Changes in SEN and disability provision, pressures on ordinary schools and parental choice: a review of inclusive education and its prospects

SUMMARY
This paper is based on the policy seminar on ‘Changes in SEN / disability provision, pressures on ordinary schools and parental choice: a review of inclusive education and its prospects’ on 30 January 2018, London. Presentations, which are reported in this paper, covered: A summary of recent trends research – rising special school placement, an academisation effect? (Dr Alison Black, University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education); Pressures on ordinary schools: (Lizzie Harris: Acting Head: Tollgate Primary School, Newham); A Local authority perspective (Jenny Andrews: Manchester) and Parental perspectives on choice and inclusion (Jayne Fitzgerald and Claire-Marie Whiting (Rotherham).

The seminar addressed these questions: 1. The numbers of pupils in special schools have risen significantly nationally over the last few years. What factors are contributing to this trend? 2. What pressures are mainstream schools experiencing in trying to work inclusively? What is needed now to help them do so? What do we effectively challenge less inclusive practice? 3. The Coalition Government’s resolution to the inclusion debate was to strengthen parental choice. How far do parents have a real choice for mainstream? or is choice of special school options increasingly determined by negative experience of mainstream alternatives? and 4. What role are Local Authorities and other organisations able to play in promoting inclusion, in a context of greater school self-determination and the absence of clear national policy?

Alison Black presents data to illustrate trends. In relation to SEN policy they show that:
1. Both the actual number of and proportion of children in special schools in England is increasing;
2. This increase is particularly pronounced in primary aged children (5-10);
3. The proportion of pupils identified as having SEN but without a statement/EHC plan in England has fallen;
4. There is variation of in the proportion of pupils with SEN in the different types of schools;
5. The proportion of pupils identified as SEN but without an EHC plan (SEN Support) has fallen in each type of school.

In terms for next research steps a more sophisticated analysis is being carried out by the Exeter team at pupil, school and LA level, tracking trajectories of children vulnerable to exclusion to identify some factors that explain significant divergence from typical routes through school. There is a possibility of working with the CSIE to explore funding for the next Trends report. Finally, there is a need to explore qualitative explorations of the patterns in quantitative data.

Lizzie Harris presents a personal account based on her professional experiences and reflections from working in an inclusive school (outstanding Ofsted rating). Her wishes included: i. funding that enables support to be available, ii. ensure that these pupils have equal access to experienced, subject-expert teachers with high expectations and a rich curriculum, iii. ensure that pupils with SEND do not mix and interact mostly with one another, iv. SEND expertise is seen as valuable (high status) and not the easy option (historical reputation), v. reduce the amount of time that the expert skilled professionals are tied up in administration and vi. all schools have an expected quota or admission for SEND to bring fairness and balance. Families could be supported to know that their choice includes their local school, based on the idea that choice does not actually make for more satisfaction. She concluded with a reminder of the Salamanca Statement about inclusion as a human rights issue.

Jenny Andrews presents a comprehensive and historical overview of the Manchester system based on the perspective of a deputy director of Children’s Services. She concludes that Local Authorities (LA) used to provide more guidance and influence change. Successful inclusion always depended and continues to depend on successful partnership working. In the current educational landscape, it is crucial that LA’s work collaboratively with others, including Regional Schools Commissioner, Ofsted and leaders of Multi-Academy Trusts. Supporting inclusive practice depends on the quality of these relationships. For children and young people with complex needs specialist provision has much improved, perhaps driven by the expectation that there is learning progress. The increasing use of supported internships is enabling more young people with significant needs to enter the workplace, though there is still some way to go. But, the biggest risk to inclusive practice is for children and young people in mainstream schools with social, emotional and mental health needs, who are most at risk of exclusion and marginalisation. The current accountability does not encourage schools to
support the most vulnerable; their achievement and progress, besides the basic measures, is not captured. The curriculum and assessment/testing regime has had a negative impact on this group.

Jayne Fitzgerald and Claire-Marie Whiting present an account of a unique collaboration between the Parent Carer Forum and Rotherham LA that led to the Rotherham Charter and Genuine Partnerships. The Charter has four key principles: i. welcome and care, ii. value and include, iii. communicate and partnership, through which iv. trust (and therefore co-production). They conclude that though parent-carers have greater voice through Parent Carer Forums, they continue to experience inclusion and genuine choice as a challenge. They illustrate what parent-carers perceive as impacting negatively on inclusion and affecting their ability to make choices for their children with additional needs. They also show the impact of SEND on the emotional well-being of children and young people and their families, something not to be ignored. They also conclude that though there are pockets of good co-production taking place that involve parent carers, young people, schools and services, there continue to be issues that need tackling. Quality assurance frameworks based on the four principles (above) could be more formally adopted by regulatory bodies to provide greater national guidance on inclusion and choice.

The key points from the discussion groups were that: i. there is a vacuum of national policy about inclusion, what is means and how to promote it, ii. there needs to be more strategic leadership, with questions about what leadership is provided by Regional Schools Commissioners and Multi-academy trusts, iii. that strong leadership was going to be required to overcome the other pressures on schools, both financial and performance pressures and iv. there is a need to increase the accountability for and the value given to SEN provision and inclusion.
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Section 1: Introduction

Topic: Changes in SEN / disability provision, pressures on ordinary schools and parental choice: a review of inclusive education and its prospects

This seminar took place on 30 January 2018: 1.30 for 2-5pm, St Albans Centre, London in which 45 people participated.

Presentations:

1. Summary of recent trends research – rising special school placement, an academisation effect? Dr Alison Black, (University of Exeter, Graduate School of Education)

2. Pressures on ordinary inclusive schools: Lizzie Harris: Acting Head: Tollgate Primary School (Newham)

3. Parental perspectives on choice and inclusion: Jayne Fitzgerald (Strategic Lead: Rotherham Parent Carer Forum) with Claire-Marie Whiting (Educational Psychologist)


This seminar addressed these questions:

1) Numbers of pupils in special schools have risen significantly nationally over the last few years. What factors are contributing to this trend?

2) What pressures are mainstream schools experiencing in trying to work inclusively? What is needed now to help them do so? What do we effectively challenge less inclusive practice?

3) The Coalition Government’s resolution to the inclusion debate was to strengthen parental choice. How far do parents have a real choice for mainstream? or is choice of special school options increasingly determined by negative experience of mainstream alternatives?

4) What role are Local Authorities and other organisations able to play in promoting inclusion, in a context of greater school self-determination and the absence of clear national policy?

SEN Policy Research Forum

The SEN Policy Research Forum, which organised this seminar, incorporates the aims and work of the previous SEN Policy Options group in a new format and with some expanded aims. The Forum’s website is at:
The aim of the Forum is to contribute intelligent analysis, knowledge and experience to promote the development of policy and practice for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The Forum will be concerned with children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities from preschool to post 16. It will cover the whole of the UK and aim to:
1. provide timely policy review and critique,
2. promote intelligent policy debate,
3. help set longer term agendas – acting like a think-tank,
4. deliberate over and examine policy options in the field.
5. inform research and development work in the field.
6. contribute to development of more informed media coverage of SEND policy issues.

The uncertainties over what counts as 'special educational needs' and 'disabilities' in relation to a wider concept of 'additional needs' are recognised. These will be among the many issues examined through the Forum.

The Forum, which continues the work of the SEN Policy Options group has been continuing this work for over 20 years. It started as an ESRC seminar series with some initial funding from the Cadbury Trust. The Forum appreciates the generous funding from NASEN and the Pears Foundation to enable it to function, though it operates independently of these organisations.

Lead group and coordination of the Forum:
Dr Peter Gray - Policy Consultant (co-ordinator)
Professor Brahm Norwich - University of Exeter (co-ordinator)
Yoland Burgess, Young People's Education and Skills, London Councils
Professor Julie Dockrell - Institute of Education, University of London
Niki Elliott - Sheffield Hallam University / Special Education Consortium
Brian Lamb - Policy consultant
Professor Geoff Lindsay - University of Warwick
Debbie Orton, Hertfordshire local authority
Nick Peacey, First Director , SENJIT. Institute of Education
Linda Redford - Policy Consultant
Penny Richardson - Policy Consultant
Chris Robertson, University of Birmingham
Professor Klaus Wedell - Institute of Education, University of London

Membership:
If you would like to join the Forum, go to the website and follow link to registering as a member. You will be invited to future seminars and be able to participate in discussion through the Jiscmail system. SEE SENPRF website for joining instructions.

