



Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education

A response to the call for evidence

Education Committee inquiry: Solving the SEND crisis

The Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Education Committee's inquiry into solving the SEND crisis. CSIE's response is included in the submission from the Special Educational Consortium. In this additional submission, CSIE wishes to draw particular attention to the following issues:

We welcome the Committee's recognition that the system is letting children down, its intentions to explore how schools and other educational settings can become more inclusive, and to review the way SEND is funded. We respond to each of these in turn.

In the past 25 years the education system has become less inclusive, increasing numbers of children and young people are identified as having SEND and are not in our mainstream schools. The main problems with the previous statutory framework, as identified by the Lamb Inquiry in 2009, are precisely those identified by the SEND Review in 2022 with regard to the current statutory framework: frustrated parents and young people, poor outcomes, and unsustainable costs. The time for effective change is long overdue.

Developing an inclusive education system in which ordinary schools have capacity to respond to the full diversity of learners is possible and has been achieved elsewhere. The province of New Brunswick in Canada introduced a legally-binding policy on Inclusive Education in 2013, which forbids the existence of separate "special" schools and sets out clear and easy to follow requirements for all public schools, installing education support teams, and defining Personalized Learning Plans. From another part of Canada: "All students with disabilities who live in the school district have the opportunity to be totally included in the regular classroom and the extracurricular activities of their school. The only criteria for a student to attend any of our [schools] is they must be breathing." (Ontario school district, quoted in National Center of Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995)

In order to develop an inclusive education system, workforce development is essential. Training needs go beyond teachers in schools and other educational settings. In CSIE's view, there needs to be a long-term, comprehensive, coherent and systematic workforce development plan across education, health and care so that:

- all staff in schools and other educational settings receive the initial training and subsequent professional development needed for: a) establishing a widespread pedagogy for inclusive teaching and b) ensuring that all statutory requirements are met, including all disability duties in the Equality Act 2010;
- specialist expertise and support is available to schools and other educational settings and to children and young people themselves, where and when it is needed;

- the range of specialist services can be fully identified, with an audit carried out of their capacity and availability to support schools, along with plans and funding to meet the shortfall;
- care and health, including social workers, health visitors are trained and engaged in supporting children and young people with labels of SEND and their families.

Inclusive education also depends on an inclusive curriculum and assessment processes. CSIE hopes that the range of activities which have started as separate initiatives, not least the Curriculum & Assessment Review and ongoing Ofsted consultation, will be brought together to feed into a co-ordinated transformation. CSIE hopes, and will propose in its response to the Ofsted consultation, that: a) inspections will include a review of each setting's accessibility plan, and b) that a "fundamental requirement" for inclusion is established through the new inspection framework, to ensure that all schools and other educational settings develop the inclusive cultures, policies and practices needed to offer a good education to children and young people with labels of SEND.

It also seems essential to increase incentives for schools and other educational settings to develop more inclusive cultures, policies and practices. It seems important to recognise that the standards agenda, intensely valuing and rewarding academic achievement, acts as a barrier to the development of inclusive education. We recommend following Professor Mel Ainscow's recommendation to find ways of measuring what we value, rather than valuing what we can easily measure¹.

CSIE supports the development of more inclusive education as a matter of human rights. We believe that one of the main barriers to developing inclusion is that children's rights are understood in vastly different ways and that this remains unexplored and unresolved. If our education system responds to children and young people's needs by offering support or services instead of (rather than in addition to) what is offered to their peers, it is effectively allowing a perceived need for adult specialists to trump young people's need to belong in their local community and to learn and develop alongside their non-disabled peers. That would be like placing a child in hospital without allowing family or friends to visit, on the grounds that the child needs the medical intervention.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has reported² that hundreds of thousands of disabled people regularly experience harassment or abuse, but have come to accept this because of our society's culture of disbelief, or 'collective denial'. In an attempt to break this cycle, the EHRC recommended³ that "Schools and colleges should develop material for helping students understand disabled people and the social model of disability, and the prejudice that disabled people face within society". Embracing the social model of disability and understanding disability as an ordinary part of human diversity are at the heart of developing a more equitable education system, which

¹ Ainscow, M. (2005) Developing inclusive education systems: what are the levers for change? Journal of Educational Change 6: 109-124.

² Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (2011) Hidden in Plain Sight: Inquiry into Disability-related Harassment.

³ Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (2012) Out in the Open: Tackling Disability related Harassment; A Manifesto for Change.

expects educators to have high aspirations for *all* children and young people, and which responds to the needs of *all* learners with equal commitment and effectiveness.

We believe, therefore, that a culture change is needed, to ensure that the social model of disability is more widely understood and respected, and that educators embrace a shared rationale for inclusion. This can be achieved through a nation-wide programme of disability equality training, led by disabled people.

The global call to develop more inclusive education remains strong, for example through the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Sustainable Development Goal #4. The UK has been repeatedly criticised by UN Committees for its slow progress towards developing more inclusive education.

Such a thorough transformation of the education system will need adequate funding. As CSIE recently suggested when invited to submit evidence to the Public Accounts Committee's inquiry into support for children & young people with special educational needs, an entirely different funding model is worth considering. In a system set up to fund individual children's needs, as has recently become only too evident, costs can spiral out of control. Instead of inventing new rules intended to have a cost-cutting effect, CSIE strongly suggests that the entire model of financing inclusive education is thoroughly reviewed. Recent evidence⁴ suggests that: a) changing systems of financing inclusive education is a key lever for achieving more widespread inclusion; and b) countries which implement a financing model based on funding services provided, have greater success compared to countries where funding is based on some aspect of individual need (e.g. types or categories of need). CSIE recommends a thoroughly restructured system, with a financing model focussed on generating services, and which offers sufficient incentives for inclusion and removes barriers to it. Only in this way will it be possible to develop an education system fit for the 21st century, designed for *all* children & young people equally.

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6 February 2025

CSIE is a national charity, established in 1982, working to develop more inclusive education for all, especially those with labels of SEND. In addition to lobbying & campaigning activities, we offer direct support for inclusive school development, training for educators & pupils, consultancy, and a wide range of resources. Among our many achievements is an international award (Innovative Practice Award 2016) for "Equality: Making It Happen - A guide to help schools ensure everyone is safe, included and learning". For more information please see our short film at bit.ly/CSIE-film or visit www.csie.org.uk.

⁴ Cor J. W. Meijer & Amanda Watkins (2019) Financing special needs and inclusive education – from Salamanca to the present, International Journal of Inclusive Education, 23:7-8, 705-721, DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2019.1623330