging experiences without divisive, pejorative, or restrictive consequences. The social-construction model of disability provides some important indices for judging institutional progress in terms of policy, structures, attitudes, resources, contexts for learning and staff skills.

In conclusion, it has been said that something happens on the road from childhood to adulthood which closes down our ability to deal with human differences. Government can publish the manifestos, point in the desired direction, provide resources, and legislate for certain doors to be opened. Professionals committed to inclusion for success, however, have the much more complex challenge of opening people's minds.

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