For further information please contact the co-coordinators of the Forum, Brahm Norwich, Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter, Heavitree Road, Exeter EX1 2LU (b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk) or Peter Gray (pgray@sscyp) .
Past Policy Options Papers (see website for downloadable copies)
1. Bucking the market: Peter Housden, Chief Education Officer, Nottinghamshire LEA
2. Towards effective schools for all: Mel Ainscow, Cambridge University Institute of Education
3. Teacher education for special educational needs: Professor Peter Mittler, Manchester University
5. Special schools and their alternatives: Max Hunt, Director of Education, Stockport LEA
6. Meeting SEN: options for partnership between health, education and social services: Tony Dessent, Senior Assistant Director, Nottinghamshire LEA
7. SEN in the 1990s: users' perspectives: Micheline Mason, Robina Mallet, Colin Low and Philippa Russell
8. Independence and dependence? Responsibilities for SEN in the Unitary and County Authorities: Roy Atkinson, Michael Peters, Derek Jones, Simon Gardner and Phillipa Russell
9. Inclusion or exclusion: Educational Policy and Practice for Children and Young People with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties: John Bangs, Peter Gray and Greg Richardson
9. Baseline Assessment and SEN: Geoff Lindsay, Max Hunt, Sheila Wolfendale, Peter Tymms
11. Rethinking support for more inclusive education: Peter Gray, Clive Danks, Rik Boxer, Barbara Burke, Geoff Frank, Ruth Newbury and Joan Baxter
12. Developments in additional resource allocation to promote greater inclusion: John Moore, Cor Meijer, Klaus Wedell, Paul Croll and Diane Moses.
13. Early years and SEN: Professor Sheila Wolfendale and Philippa Russell
14. Specialist Teaching for SEN and inclusion: Annie Grant, Ann Lewis and Brahm Norwich
15. The equity dilemma: allocating resources for special educational needs: Richard Humphries, Sonia Sharpe, David Ruebain, Philippa Russell and Mike Ellis
16. Standards and effectiveness in special educational needs: questioning conceptual orthodoxy: Richard Byers, Seamus Hegarty and Carol Fitz Gibbon
17. Disability, disadvantage, inclusion and social inclusion: Professor Alan Dyson and Sandra Morrison
18. Rethinking the 14-19 curriculum: SEN perspectives and implications: Dr Lesley Dee, Christopher Robertson, Professor Geoff Lindsay, Ann Gross, and Keith Bovair
19. Examining key issues underlying the Audit Commission Reports on SEN: Chris Beek, Penny Richardson and Peter Gray
20. Future schooling that includes children with SEN / disability: Klaus Wedell, Ingrid Lunt and Brahm Norwich
VI. Policy Options Papers from sixth seminar series
21. Taking Stock: integrated Children's Services, Improvement and Inclusion: Margaret Doran, Tony Dessent and Professor Chris Husbands
22. Special schools in the new era: how do we go beyond generalities? Chris Wells, Philippa Russell, Peter Gray and Brahm Norwich
23. Individual budgets and direct payments: issues, challenges and future implications for the strategic management of SEN
Christine Lenehan, Glenys Jones Elaine Hack and Sheila Riddell
24. Personalisation and SEN
Judy Sebba, Armando DiFinizio, Alison Peacock and Martin Johnson.
25. Choice-equity dilemma in special educational provision
John Clarke, Ann Lewis, Peter Gray
26. SEN Green Paper 2011: progress and prospects
Brian Lamb, Kate Frood and Debbie Orton
27. A school for the future - 2025: Practical Futures Thinking
Alison Black
29. How will accountability work in the new SEND legislative system?
Parents from Camden local authority, Penny Richardson, Jean Gross and Brian Lamb
30. Research in special needs and inclusive education: the interface with policy and practice, Brahm Norwich, Peter Blatchford, Rob Webster, Simon Ellis, Janet Tod, Geoff Lindsay and Julie Dockrell.
31. Professional training in the changing context of special educational needs disability policy and practice. Neil Smith, Dr Hazel Lawson, Dr Glenys Jones.
32. Governance in a changing education system: ensuring equity and entitlement for disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs. Peter Gray, Niki Elliot and Brahm Norwich.
33. School commissioning for send: new models, limits and possibilities, Tom Jefford, Debbie Orton and Kate Fallon.
34. An early review of the new SEN / disability policy and legislation: where are we now? Brian Lamb, Kate browning, Andre Imich and Chris Harrison.
36. A worthwhile investment? Assessing and valuing educational outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Graham Douglas, Graham Easterlow, Jean Ware & Anne Heavey

Copies of most of these papers can now be downloaded from the website of the SEN Policy Research Forum http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/sen-policyforum/
Section 2:
Summary of recent trends research – rising special school placement, an academisation effect?
Dr Alison Black

Introduction:
This paper is an examination of trends in special educational needs (SEN), and the academisation of schools in England. The specific trends under examination are: the proportion of children attending special schools; proportion of pupils identified as having SEN; the change in school types under the academisation policy; and the proportion of pupils with SEN in different kinds of schools, all within an English context. It does not seek to explain the trends; rather it presents them, in order to set the scene for the articles that follow.

The trends data presented have emerged from three separate studies (with updates in places, reflecting patterns since 2013):
1. An ESRC funded project, Inclusion & the academisation of English secondary schools: trends in the placement of pupils with significant SEN & those permanently excluded, which aims to analyse the National Pupil Database. Its focus is identifying routes from mainstream schools to special schools/alternative provision thereby identifying some factors that explain divergence from typical routes through school.
2. A project with the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE), funded by Esmée Fairbairn, Contrasting responses to diversity: school placement trends 2007-2013 for all local authorities in England (Black & Norwich, 2014). This study is a continuation of the CSIE Trends reporting of school placement trends (since 1988) of all local authorities in England (i.e. the proportion of children placed by each local authority in an ordinary local school and the proportion of children being sent to separate special schools).
3. My doctoral thesis, Future secondary schools for diversity: where are we now, and where could we be. (Black, 2012), where I explored pupil numbers in special schools by age.

Data presented where not referenced have been taken from publicly accessible ONS population datasets (Population Estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, ONS, 2018) and Gov.uk datasets (Statistics: school and pupil numbers - Schools, pupils and their characteristics, DfE, 2017).

What proportion of children attend special schools?

Figure 1 is a graph taken directly from Black & Norwich (2014) which summarises the previous iterations of the CSIE Trends reporting. It plots the proportion of pupils in special schools since the early 1980s and continues up until 2014. A general trend of the proportion of pupils in special schools falling until 2007, with evidence of some plateauing in the early 2000s. Since 2007 the proportion of pupils in special schools appears to be rising slightly.
It is important to remember that the three sets of figures are not directly comparable, due to differences in the information available for these analyses. This is due to the difference in the information provided by the Department for Education and the way this has been processed. Rustemier & Vaughan's (2005) and Black & Norwich's (2014) data includes children aged 0-4 and 16-19 which the previous data set did not use. Thus the number of pupils in special schools was calculated as a proportion of a larger whole, making the percentage lower. Black & Norwich’s report only includes pupils in special schools, whereas Rustemier & Vaughan’s (2005) analysis reported on the proportion of pupils in all separate settings.

For the purposes of this paper I have calculated the proportion of children in special schools since 2013 (Figure 2). The proportion of children in special schools has increased. Again, the two data sets are not completely comparable, as the updated data points, based on publicly accessible data (from DfE, 2017 and ONS, 2018) do not include data for children placed in independent special schools, whereas the data from the previous studies do, and so the proportion is likely to be slightly higher. (I have included data points from 2011 and 2013 using the publicly accessible data to illustrate this.)

It might be thought that the increase in proportion of children in special schools is an outcome of Conservative government policy (Lauchlan & Greig, 2015), however, the increase started during the last Labour government, which ended in 2010. Other contextual factors might include the 2015 general election, were the UK government moved from a Conservative: Liberal Democrat coalition to a Conservative majority. Another important influence that might have had an effect on the proportion of children attending special schools may be the new SEND Code of Practice, (DfE/DoH, 2014).
Rather than looking at proportion of children who attend special school out of the whole population of the same age, Figure 3 demonstrates the number of children in special schools. Data from Black & Norwich (2014) has been supplemented with more recent data (again, not completely comparable as discussed above). The relatively small increase in proportion of pupils in special schools represents an increase of 8,745 placements. The increase from 2007-2017 represents an increase of 20,765 placements in special schools.

![Figure 3: Number of pupils in special schools](image)

This could be explained by population growth; the population of pupils aged 0-19 is increasing (ONS, 2016). However, the increase in population between 2007 and 2013, was 3.5% whereas the increase in special school population was 4.6% (Black & Norwich, 2013). This is even more stark when you compare the last ten years. The population of people aged 0-19 increased from 12,337,548 in 2007 to 13,106,976 in 2017, an increase in population of 769,428 (6.23%) (ONS, 2016). When compared to the 22.37% increase in number of pupils in special schools we see that increase in population may account for only small rise in special school placements (the increase of 20,765), indicating a trend towards segregation.
Black (2013) reported that in 2011, of the 76,900 pupils aged between 5 and 16 in special schools in England, 65% of the special school population were of secondary age (11-16), (based on data from Department for Education, 2011), a pattern that had been constant in the years studied (2003-2011). When the raw data used by Will Swann (1985) in one of his early “integration statistics” articles is examined it can be seen that the same pattern existed as far back as 1978 and 1984.

![Figure 4: A comparison of the percentage of pupils of primary and secondary age in special schools in England](image)

More recent data shows that the majority of the special school population are still of secondary age, however, a greater proportion than before are primary age (Figure 4). When the number of pupils of the different ages is plotted against time, the number of primary aged children in special schools seems to be increasing at a faster rate than the number of children of secondary age in special schools (Figure 5).

![Figure 5: Number of pupils in special schools by age](image)
In summary, both number of pupils in special schools and this as a proportion of all pupils aged 0-19 is increasing. The increase cannot fully be explained by population increases. The number of pupils in special schools is rising for both primary-aged pupils and secondary-aged pupils. The number of pupils of primary age is increasing more rapidly than secondary aged pupils, this has affected the proportion of pupils by age in special schools.

What change has there been in the proportion of pupils identified as having SEN in England from 2011 to 2017?
This section explores trends in identification of pupils with SEN, at the highest level of need (Statement/Education Health Care (EHC) Plan), and the lower level involving identification of SEN but without a formal statement/EHC plan (School Action, School Action plus/SEN support, hereafter SEN Support). 2014 has been highlighted to show when the new SEN Code of Practice was introduced. (The concept of EHC plans and SEN support came in as part of the new Code of Practice, replacing the terms statement and school action/school action plus respectively).

Figure 6 shows the stability of the proportion of pupils with a statement/EHC plan, at 2.7-2.8%. The proportion of children on SEN support out of the school population has fallen from 17.8% of the school population having some form of SEN but without having a statement/EHC Plan in 2011 to, down to 11.6% in 2017. The larger decrease form 2014-15 may reflect formal reduction from two lower levels of SEN (School Action & School Action plus) to one (SEN Support). These identifications are made by schools, while the Statement/EHC Plan identification depends on a more systematic multi-agency process, carried out by local authorities.

There is local authority variation in not only identification of pupils with SEN support, but also how this has changed over time at varying rates. In figure 7, the darker the colour the more SEN support, the lighter the colour, the fewer. The maps get progressively lighter since 2011.
Figure 7: Regional changes in proportion of children identified as SEN support (School action, school action + prior to 2014)

So, the percentage of pupils with a statement/EHC plan has remained the same while the percentage proportion of pupils on SEN Support has fallen. There is variation at a local authority level.

What has been the change in the proportion of maintained compared to academies in English primary and secondary schools between 2011-2017?

Another change that has been happening in schools is the change in school types within the policy of academisation, with some maintained schools becoming academies. There are now a range of school types, each with a different level of autonomy. Converter Academies (the most autonomous of the types); Sponsored Academies (required to convert, governed by outside sponsor) and maintained schools (remaining as local authority schools). Free schools are new schools set up under the initiative of parents, voluntary organisations or religious groups, and have a similar level of autonomy as converter academies. Figure 9 shows that while the majority of primary schools were maintained and under local authority control in 2011, this fell to 78%; 15% of the other schools becoming convertor academies in 2017, and 6% becoming sponsor-led academies. In secondary schools the change has been more stark, the number of maintained schools was overtaken by the number of Converter Mainstream Academies for the first time in 2015. Most secondary schools are now converter academies, a third have remained as maintained schools, and 18% are sponsor-led academies.
Figure 8: Proportion of maintained compared to academies in English primary and secondary schools (mainstream)

Some new schools have opened - mainstream free schools, from 0.1% in 2013 to 0.7% of primary schools; and 0.8% to 4% of secondary. Free schools increase is happening, just not at the same rate as others.

Again, there is variation by local authority. The darker the colour on Figure 9, the more academies (both sponsored and converter combined) there are in that local authority. In 2011, there was very little academisation at all, moving through to 2017, where there are some areas with greater academisation.

Figure 9: Academisation by local authority

To summarise, the number of mainstream maintained schools are falling, as the number of academies increase, a pattern especially apparent in the secondary sector where there are more secondary converter academies than mainstream
secondary schools. There is variation in the proportion of academies by local authority.

**What is the pattern of change in the proportion of pupils with SEN in different kinds of primary and secondary English schools between 2011 and 2017?**

The next section looks at what is happening with the proportion of children identified as having special educational needs in the various types of schools.

Figure 10 shows the proportion of pupils with the highest level of need – a Statement or EHC plan in both primary schools and secondary school of various types, from 2011-2017. Overall, we do not observe significant differences in how the proportion of pupils with Statement/ EHC plan has been changing in 2011 to 2017 between maintained schools and academies.

Some points of interest are:

1. In primary schools the proportion of pupils with a statement/EHC plan in 2017 is similar; albeit with a larger increase in one year in sponsored academies (from 0.9% in 2012 to 1.6% in 2013)
2. In secondary both sponsored academies and maintained schools had larger proportions of children with statements/EHC plans, compared to converter academies. The proportion in these schools rose to 1.8% but has since dropped to 1.5% in 2017, 0.4% below sponsored academies.
3. A slight decrease has occurred since the introduction of the new SEN Code of Practice in 2014 (with the exception of primary mainstream free schools). The trend towards a decreasing proportion started prior to the new SEN Code of Practice in secondary sponsored academies.

**Figure 10: The percentage of pupils with Statement / EHC plan by type of school, England, 2011-17**
Figure 11 shows the data for pupils with SEN support, which shows the percentage of children with SEN support has been falling across all types of schools, but the change was particularly steep for sponsored academies in both mainstream primary and secondary schools. In primary sponsored academies in 2012 24% of children had the SEN Support status, compared to 14% of children in 2017 having the SEN support. For secondary schools, the pattern is the same, a decrease in SEN Support in all school types, with a steeper increase in sponsored academies and free schools. For sponsored academies it was from 26% to 13%. The fall since the introduction of the new code of practice is particularly steep in all secondary school types.

So it can be seen that there is variation of proportion of pupils with SEN in the different types of schools, and the proportion of pupils on SEN Support has fallen in all these different schools.

Conclusion
This paper has laid out data to illustrate trends in: the proportion of children attending special schools in England; proportion of pupils identified as having SEN in England; the change in school types under the academisation policy in England; and the proportion of pupils with SEN in different kinds of schools. As well as demonstrating that the number of mainstream maintained schools has fallen, it shows that the number of academies has increased. In relation to SEN policy it shows that:

6. Both the actual number of and proportion of children in special schools in England is increasing;
7. This increase is particularly pronounced in primary aged children (5-10);
8. The proportion of pupils identified as having SEN but without a statement/EHC plan in England has fallen;
9. There is variation of proportion of pupils with SEN in the different types of schools;
10. The proportion of pupils identified as SEN but without an EHC plan (SEN Support) has fallen in each type of school.

In terms for next steps a more sophisticated analysis is being carried out by the Exeter team at pupil, school and LA level, tracking trajectories of children vulnerable to exclusion to identify some factors that explain significant divergence from typical routes through school. There is a possibility of working with the CSIE to explore funding for the next Trends report. Finally, there is a need to explore qualitative explorations of the patterns in quantitative data.

References


Section 3:  
Pressures on ordinary schools: a review of Inclusive education and its prospects  

Lizzie Harris, Newham  

This is a personal account based on my professional experiences and reflections from working at Tollgate primary school which will cover these key questions: i. What pressures are mainstream schools experiencing in trying to work inclusively?, ii. What is needed now to help them do so? And iii. How do we effectively challenge less inclusive practice?  

What pressures are mainstream schools experiencing in trying to work inclusively?  
Tollgate is a two form entry, regular mainstream school. Children speak forty-three different languages from thirty-nine different countries; the school has a really diverse population. It is an Ofsted outstanding primary school. I am standing in for head teacher who is very busy at HMI at the moment.  

Some of the pressures in mainstream environments are about funding. As many of you will well know that to make it successfully inclusive there has to be finance to support that model. Tollgate has a resourced unit for autism. We have fourteen places in our resource provision, but we have twenty-nine pupils supported by the resourced provision. This has gone up considerably in the last few years with many of these placements having been forced placements. We have tried to negotiate and say: “we think we have enough numbers”. Obviously, we want the pupils that are in our community to come to our school, not wanting to say ‘no.’  

The other feature of the school is that it is an academy. This followed in 2011 when the school was awarded an Ofsted outstanding grade. When the letter inviting the school to become an academy arrived, staff sat round the table and said no, as this was not what was wanted. But after reflection and after the local authority took a position on the matter, it was decided to reconsider. Several schools in our local area were joining academy chains that were not as inclusive as Tollgate. The local authority asked the school to help out: “you become an academy then they (academy chains) won’t take the local schools”. So, the school is in a group of six schools which are really inclusive, something we really hold as an important characteristic of our multi-academy trust (MAT). So, we are part of the ‘go to’ MAT for special needs. This has been very visible when we show people around our school. When parents ring for visits they say openly to us: “Oh, well, we went to so and so, they said, we should come to your MAT, because you’ll let us in.”  

Funding is a large part of making inclusion successful but so is making sure that the schools invest the money that they are given for the children with SEN. Strong local leadership for SEND is also important. The Newham authority has a really strong reputation for inclusion, the most inclusive authority in the country. However, it does depend on the level of expertise right at the top of the authority, which has been variable.  

Schools with an inclusive ethos attract pupils with SEN. That is the impact of becoming a welcoming school for SEND compared to one who has a hostile
response. There are definitely schools in our neighbourhood where parents will visit with their children and they may be shown around by somebody from the office, somebody perhaps with less status than a parent should meet. It is important that the person who walks parents around, understands the curriculum, knows how the school works and can give a family correct information. I think that particular schools go out of their way to make that experience uncomfortable for parents. This has an impact on where parents send their child; if you walk around a school and you do not think your child is welcome, you are unlikely to send your child there.

Recruitment in SEND: finding the expertise and people that are up for the teaching challenge is also an issue. In my role I have been looking for great SEN teachers for the last sixteen years. You meet some exceptional teachers, but it is not easy to find the level of expertise that you want. That is not necessarily about formal qualifications, it is about the right types of people that you want working in an inclusive school.

Paperwork, appeals, EHC Plans etc.: anybody who works in schools and SEND will know that the bureaucracy is enormous. Paperwork is very important so that you have the facts and details about pupils to make their education fit. However, the amount of money that some people will get paid to deal with paperwork is not a good use of resources.

One of the key factors that determines where children with SEN go to school is that they are counted in performance data that is published. Were children with SEND not part of published SATs results, it will be a different story when prospective parents visit the school. The difficulty that schools have is that this child is going to impact on their performance data. The child is unlikely to get a hundred and ten standardised score; they are more likely to get forty, which will reduce the level of the school’s performance data. As a head or deputy head teacher you will be thinking, rightly or wrongly, that this placement will impact on your data. Sometimes, these teachers work out what year the child is going to have an impact. So, for example, at the moment, in my Reception cohort, with a two form entry, there are seven pupils that will not score on the test. If they stay at the school for the period of their primary schooling, they will not score. Obviously, we want them to stay in our school, but we have to be prepared that everybody else has got to do well. Otherwise, the school’s percentages will decline and Ofsted will talk about the under-achievement of the cohort.

Valuing all pupils’ progress at whatever level is also very important. From my perspective as a senior leader in a school, some people do not value progress at any level. What matters is not that they at P4 level or attain some criterion, but how much their learning progresses. In my view, why should the performance of one group of children be more valuable than the performance of other pupils? So, the value of pupil progress for all children has to be a high priority; this is what an inclusive ethos means. When I hold pupil progress meetings with teachers, my conversations are about including those children who are very complex. I expect them to be accountable for the progress that those children have made, which is how it should be.
Central government ethos is critical as it influences practice, the finance that people want to invest in and the way that teachers are trained. Tollgate is a teaching school, which trains forty teachers a year. Politics matters; it makes things change, such as the ethos and peoples’ opinions. I believe that the terminology has been hijacked; inclusion has been discredited by some very high profile advisors for the DFE and reports have been written that suggest ‘equality is not all about Inclusion’

The Conservatives have moved away from what they felt was a ‘bias to Inclusion’ towards a model that was based more on parent choice. The philosophy of the current model is highly dependent on children being placed in performance groupings. In my view it is essential for effective inclusion that there is a mixed model of grouping. In secondary schools, the ‘bottom sets culture’ is often staffed by the least skilled teachers.

Where did the change come from?
The then Conservative leader, David Cameron, was tackled on BBC TV by Jonathan Bartley in 2010 (BBC, 2010). In my view this was the change point; when Jonathan Bartley challenged him by saying “Why are you doing this? I want my son to get to the local school.” He told Mr Cameron of the two-year struggle he had faced to get his seven-year-old into his local school expressing concerns about Tory plans to end the bias towards inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools. David Cameron said that he was passionate about helping parents get the education that is right for them. Mr Bartley said a bias against inclusion was “the wrong way to go - you are not representing the needs of children in mainstream education. You want to segregate disabled children.” But Mr Cameron, whose disabled son Ivan died last year, said he would make it easier for parents to get what was right for their child, be it inclusion in mainstream schools or a special school education.

What is needed now to help schools work inclusively?
Funding: There needs to be a debate about funding to insure that you have got the right staffing, the right resources, and the right specialist input, such as, Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists.

Accountability: I think accountability is probably one of the most important things. If there is to be an inclusive environment then senior teachers are to be accountable, but so are teachers. If you have got a child with complex needs in your classroom, you are accountable for their progress. It is not the teaching assistant’s role to be accountable. And, if you’ve got strong enough leadership, that can work.

SENCOs: reducing paperwork, as discussed above, has to be a priority to get people that really know what they are doing more involved in teaching practice. Ofsted and school improvement partners equally need to feel that they are accountable for children with SEN.

Staff: you need skilled, experienced and resilient people, as already discussed. We have teachers who have come for an interview, who have Masters degrees, but when they are appointed and start in practice, they struggle; it is a very different story. For me, it is not about qualifications; it is definitely more about aptitude and personality. You need you to be the right kind of person with the right ethos.
Awareness raising: There needs also to be awareness raising with communities and with pupils.

So my wishes are:

1. To have funding that enables support to be available
2. To ensure that these pupils have equal access to experienced, subject-expert teachers with high expectations and a rich curriculum
3. To ensure that pupils with SEND do not mix and interact mostly with one another.
4. That SEND expertise is seen as valuable (high status) and not the easy option (historical reputation)
5. To reduce the amount time that the expert skilled professionals are tied up in administration.
6. That all schools have an expected quota or admission for SEND to bring fairness and balance.

_How do we effectively challenge less inclusive practice?_

_Speak up and speak out:_ Unfortunately, it is people with high profile voices that matter and get things changed. It is not people like myself. So using people that we can benefit from; by using research. Increasing awareness of key organisations – Ofsted and the DfE. Support families to know that their choice includes their local school. I think there is a new feeling that there is choice, but if you look at research, choice does not actually make you feel more satisfied. Choice can make you less satisfied; because once you get choice, you feel that it is a never-ending game. For example, I have been to tribunals against established special schools in London. The parents get a place at Treehouse, for example. That is the first fight over. But, after being at Treehouse and they do not get quite the results they were expecting, so they seek ABA and we get the next a and so on. Sometimes, choice actually does not make you feel more satisfied; it might make you feel a little bit more lost. So, celebrate successful models and encourage colleagues and parents to challenge decisions that are not inclusive.

In conclusion, there is a need to reconsider the Salamanca Statement about inclusion as a human rights issue:

"... Those with special educational needs must have access to mainstream services which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs. Mainstream schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all" (the Salamanca Statement – UNESCO World Conference on SEN)

References:

Section 4:

A Local authority perspective
Jenny Andrews, Manchester

Manchester – the place and background:
Manchester has always been at the centre of innovation and enterprise, qualities that led to its place at the heart of the industrial revolution. Following a decline in the 20th century when people left the City in search of employment elsewhere, the successful reinvention of the City over the last 20 years has seen it become the fastest growing City outside London (2001: 423,000, 2011: 500,300 and 2017: 549,000). The child population (0-16) has increased significantly with an estimated 2,500 more children in the City in 2015-16 than 2014 – 2015. The annual school census completed in January 2017 showed 73,406 pupils attending Manchester Schools compared to 71,000 pupils in January 2016. There are now 183 schools in the City (118 Maintained schools, 65 academies across 24 MATs and 11 single academies: note 1).

The City has always been a place where things happen. Its development as a business centre has been very attractive to investors. There are great universities providing a strong research base. It is a cultural centre and lead Council across Greater Manchester (the Northern PowerHouse). The development of the Airport, including the establishment of direct flights direct to China, the legacy of the Commonwealth Games and the development of world class sports facilities in the City, expanding service industries and the City’s cultural offer all contribute to make Manchester a destination of choice.

There remain however areas of considerable deprivation and a number of wards are amongst the most deprived in the country as measured by employment, no-one in household with at least a Level 2 qualification, by health status, type of housing and occupancy rate. The challenge of ensuring that as the City grows it is inclusive and that a greater proportion of the residents are linked to the opportunities that the growth of the City brings, remains a challenge; ‘10% of residents have no qualifications, 35.6% of children live in poverty and 31% of residents paid less than the UK living wage’ (note 2). An effective school system is central to the continued development of the City and key to providing young people with the skills to create and take opportunities in life.

Manchester’s recent growth as a City has had a huge impact on education. The range of factors giving rise to the increase demand for school places is extensive and complex. ‘It includes increased birth rate, migration to and movement around the City, the impact of welfare reforms, new housing developments, changing patterns of parental preference for schools, restrictions on the supply of school places outside the City, changing economic circumstances and successful regeneration’ (note 3). Accurately assessing and planning for additional school places is complex and has been a key priority for the City for a number of years. Continuing to ensure there are sufficient good school places remains a major priority for the Local Authority.

Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) in Manchester:
Data from the May 2017 Census showed that 16.3% (13,634) of pupils in Manchester have been identified as SEND. This was made up of 13.2% (11,078) pupils who have their needs met at SEN Support level and 3% of pupils who have a statement (443) or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP: 2,113). The number having their needs met through SEN Support is increasing, after falling for several years, and is higher than the national average (11.6%) (note 4).

### Number of Pupils with SEND in Manchester Schools (School Census: note 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>May 2015</th>
<th>May 2016</th>
<th>January 2017</th>
<th>May 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EHCP/Statement</td>
<td>2,236</td>
<td>2,339</td>
<td>2,464</td>
<td>2,556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN Support</td>
<td>10,550</td>
<td>10,298</td>
<td>10,667</td>
<td>11,078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All SEN</td>
<td>12,786</td>
<td>12,637</td>
<td>13,131</td>
<td>13,634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of pupils with high levels of need requiring an EHCP has increased and the percentage of pupils in Manchester schools with an EHCP has increased; at 3% is higher than the national average (2.8%). While the number of pupils attending special schools is growing, as a proportion of the whole school population it has remained at, or below, 1.6% since 2012.

The type of needs most common identified in Manchester are: moderate learning difficulties (22%), Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs (20.1%), Speech, Language and Communication Needs (19.9%) and Autism Spectrum Condition (8.2%). The most common needs related to Education Health and Care Plans (note 6) are:

- Autistic Spectrum Condition (27%); this reflects and almost matches the national picture of 29.6%
- Cognition and Learning (20%) against a national picture of 12.9%
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs (20%) - nationally this is nearer 12.4%.

### Drivers for Change (2004)

In 2004 Manchester a significant number of special schools (24) and two separate specialist services for Hearing Impairment and Visual Impairment were always full and with waiting lists. This led to an increasing number of pupils being placed in out of City provision. The Council was also committed to greater inclusion and reducing the amount of segregated provision; and this position was fully supported by the Chief Education Officer.

I joined the Council in 2004 specifically to lead on the development of the City’s Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Strategy. In responding to a brief to develop a more inclusive strategy it became apparent that, in spite of the number of special schools, all budget lines for SEN were of concern and places were at a premium. The budget for out of City placements was significantly over-spent, as was SEN Transport; and the budget for funding SEN pupils in mainstream schools was fully allocated at the start of each financial year with no room for growth. Waiting lists for Educational Psychology assessment for statutory assessments were very long with parents facing unacceptable delays in ensuring their child’s needs were better understood. Mainstream schools spent a lot of time and energy trying to get a statement of educational need and through the statement securing additional
resources, often used to employ a teaching assistant to provide 1:1 support. There was very little real choice for parents and many felt that it was a struggle to either get a place in a special school or to get the support for their child to attend a mainstream school.

The Strategy
A strategic approach was developed to address fundamental issues. A number of significant strands were developed, as set out below.

- **Engagement and consultation with as many interested people as possible** – a period of nearly six months was spent on engagement and consultation with all groups who felt they had a stake in this strategy, particularly parents/carers but also headteachers, SENCOs, community paediatricians, CAMHS, health professionals, social workers and others. The consulted groups then went on to contribute to the range of ‘working groups’ established to work on the detail of each strand of the Strategy.

- **Giving a priority to the ‘Early Years’** and the development within the strategy of a more coherent Early Years pathway. The pathway first developed in 2004-08 has continued to be refined and now provides an ‘Early Help’ offer to support families of children that have a level of SEND that cannot be met by universal services. An Outreach Service for early years is now in place and the pathway is embedded in the Early Years Delivery Model so children with significant needs are being identified earlier and where appropriate the process of assessment leading to an EHCP application starts earlier.

- **Introducing more transparency into the system** - the 'Matching Provision to Need' tool was developed to provide a graduated approach and improve understanding of the needs of children and young people with SEND and match needs to appropriate provision. It has been in use ever since and is used by schools, SENCOs, Educational Psychologists, and the Local Authority Statutory Assessment Team to provide guidance and ensure consistency in the way a child’s need is described and the appropriate resources to support that need. It has been updated regularly to reflect changes over time, for example, to reflect revisions to the Code of Practice. It is currently being updated to reflect ‘life without levels’.

- **Reviewing funding** - a complete review was undertaken of the way SEN funding was delegated to mainstream schools and the formula for distributing these resources. Critical to this was the discussion about what mainstream schools should be expected to provide through Quality First teaching and hence identifying where additional resources were required. This was a challenging piece of work but, working collaboratively with headteachers, was nevertheless successfully completed. It anticipated the current funding methodology for supporting SEN in mainstream and the expectations of the Code of Practice.

- **Establishing a continuum of provision** that included: mainstream, resourced mainstream and specialist provision. Manchester now has 15 designated resource provisions (138 places) in mainstream schools for children with higher levels of SEND (Autism/Specific Language Impairment,
SEMH and Hearing Impairment). The number of special schools was reduced from 24 – 11. In recent years all of the special schools have increased their planned admission number (PAN) to accommodate the increase in pupil numbers across the City.

- **Systematically strengthening SEN Specialist provision** within the City to meet needs of the majority of children and young people with the most complex needs within the City. This has been very effective. The Special Schools Partnership in collaboration with the Local Authority now lead this work.

- **Ensuring strategic oversight of the implementation of the Strategy by establishing** the SEN Board chaired by the Director of Children’s Services. The Board had representatives from key partners at the appropriate level of seniority. Commitment to this high level board has remained and its remit developed over time and is now the children and young people’s workstream of the ‘Our Manchester Disability Plan’ (OMDP) Board.

### Challenges for Local Authorities in providing strategic leadership for inclusion and maintaining inclusive practice (2018)

The period 2004 - 2014 was a time when there were huge system changes and turbulence in the system which continue to this day. These changes can be characterised in a number of ways and include the following:

- **The gradual shift of power and direction from Local to Central government.** This increasing centralisation was initially evident through National Strategies, initiatives like the London and Manchester Challenges and the continued review of the inspection process and associated accountability framework. Increased centralisation and movement away from Local Authorities is now also seen through the role of Regional School Commissioners and the accountability of Academies and Multi-Academy Trusts to Central Government;

- **The impact of the financial downturn** which led directly to a reduction of resources to local authorities and had a direct impact on the capacity of Local Authority Education Services. In many cases this meant that Local Authorities, ceased to manage directly school improvement and SEN support services;

- **The greater emphasis on school self-determination and increased delegation of resources.** Resources formally used by the Local Authority to provide services were now passed on to schools;

- **Greater autonomy for schools and the notion of the primacy of a self-improving school system.** Emphasis on partnership and collaboration between schools were central to these developments;

- **The development and roll out of the academies programme.** The Local Authority role was eroded and more fragmentation introduced into the system.

Taking account of these changes there are clearly significant challenges to any Local Authority in providing strategic leadership for inclusion and maintaining inclusive practice. However the Children and Families Act (2014) sets out a clear role for Local Authorities in relation to children and young people with SEND 0 – 25 years (publishing the Local Offer, providing information, advice and support for parents and young people, replacing statements with EHCPs, preparation for adult life and
providing sufficient good school places including for those with SEND). Local Authorities still have a significant role to play, are accountable and will be inspected using ‘A Framework for Inspection of Local Areas’ Effectiveness in identifying and meeting the needs of Children and Young People who have SEND’ which has been in place since May 2016.

Reduced capacity of Local Authorities means that in Local Authorities there are just fewer people to provide the leadership. The Local Authority has therefore to rely on and use partnerships to lead and influence by building relationships on the basis of collaboration.

The central features of our education system (funding, the curriculum and how it is taught and the continued re-design of the testing and assessment system) continue to shift and change and accentuate the variability across the system. In the past Central Government has tended to review these areas one by one, but currently, and for several years now, all parts of the system appear to have been reviewed simultaneously.

Successive Secretaries of State for Education have needed to show results. The unrelenting changes and shifts in the system have an impact at Local Authority level, at school level and are felt in the classroom by individual teachers, children and young people. The consequences, often unseen, of this turmoil have an impact on SEND and inclusion in these ways:

- **Funding** across schools and between LAs remains inconsistent and there are pressures on both mainstream and high needs budgets from demographic changes as well as local authority differences. Years of review of school budget have not yet resulted in reform that was expected or the associated re-balancing of perceived inequalities. While there now seems to be recognition by the current Secretary of State that there is insufficient funding available overall, there is at present no sign that this will be addressed in the near future.

- **High Needs Funding** There continues to be a pressure on the high needs block as a result of demographic growth, the resulting increase in requests for assessments and the number of 18 – 25 year olds with SEND remaining in education and training. The high needs block does not fully meet the demands created from additional school places, increases in the number of Education Health and Care Plans and additional duties around 18 – 25 year olds. In Manchester the most significant demand on the high needs budget comes from the growth in pupil numbers, including those with significant SEND.

‘Based on current projections, numbers and costs of placements there would need to be an increase of 154 special school places and 227 additional children needing EHCPs outside of a special school sector and 42 post-16 placements This would cost a projected £3.399 m in 2018/19 rising to £6.746m in 2019/20’ (note 7).

- **The Curriculum and assessment:** In mainstream schools particularly for lower attaining pupils with additional needs the curriculum is arguably now
much less accessible with an emphasis on basic outcomes (English and Mathematics), E-Bac, fewer vocational options, reverting back to the single exam at the end of KS4. A new curriculum specification across all subject areas is being introduced along with the move to numbers not grades. The needs of some of these young people might formerly have been recognised as MLD. Without relevant training for staff, the adequate resources, relevant curriculum and accreditation pathways, pupils can feel or actually be ‘excluded’. This includes, in Manchester, children and young people for whom the primary needs are most commonly recorded as moderate learning difficulties (22%), social, emotional and mental health needs (20.1%) or speech, language and communication needs (19.9%).

The perspective of a number of headteachers is that while Education Health and Care Plans can work for children with complex needs, children with other needs, particularly SEMH are side-lined. The changes particularly in relation to the curriculum and assessment/testing regime has an impact on children and can have the unforeseen consequence of leading to greater exclusion. There is a worrying picture nationally in relation to the exclusion of SEND pupils with an EHCP and with SEN Support. For example, in Manchester:

‘the fixed term exclusion rates for pupils with SEND remains around five times higher than of pupils with no SEND. Pupils with a statement or EHC Plan now have the highest rate of exclusions, at almost six times higher than pupils with no SEND’ (note 8).

There was also an increase in 2016/17 in the number of permanent exclusions in the City; again SEND pupils were more likely to be permanently excluded than their peers (with 53.7% having SEND). It is clear that included in this group will be children and young people with SEMH where needs are recognised, if not met, and that schools working with parents and other agencies need to be better equipped to provide for them. This includes recognising the impact on schools, as the universal service, of the pressure on other services including shortfall in access to specialist services for mental health, access to social care support and family support and the impact of benefit changes.

- **Parental preferences and expectations** – There is now evidence of increasing demand for special school places. While in some areas, as in Manchester, this can be directly linked to demographic growth, it is also apparent that there has been an increase in parental demand for special school places and an increase in parental appeals for specialist provision. This may be linked to parents’ confidence in how well mainstream schools can meet their child’s needs. An increase in parental appeals related to school placements has been seen in Manchester. From January – Oct 2017, Manchester spent £21,435 on 59 mediations but in spite of this 36 families have gone to appeal (note 9).

Information from the Ministry of Justice reported in the TES (note 10) revealed that there had been an increase of 27% in the number of SEND appeals registered nationally for Tribunal, reaching 4,725 in 2016 – 2017 compared to 3,712 in the previous year. More than half of these related to the content of the EHCP. It is estimated that more than £70 million has been spent on appeals since the new law
came into effect in September 2014 and interesting to consider if better used could not have been made of that resource to support the needs of SEND children and young people?

**Going Forward:**
If Local Authorities are to continue to provide strategic leadership to go forward, this leadership has to be based on collaboration and partnership. There are a number of different models developing across the country but in Manchester the following are in place, all of which support schools to maintain an inclusive approach.

- **One Education** - Manchester’s Support Services were established as a Traded Services in 2011. Now employing over 200 staff and trading services to schools in a wide range of areas including for SEN.

- **Manchester School Improvement Partnership (MSIP)** – an alliance of the Manchester Teaching Schools working with the Local Authority to support schools was established in 2013/14

- **The Manchester Schools Alliance (MSA)** was incorporated as a company in April 2014 as a Local Authority and Schools partnership led by schools for schools to support the self-improving school system. The main objective of the alliance is to facilitate the development of a self-improving school system within Manchester through the delivery of partnership activity and services to its members. The work of the Alliance is managed by a Board comprising 5 headteachers and 2 governors (Directors). The Director of Education, as the Local Authority Member, is a co-opted member of the Board. The Board is responsible for the appointment of a headteacher as CEO, setting and monitoring MSA’s annual plan and budget.

This arrangement forms the cornerstone of the strategy and set of relationships to respond to the City’s wider agenda, the national reform of education and the impact of these changes. Schools pay £1 per pupil for membership, capped at £1,000 and 145/183 schools are currently members of the Manchester Schools Alliance.

- **The Manchester Special School Partnership** is a formal partnership that has been developed between the Local Authority and special schools in Manchester so that pupils with most complex and exceptional needs can remain within a Manchester Specialist setting. To support this, £550k is devolved annually to the partnership for the purpose of supporting access to learning, minimising the risk of multiple fixed term or permanent exclusion and reducing the need for external placements. This forum has also enabled discussion on assessment of international new arrivals with complex SEN to take place. Last year, 65 young people accessed additional funding (8k – 25k), 22 new arrivals have assessment places in 2016/17. There have been no permanent exclusions from Manchester Special Schools in last 3 years. But, this Partnership does not mean ‘no difficult conversations’.

- **Partnerships that support preparation for Adulthood** – Post-school opportunities for young people with SEND continue to expand. In 2017-18, there were 60 supported internships in the City. Routes into employment for young people with SEND in Manchester are recognised as some of the best in the country. The Local Authority provides High Needs funding to
Manchester College and Pure Innovations to deliver internships with Manchester City Council, the Central Manchester Hospital Trust, Manchester Airport and Media City. 80% of these young people progress into work (note 11).

- **Leadership across the Council and Working with Partners** – strong joint working between education, health and social care services with leaders focussed on the impact of joint working. In Manchester the work to develop integrated delivery to SEND reforms is being led by senior leaders in Education, Health and Social Care on the SEND Board and other strategic groups. One example of successful partnership working is that the Child Adolescent and Mental Health Services (CAMHS) have redesigned the Emotional Health in Schools Team so it can offer direct consultations and training to schools. This development has been very positively received by schools and enables schools to make direct referrals to CAMHS.

It is very clear that local leaders within local areas will be held to account for how they implement the Code of Practice, duties which came into force September 2014, and for their strategic leadership of services in the local area. In particular the inspection process will evaluate how well the implementation of the Code has led to improvements in

- Identification of SEN
- Providing for and meeting needs
- Outcomes for children and young people who have SEND

The report from Ofsted (note 12) summarising the main findings from the first 30 local area SEND Inspections identifies some critical issues. Of the 30 areas inspected 9 were required to provide a ‘Written Statement of Action’ (WSOA). Main findings from the first 30 inspections include:

- **Children and young people identified as needing SEND support had not benefitted from the implementation of the Code of Practice well enough** (note 13). They are found to be excluded, absent or missing from school much more frequently than other pupils nationally. Unofficial exclusions are too readily used to cope with children and young people who have SEND.

- **Access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) was poor in many areas.** This resulted in children and young people with SEMH not getting the right and timely support

- **Where children’s needs were identified well in the early years parents generally felt supported.** However as children get further into the school system the likelihood of needs being identified quickly reduced significantly. In areas required to write a WSOA, parental dissatisfaction and frustration was a significant factor. A large proportion of parents in the local are lacked confidence in the ability of mainstream schools to meet their child’s needs.

**Conclusion**

In terms of the future prospects of maintaining an inclusive approach to education for children and young people with a range of SEND and based on my experience in working with these groups in one Local Authority, my main observations are:

1. Leadership on a range of matters including SEN comes from individual school leaders and leadership teams, governors, trustees and CEOs of
Multi Academy Trusts. This has always been so, particularly in terms of the individual experiences for children and families. However, in the past Local Authorities provided more guidance, and had capacity to influence and lever change. Successful inclusion has always been about successful partnership working. In Local Authorities where strong partnerships have been developed and are embedded there seems to be a better chance of an inclusive approach being maintained. In Manchester, through the partnership arrangements set out in this report, there is a place for continuing the inclusion conversation and influencing practice.

2. Given the changing nature of the educational landscape, it is crucial that Local Authorities work in a positive and collaborative way with all those with an interest in their local authority area. This includes working with Regional Schools Commissioner, Ofsted and leaders of Multi-Academy Trusts. The quality of this set of relationships and the professional dialogue that can take place is especially critical in terms of the Local Authority leadership role to support inclusive practice.

3. For children and young people with the most complex needs the offer in specialist provision has much improved over the years. Arguably, the expectation that there is a broad curriculum offer and that progress in learning is expected (and measured) has had a positive impact on the quality of provision in specialist settings. The increasing use of a range of relevant accredited courses and post – school opportunities through supported internships is enabling more young people with significant needs to enter the workplace. While there is still some way to go, there are an increasing number of positive examples of young people with complex needs entering the workplace tangible evidence of an inclusion policy working.

4. The biggest risk to inclusive practice is for children and young people in mainstream schools with social, emotional and mental health needs. This is the group that is vulnerable and most at risk of exclusion and marginalisation. The current accountability framework does not encourage schools to continue to support the most vulnerable – there does not seem to be a way of capturing or measuring their achievement and progress (outside of the basic measures) or acknowledging the wrap around support that schools. The changes particularly in relation the curriculum and assessment/testing regime has undoubtedly had an impact on this group as the statistics nationally and in Manchester show.

Notes:
1. Correct at 30 January 2018
2. Manchester City Council, State of the City Report, 2017
3. Manchester City Council, Report to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 5th September 2017
4. Manchester City Council – Report to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 5th December 2017
5. Manchester City Council – Report to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 5th December 2017
6. Manchester City Council – Report to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 5th December 2017
7. Manchester City Council – Report to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 5th December 2017 para 11.3
8. Manchester City Council – Report to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 27th February 2018
9. Manchester City Council – Report to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 5th December 2017 para 5.6
10. TES 5th January 2018
11. Manchester City Council – Report to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 5th December 2017
12. Highlights from Local Area Inspections: One Year On (October 2017)
13. Highlights from Local Area Inspections: One Year On (October 2017)
Section 5:

Parental perspectives on choice and inclusion:
Jayne Fitzgerald and Claire-Marie Whiting, Rotherham.

Context
“Section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014 makes clear that Local Authorities, in carrying out their functions under the Act in relation to disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN), must have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child’s parents…” (DfE, 2015).

Chapter One of the current SEND Code of Practice re-emphasises the underlying principle of the participation of children, their parents and young people in decision-making, and indicates that young people and parent carers will have greater choice and control. There is a focus on inclusive practice, “…the presumption of mainstream education…and ensuring that the preferences of the child’s parents or the young person for where they should be educated are met wherever possible…” (DfE, 2015).

How far these ideals are perceived to have been translated into experience is likely to depend on a parent-carer’s context. Of note is that there are now 152 Parent-Carer Forums involving more than 80,000 parent carers, and a National Network which promotes active co-production with parent carers so that they have significant impact on local service development and strategic planning (NNPCF, 2014). If having a voice and being involved in decision-making are viewed as intrinsically linked, it might therefore follow that more empowered parent carers would automatically involve greater parent-carer choice in respect of provision.

Rotherham is nationally recognised for best practice in co-production. Here, a unique collaboration between the Parent Carer Forum and the Local Authority has led to the creation of the Rotherham Charter and Genuine Partnerships. The Charter consists of four key principles: i. welcome and care, ii. value and include, iii. communicate and partnership, through which iv. trust (and therefore co-production) can authentically be built. The principles were formulated in 2010, evolving from local research with children and young people with additional needs and their parent carers, based on two broad questions: What is it like to be a learner in a Rotherham school if you have additional needs? What is it like to be a parent of a child or young person with additional needs?

Inspired by the Lamb Inquiry (2009), the narratives generated led to an innovative project involving parent carers, young people and practitioners working together in co-production as equal partners to improve SEND systems in the borough. Self-evaluation tools, training and support packages have since been created by the Rotherham team to help schools, settings and services embed the four principles into their everyday practice in order to improve the lives of children, young people and their families.
In 2016 Genuine Partnerships, the national face of the initiative, was invited to join VOICES: National Alliance for Local Area Partnership Working. The Alliance is a collaboration of SEND reform partners, Local Authorities and statutory organisations whose purpose is to create a nationally agreed framework, process and principles for whole area co-production and participation that can be used by all stakeholders in each Local Area in England. The Rotherham Charter principles have been adopted by the Alliance and re-named the Four Cornerstones of co-production. Genuine Partnerships is working with Contact (formerly Contact a Family) to deliver VOICES projects nationally to improve co-production at a Local Area level.

The premise behind this work is that many Local Areas still need help to establish and embed recognisably good co-production. Since 2011/12 Contact has been asking Parent Carer Forums to what extent they feel they co-produce with local statutory colleagues. A downward trend in co-production and participation has been demonstrated following a peak in 2013/14 (Contact, 2017). This may be owing to the greater empowerment of parent-carers since the reforms with the growth of Parent Carer Forums, and therefore higher expectations, but other pressure are also perceived to be at work.

**Parent-carer narratives on choice and inclusion**
In this paper these perceived pressures are illustrated by responses received from parent-carers from Rotherham, other parts of the Yorkshire and Humber region, and the National Network of Parent Carer Forums to the following questions:

*What do you think are the factors contributing to numbers of pupils in special schools rising significantly?*

*What pressures do mainstream schools experience in trying to work inclusively?*

*What is needed now to help them do so? How can less inclusive practice be challenged?*

*How far do parents have a real choice for mainstream? Is a choice of special school options increasingly determined by negative experience of mainstream alternatives?*

*What role are Local Authorities (LAs) and other organisations able to play in promoting inclusion, in a context of greater school self-determination and the absence of clear national policy?*

Research undertaken in Rotherham indicates that whether or not parent-carers feel their child or young person is included, and whether or not they feel they have a real choice in respect of their educational provision and support, relates to their own experience. The borough’s co-production model draws upon narrative practice to enable coherence and meaning to be given to experience once space is offered for it to be voiced. A ‘free association’ narrative approach (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) is then used to elicit stories based upon the principle that spontaneous associations follow the emotional priorities of participants, thereby avoiding the imposition of constructs and the application of assumed truths.
Here, then, is an account of parent-carer responses to the above questions subsequently grouped into seven overlapping co-constructed narratives relating to experiences and priorities shared:

1. **There are more children and young people with additional needs**

There is a perceived increase in the number of children and young people with additional needs, together with severity and complexity. Carpenter et al. (2015) discuss how improved health care for premature babies has led to greater prevalence of complex neuro-developmental needs later on in development. Parent-carers suggest that because there are more children with profound and multiple needs in special schools, more children with moderate needs have to cope in mainstream schools. However, although DfE statistics published in 2017 suggest an increase in numbers of children with SEND, the proportion is about the same, indicating that the increase is more in line with an increase in the general population but that High Needs funding for Local Authorities has not followed this trend. The lack of capacity to sufficiently provide educational placements within a Local Area often leads to high cost Out of Authority placements and transport, therefore reducing spend available for mainstream inclusion.

2. **The mainstream curriculum and social context is often too fast-paced and impacts negatively on the wellbeing of children and young people with additional needs**

Parent-carers talk about children with additional needs getting left behind academically and socially. Progress in schools has to be fast. It is voiced that formal education is too early for many children, “…what about learning through play and our understanding of child development (Piaget)?” Many parent-carers question methods of testing/marking, because their children never seem good enough: “You did well, next time do this….” It is felt there is not enough early intervention and a graduated response in some mainstream schools, which too often results in rapid escalation and crisis, and then leads to pressure on support services.

3. **The pressure on schools to be ‘outstanding’ and raise standards, especially given the increased autonomy of schools through academisation, is a perverse incentive against inclusion; this is often disguised by well-meaning language**

One parent-carer asks whether there are any genuinely inclusive schools. Another says, of academisation, that children with SEND, “Don’t fit their A star mould…” Many parent-carers of children with additional needs say that national education policy works against inclusion because it prioritises progress and targets. Attainment (exam results and, to a lesser extent, achievement) determines the success of a school, for example Ofsted ratings, Progress 8 and league table positions. These blanket approaches do not really take children with SEND into account. Schools are assessed in terms of how much value they add. It may be considered that the amount of value added to SEND children is not sufficient enough based on these traditional academic measures, and therefore reflects badly on the school.
Parent-carers suggest schools can be punished by Ofsted for promoting inclusion at the expense of attainment, because welcoming children with complex additional needs can negatively impact on data, even when the children at an individual level are happy and make personal progress. There might be a reluctance by some schools to include children with SEND, a relative minority, because of the perceived negative impact on the majority of other children and young people at the school. As a result, there are big inconsistencies between schools’ approach to inclusion, and little incentive to be inclusive.

Experiences of failure at school are very distressing for individual children, young people and their families, and frequently lead to a lack of trust and confidence in their mainstream school, not only for the individuals concerned, but also other families and practitioners who hear about a school’s non-inclusive reputation. A National Autistic Society survey (2015) found that many parent-carers have lost confidence in mainstream schools and are seeking alternatives such as special schools or specialist units; 40% of the parent-carers who responded said their child’s school place did not fully meet their child’s needs.

Sometimes staff representing mainstream schools, and practitioners from external agencies such as Health, advise families that their child would be better off in a special school, for example:

"…we are an academic school. Have you looked at special schools?";
“special…schools are better at sourcing exams that suit the needs of their pupils.”

These suggestions seem well-intentioned, relating to a reduction of stress or distress for a child, but can also be viewed as exclusion in disguise as they leave parent carers feeling unable to challenge, removing choice by default:

“Parent carers can feel they are pushed to choose specialist provision due to bad experiences in mainstream; not much of a choice really.”

Children with additional needs sometimes seem set up to fail. Too often they are described in terms of their behaviour rather than their needs, which then makes the process of formal exclusion easier (a trend that might relate to a rise in primary school exclusions). Schools with places can seem the most dismissive when a place is being sought for a child with additional needs:

“…would you send your child to a school where they are not wanted?”

4. Inclusive schools are not rewarded

Many parent-carers talk about inclusive schools being full, saying they have no capacity to take more children and young people with SEND. as they are already overwhelmed by children and young people “offloaded” by schools that are less inclusive. Schools that are inclusive, because of their reputation often seem short of funding because they are responding to a disproportionate number of children with additional needs. One parent-carer cited a school known for trying to be “all-inclusive” hitting the headlines when it ended up facing huge financial pressures.
because of school budget cuts whilst faced with the requirement to fund the first element of provision for all its SEND pupils and make environmental adjustments. A deficit was generated and the head teacher resigned.

5. **Lack of mainstream staff confidence and skills**

Despite the new ITT (Initial Teacher Training) requirements there still seems to be a relative lack of teacher training in SEND, leaving many teachers with too little knowledge or understanding, or access to SEND-related CPD (Continuing Professional Development). Some parent carers feel that school-based teacher training programmes have reduced formal training opportunities and the exploration of pedagogy (how to teach), which has resulted in reduced staff capacity to effectively meet needs and create personalised approaches. There is no inclusive schooling guidance in the new SEND Code of Practice, and so a lack of information abounds for schools in terms of good practice in making reasonable adjustments.

6. **Special schools are full**

This seems to be a common narrative for Local Areas:

“All our special schools are full. The LA is even sending parents to a private provision...”

In Rotherham, work around ‘sufficiency of provision’ still has a focus on increasing specialist provision as well as improving inclusive practice. Parent-carer choice depends on having a surplus of places in every school, whereas special schools are over-subscribed and most inclusive mainstream schools are too. So, “Choice’ therefore means nothing in this context.”

Many parent-carers believe that only an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) can ensure choice of mainstream school, thereby forcing some parent-carers down a statutory route for their child or young person that might have been avoided if there was consistency of inclusive practice across mainstream settings.

7. **There seems to be little accountability to ensure inclusive practice**

In the absence of a clear national policy or inclusion standards some Local Authorities have not yet developed their own inclusion strategy. Even when they promote inclusion and provide free training to schools, this can have limited impact on the behaviour of some academies and other schools that are avoiding it:

“…there is very little they can do if an academy head teacher just doesn’t want to play ball.”

There seem to be few repercussions; indeed it is possible the school will be financially better off and more likely to look good on paper for Ofsted.
The experiential reality of each of these seven narratives is illustrated by parent-carers K and A (see Appendix 1).

**Alternative narratives – What would make it better?**

1. **More real incentives for schools to be inclusive**

This was the strongest narrative from parent carers, voiced repeatedly. They want good and outstanding inclusion to be celebrated. This means recognition of best inclusive practice, but also more than this. It involves financial acknowledgement of the challenges created by having an inclusive open-door policy, and positive public acknowledgement by regulatory bodies and Ofsted of those schools and settings that rise to the challenges and try their best to embed principles like the Four Cornerstones into ethos and practice despite any potential impact on data. One parent carer suggests the following solution:

“Ofsted - simply don’t give outstanding unless SEND is outstanding.”

The dynamics need to change to avoid rewarding non-inclusive systemic behaviour. For some schools this might mean suspending judgement on data until the school’s own narrative on inclusion has been heard. Parent carers feel that inclusion should become an Ofsted priority, and that promoting social inclusion and opportunities for non-academic children deserves as much recognition as high percentages of children meeting and exceeding national standards.

2. **A whole Local Area approach; sharing good practice and challenging non-inclusivity**

Parent carers suggest there needs to be more SEND peer challenge, but question whether all schools within a Local Area will participate because of the ‘autonomy of schools’ agenda. Parent carers advocate school leaders coming together to promote inclusive cultures through strategic network meetings. This might involve Local Area investment to enable schools, settings and services to work more closely together to scrutinise High Needs spending and to achieve, for example, the kind of ‘collective responsibility’ approach to exclusions being practised in some Local Areas, like Rotherham. Asking schools and services together to analyse figures for part-time timetables and exclusions, and to consider why Out of Authority placements have been needed, can prove effective at challenging practice.

Innovative thinking through Joint Commissioning around provision by considering how to improve inclusion is also suggested. This is likely to include showing commitment to expanding, rebuilding and refurbishing school environments to make accessibility more consistent across settings.

There is broad agreement from parent-carers that it would aid Local Authorities to develop a clearer policy on inclusion if there was national guidance to follow, and a recognised quality assurance framework against which inclusive practice and co-production with parent-carers and young people could be checked. Implementing more requirements, for example, for schools to publish a breakdown of SEND
spending (as well as Pupil Premium), might also be helpful. Broader criteria for SEND admission might also be useful, incorporating school SEND support and the graduated response.

Having a Local Area framework for Inclusion and Co-production similar to the Four Cornerstones model being promoted in Rotherham, and by the VOICES Alliance, would give greater strength to workforce development events that share and promote good practice. It would be ideal to implement systems that would involve more experienced SENDCOs mentoring and supporting staff in other schools, and for there to be good staff training.

3. **Genuinely listen to, and involve, children, young people and their parent-carers**

This paper has illustrated that parent-carers who have greater confidence give their views more readily, particularly through their Parent Carer Forums, but that they also recognise choices are not always choices, and that support for parent-carers during decision-making processes continues to be important. They ask that their children and young people also have more of a voice, and that their aspirations are nurtured.

**Conclusions**

This paper has explored parent-carer responses to questions related to choice and inclusion four years on from the 2014 SEND reforms. The parent-carers were members of the Rotherham Parent Carer Forum, other parts of the Yorkshire and Humber region, and the National Network of Parent Carer Forums. The current context indicates that parent-carers have greater voice through Parent Carer Forums, but they continue to experience inclusion and genuine choice as a challenge. This is despite local and national work to promote a framework for co-production and inclusion, for example via the Rotherham Charter and the Four Cornerstones of the VOICES Alliance.

A narrative-based approach has been adopted here to show that what parent-carers perceive as impacting negatively on inclusion and affecting their ability to make choices for their children and young people with additional needs. These include alternative narratives that would make a difference (see Appendix 2). A and K’s stories (Appendix 1) illustrate how these narratives play out powerfully in lived experience. They demonstrate well how the impact of SEND on the emotional well-being of children and young people, and their families, must not be ignored within this debate. Grief, failure and emotional pain are commonly expressed.

Parent-carers want their children and young people with additional needs to enjoy the same success and well-being as their siblings who do not experience additional needs. Their voices need to be heard. (See Appendix 3 for poem written by a young person with autism who is imploring the adults around him to properly understand his needs).

There are many pockets of good co-production taking place locally, regionally and nationally that involve parent carers and young people, schools and services, and Local Areas and national bodies, which are attempting to tackle the issues raised in this paper. Quality assurance frameworks have been devised, for example in relation
to the Four Cornerstones, that could be more formally adopted by regulatory bodies
to provide greater national guidance on inclusion and choice, and therefore impact
positively at a Local Area level. Why there might still be reluctance to invest in this is
open to question given the strong voice presented by parent carers around this
issue.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

K’s story
“My son who is just six and should be in Year 1 is currently out of education due to
high anxiety levels and unidentified needs. He has been out of education for just four
months. As a family we have had very little support from the Local Authority, school
and Health. As time goes on, my son's needs and fears are becoming greater, and
more support will be needed to help him return to education. Due to the lack of
support we are constantly going around in circles. The buck has been passed from
one service to another, but none keeping my son at the heart of it.

We have made a decision not to send my son back to his current school as it causes
him major anxiety and no offer of support was given. During the time looking for a
new setting for my son, I was shocked at how hard it is. The most inclusive schools
are full and schools that have spaces seem to be very dismissive and have clearly
found having children on role with SEN a burden. I have been told they can't meet
his needs for various reasons including, "...the classroom isn't big enough", "...we
haven't got the staffing levels", "...he hasn't got a EHCP", "...there's already too
many children with SEN in this class" which, as a parent, it is hard to hear. It's like they don’t want my child.

As a family we feel in a very difficult position, and there are only a few options left: continue to home school, which would prove difficult long term, and is not the best thing for my son; force a school that has space to take him and worry that his needs are not being met and could potentially make him worse; or fight for an EHCP when the LA are saying his needs ‘should’ be met within a mainstream provision. Then, if we do get an EHCP, he could return to education either in a more inclusive mainstream, or potentially a special school.

I believe more training should be given around inclusion, graduated responses, budgeting for children with SEN. But, most importantly, there needs to be more recognition for the schools that are going above and beyond to help children and are inclusive; then maybe other schools and academies would follow and hopefully all children would be given the same opportunities and treatment. I also believe this would enable more children to stay within mainstream provision with better outcomes for all.

As a parent of a child with additional needs, I feel we have very little choice in my son's education and we are worried about what the future will bring if changes don’t start happening soon.”

A’s story
“I have a daughter who is a very bright little girl. However, her ability to learn depends on the level of understanding of her teachers, and the attitude of staff. Although she can be very vocal and engaging at times, at the drop of a hat she can become silent and withdrawn. She often cannot communicate her needs due to severe high anxiety and she has suffered in silence. Too many times academic pressures and lack of understanding have pushed my little girl to the cliff edge, and very nearly off it. Autism, and sensory processing difficulties alongside anxiety, can be invisible to people that don’t or won’t see them, and the tremendous pressure that children like her are under means that they often have to fail and crash for people to start to take notice.

Most mainstream schools are driven by Ofsted grades, and as children with special needs often bring down overall grades, I feel that they are purposely pushed to breaking point so parents move them due to the stress and worry about their health. The lack of support and the unwillingness to work with parents means that needs are not met and the downward spiral begins. It takes a strong and able parent to challenge this practice, and even then it can be too much. Our children deserve so much better from the top down. Too often our children are seen as failures and inconveniences instead of children with rights like every other child.

What makes this so bad is that practices like these are happening everywhere and the heads that work like this are often Executive Heads, being paid high amounts of money to crush children and families with SEND. Parents lose trust, children lose trust in mainstream, and the parents then have to look at special provisions because they know that their child will not cope in most mainstream schools.
What I fail to understand is that we have a very small minority of mainstream schools that don’t work/run this way, but instead they go out of their way to love, support and nurture every child, even taking on children who have been excluded elsewhere, trying their best to support them and turn around their lives. These schools then become top heavy with SEND children, and they don’t always get the support they need from the LA to carry on. There comes a time when these schools cannot take on children they know they could help because it will mean other children will suffer, and staff too.

Why can’t people see what is right in front of them? It’s not rocket science, it’s really not. Look at schools that have crept up to be judged outstanding by Ofsted and check the number of SEND children; it will have dropped. The two do not match, or work together.

The sad thing about all this is that my little girl has Mensa levels and is as bright as a button, but she spent 17 weeks out of school with mental health problems at the age of eight. She has written her own presentations about her experiences and has presented these to lots of people.

She is now in Year Six, and after two and a half good years she is now self-harming and has been referred to CAMHS because of academic pressure, fear of transition, and the not-knowing what the next provision will be like, inclusive or not. I’m now looking for specialist secondary provision because mainstream is too noisy, crowded and big. Sheer panic was on her face during a visit to a mainstream secondary. Children who have high functioning autism have nowhere to go except specialist provision and even most of these are not set up for their academic ability. It’s like children like mine shouldn’t exist.

I’m tired of fighting, but I will carry on because my daughter deserves to fly, and she will. People need to sit up and listen. This system is failing some of our most vulnerable young people, not just in education, but it’s making them fail in life and feel worthless, useless and a burden. It’s not acceptable.

I’m writing this hoping that it won’t just bring a tear then be forgotten, but that it will bring about change in thought, feelings and attitudes. This is real life, not a sob story. One very angry, but passionate, mum”.

Appendix 2

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<th>Narratives on choice and inclusion</th>
<th>Alternative narratives that would make a difference</th>
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<td>There seems to be little accountability to ensure inclusive practice</td>
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Appendix 3

**I am autistic!!!**  Fender (2012)

Therefore:
It’s not being lazy…
It’s not knowing what to do

It’s not be sensitive..
It is noticing the tone you use…

It’s not questioning..
It’s clarifying…

It’s not being a wimp..
It’s terrifying and in pain…

It’s not unable to take a joke…
It’s not being able to tell you when you are…

It’s not correcting…
It’s trying to help…

It’s not being ignorant…
It’s trying to process something else…

It’s not being rude..
It’s being autistic!!!
Section 6:  
Summary of discussion groups

The groups addressed these questions:

1. Numbers of pupils in special schools have risen significantly nationally over the last few years. What factors are contributing to this trend?
2. What pressures are mainstream schools experiencing in trying to work inclusively? What is needed now to help them do so? What do we effectively challenge less inclusive practice?
3. The Coalition Government’s resolution to the inclusion debate was to strengthen parental choice. How far do parents have a real choice for mainstream? or is choice of special school options increasingly determined by negative experience of mainstream alternatives?
4. What role are Local Authorities and other organisations able to play in promoting inclusion, in a context of greater school self-determination and the absence of clear national policy?

Group 1:

The person who reported back for this group said in relation to the first question that there were some doubts that the number of pupils in special school was increasing. This was because the criteria change year by year in how the government collects data. However, two other members of this group said that this was not the view of others in this group who did see the data as indicating reliable rises in special school places.

This group also discussed different perceptions about the success of the SEN reforms. It was suggested that local authorities generally think they are doing a ‘great job’, while some parents would disagree with this view, perhaps less so for early years cases. It was suggested that early years parents seemed to be more excited about the reforms and considered them to be making a difference. But, this group also raised the point that without longitudinal data it is difficult to have a firm view on these issues.

On the second question about the pressures that mainstream schools are experiencing, they asked the question about what are the health and social care services doing. The group discussed the changes that are going to take place in the SEN tribunal from April, when parents appeal against the social, or health part in their educational health care plans can appeal over this. It was believed that at present, local authorities seem to have very little power to force health and social care to do their share. This often leaves schools in a difficult position, particularly when it is coming to meet children’s needs with complex needs.

Group 2:

This group wondered whether there is enough pressure on strategic leadership. This was because with such a centralised system there seems to be little strategic leadership from Regional Schools Commissioners. In connection with the first two questions, this group discussed the anxiety arising from the hothouse of
achievement: with a culture where it is almost acceptable to support the traditional achiever at the expense of those who learn differently. The group believed that this was something that had to considered seriously and guarded against.

In connection with question 4 there was a view in the group that there is a need to collectively come up with how we push against either a vacuum of national policy or ‘policy gone mad’; a perverse policy. This was seen as a significant negative factor.

Group 3:
In connection with the first question, this group identified a range of factors that could contribute to rising special school numbers. For instance, there was no strategy driving inclusion nationally and the supply and the demand of special schools. This group was interested in Alison Black’s figures about the primary schools having increasing proportions of pupils relative to secondary special schools. Some in the group commented about greater parental awareness of provision. Some also wondered about how removing SEN pupils in some way from the assessment reporting would work. They saw positives and negatives to this suggestion, but it was quite an interesting idea. These considerations opened up bigger issues about parental choice. The general view in this group was represented as there being no real choice, but a kind of forced choice. There was also some discussion about pupil funding for special schools; that special schools are very keen to recruit pupils because of the funding.

Group 4:
As regards factors related to rising special school numbers, this group raised the question of leadership in schools. Strong leadership was going to be required to overcome the other pressures on schools, both financial and performance pressures. The group considered that a school needed a really dedicated leader to put those other things aside and look at the inclusive ethos that can be developed. The members of this group believed that it could be done, as they have seen examples as shown at the seminar today. There was also the issue of a UN report that came out which took the UK government to task over failing to follow through on inclusion.

This group also discussed how to disincentivise or incentivise different parts of the system. For them the question was whether there was a way of publishing data that demonstrated that certain schools were being more inclusive than others. In terms of choice for parents, it is often the choice between one mainstream school and another; one that is willing to take and one that is perhaps not so willing to take a pupil with SEN. There were a number of pitfalls in publishing data like the robustness of the data.

Group 5:
This group reported that they covered much of what the other groups had discussed. For the person reporting back, their general position was that in the legislation, the guidance (SEND Code of practice) and the Ofsted framework as a whole, there is plenty of ammunition for people to use to resist. They considered the question that had come up in other groups about how teachers could be brave to cope with these other pressures. Some in the group also raised the issue of performance related pay, which some felt was a major issue in terms of the whole assessment structure. One approach that could work for this group was to use the approach in some areas.
where groups of mainstream schools had worked together, as in the Manchester and Hertfordshire. Here the head teachers were keeping one and another inclusive. Though this is not a perfect solution, it was felt that could make a contribution.

**Group 6:**
This group discussed how to challenge non-inclusive practice effectively. The key point for them, which had been raised by other comments, was the need to increase the accountability for and the value given to SEN provision and inclusivity. For this group, in the world we currently live in, the only way to hold schools to account on this was Ofsted. So, they agreed with the suggestion that inclusive practice should be something that is a measurable target by Ofsted in the same way as attainment.

This group also believed that it is important to increase accountability within the local area particularly of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), especially as they could be based across several areas. They tend to see themselves less as responsible for the children within that area. This group also identified that parents and professionals are often saying the same thing; there is no dispute about what the problems are. It is that these issues are not being addressed.

The group believed that this was partly due to government policy. They also talked about problem solving collaborative partnerships as being part of the solution to this, based on the head teacher forum in Rotherham, where exclusions are dealt with on a local area level. This means that rather than just saying that we will pass on this child to another school, the schools together discuss whether that child should be excluded at all, and what the best place is for the pupil. They hold each other accountable.

But the group saw that there is a potential issue about the will to set up that partnership; there does not seem to be enough incentive for other areas that are less interested in doing that or have had a bad Ofsted report. The group felt that it did not come up with a solution to create that incentive, but it is a point to think through in future.

Finally, this group identified data that was needed about what is happening to those pupils who have dropped off the list of those being identified as having SEN. Would these data corroborate with the rise in exclusions? Secondly, we need better data on informal exclusions and the use of part-time timetables because anecdotally, this seems to be a big issue that everyone is coming across but which is not included in the official figures.

**Group 7:**
This group reported discussing similar points to the previous groups, particularly around that idea of harnessing communities and bringing together counter-stories, counter-narratives. They also discussed the Rotherham example of working with parents and looking at how parents can work more effectively within the system. But, this group recognised that this requires schools to engage with parents; it requires improvement on both sides. The group also discussed an example from Derby University working in partnership with the local authority and again looking at opportunities to work with the direction of policy. So, one of the things that the
The university is trying to do is to make sure that work is built into the developmental work that is going on in Derby as part of an opportunity area.

In terms of schools, this group identified similar issues about supporting and developing teaching networks, such as teaching school alliances, but also the role of the Chartered College of Teaching. This is about what is being done to support and encourage reflective practice in terms of special education needs. Finally this group were keen to reassert a human rights framework as part of this debate.

A final point after the group discussion feedback was made by someone who argued that there is a need for some work to understand the cost of not supporting young people with SEN. This has to be data on a large enough scale that can actually influence people. This is about impacts on the wider community, GP and health services. This is about wider economic consequences, as well as the social and the personal. For this person, a government obsessed with the economics of it this might be a way to have some influence.