

Enabling Education: experiences in special and ordinary schools

By Priscilla Alderson and Christopher Goodey, Tufnell Press and Amazon

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NEW FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION, 2018

Enabling Education: experiences in special and ordinary schools is an unusual book in two main ways. It directly reports the detailed views of school students aged 4 to 16 years who have disabilities and other difficulties. And it connects them and their schools into their political contexts. Planning the provision of ordinary or inclusive mainstream schools and segregated or 'special' schools is often seen as a matter for experts in education and psychology, but our research found that the planning is powerfully influenced by local and national politics. The research, reported in *Enabling Education*, was first published in 1998, yet the book is still unusual and still very relevant to today's debates about the education of school students with disabilities and other difficulties.

Our research began by interviewing children and young people with a range of physical and sensory disabilities, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties (including autism), and their parents, about their views and experiences of their local schools. Then, with their permission, we gained access to observe the schools. We interviewed 19 school students in 'East City', and 17 in 'West County', as well as conducting interviews with 81 adults – parents, teachers and authority (LA) staff and members – and holding informal conversations with many more children and adults in the schools. Our interviewees attended 8 ordinary schools in East City and 13 segregated schools and units in West County.

The rest of this Foreword sets *Enabling Education* in its political context and then reviews changes since 1998 to show how the book and the children's views still have relevance in today's concerns and debates.

Recent history

The schools reflected local politics in that East City has very diverse ethnically mixed communities, one remaining special school, and a Labour-run council. Wealthier West County, however, with a Conservative-run council, has more traditionally white British citizens. Families and housing areas are more clearly segregated by class and income than in East City, just as the schools are segregated by ability (grammar schools, secondary moderns/high schools, day and boarding schools for moderate learning difficulties and severe learning difficulties as well other disability categories), and there is segregation by religion and income, with a range of private and public day and boarding schools.

The 1981 Education Act followed the Warnock Report, which regarded 'special educational needs' as a matter for doctors, educational psychologists, and social workers, whose advice made up much of the legal 'statement' of the child's needs

that had to be met.¹ In what was seen at the time as a radically new measure, parents were allowed to make a written ‘contribution’, though this did not actually count in decisions about placement or support. Children were not consulted, although at least the Act now placed their *education* centre-stage. Many had been totally excluded from education in general until the 1971 Education Act declared ‘no child is ineducable’.

Moreover, the 1981 Act was a world-leader in making a presumption in favour of mainstream school – a presumption previously unthinkable and made in hardly any other countries, but taken up since in the 2006 UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. However, the Act remained merely permissive in this respect. On the one hand, it enabled schools and LAs to admit children of the kind previously segregated if they wanted to. On the other hand, it allowed them to cite three reservations or caveats if they refused admission to certain children (and most wanted to refuse). They could say that they were unable reasonably to meet a child’s needs, that inclusion would be an inefficient use of resources, or that inclusion would be incompatible with the efficient education of the other children. Each caveat amounted to an infinite length of elastic.

In more recent years, standard policy has shifted towards segregation or inclusion being mainly a matter of parental choice. This has diminished the legal force of the caveats. However, and more importantly, most parents receive negative messages about the full humanity of their child when they receive a diagnosis, often in the first days, weeks or months. And public opinion is misled by propaganda from hundreds of disability charities, by ‘Children in Need’ and Variety Club Sunshine coaches with their sentimental images of children who appear to need more than ordinary state provision. Consequently, and often with justification, parents are extremely sensitive to any hint of conditionality in a school’s attitude towards their child, and many feel they do not have the determination or time to challenge rejection by an ordinary school, even though an Equality Tribunal would by now usually rule in their favour – if not on ethical grounds then on grounds of upholding parental choice.

The 1981 Act led to the arrival in ordinary schools, especially at primary age, of a small cohort of children with disabilities never encountered there before. But they have remained a minority, and they arrived through random choices made by individual schools or LAs. Within a single LA, one school cannot possibly take a pupil because of her ‘severe’ or ‘profound’ disabilities, whereas the next school down the road not only does take her, but does not see a ‘severe’ or ‘profound’ problem. The difference between the highest and the lowest rates of segregation across LA areas in England and Wales has very much increased in recent years. Consequently, a child with the same level of learning difficulties or ‘emotional and behavioural disorder’ (now referred to as social, emotional and mental health difficulties, SEMH) or

¹ The Warnock Report. (1978) *Special Educational Needs: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People*. London: HMSO.

sensory and sometimes physical impairment, has a ten times higher chance of attending ordinary school in Newham, London than in Torbay, Devon.² On a regional basis Inner London has the highest levels of attainment and of inclusion, while North East England has the lowest attainment and the lowest levels of inclusion; this correlation holds approximately for the regions in between.³ (Regional statistics necessarily fail to take account of local differences; nevertheless, they at least rule out the possibility that inclusion might reduce levels of attainment.) Over the last decade, the proportion of children in segregated education has risen by 31%, by 2017 totaling 118,000.⁴

What has happened since we reported in 1998?

Conditions that promote segregation

In the 1990s, parents still tended to choose their nearest schools. Since then the education market place has developed, so that now parents tend to feel they should choose the 'best' schools for their children, informed by online OFSTED reports and schools' results, and by self-promotion of the profusion of academies, free schools, religious schools, specialist schools and other choices. The system pressures schools to compete to attract the 'best' students and achieve the 'best' results, bolstered by the housing market so that the 'best' housing clusters around the 'best' schools. Politicians promote the market when they: encourage competition as the means of raising standards; sponsor and publish inspections and other measures; reward high achieving schools and punish those deemed to be failing in the race to the top; appeal to wealthier families and voters by aiming to provide excellent school services for them; aim to achieve highly in international league tables by pressuring schools to concentrate on tests and exams.⁵ The inevitable reverse side to this coin of success is that many children fail and many who were initially on roll are excluded if they seem likely to lower their school's success rates, by failing themselves, and by being assumed to jeopardize other students' success if they need extra time and resources.

Segregation can follow initial admission to ordinary schools and can happen at all levels of ability. Some top schools maintain their spectacular records, for example, by excluding from their final year all students who might not get the highest grades in their A-levels.⁶ However, the ones who can be most seriously disadvantaged when they are excluded are children and young people with disabilities and other difficulties. For example, half of excluded school students have mental health

² Department of Education, www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statements-of-sen-and-ehc-plans-england-2017

³ Department of Education, www.gov.uk/government/statistics/gcse-and-equivalent-results-2016-to-2017-provisional

⁴ Department of Education, www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statements-of-sen-and-ehc-plans-england-2017

⁵ D. Scott (2010). *Education, Epistemology and Critical Realism*. London: Routledge.

⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-41132701>, 2/9/2017.

problems and they are likely to end up in prison.^{7,8} Of the present 86,000 people in prison, more than 54,000 were excluded from school. Permanent exclusions in England have risen by 40% in the last three years, and there were 6,685 last year. Yet far more children are removed informally from schools and they do not feature in official statistics; 48,000 children were educated outside mainstream last year in 'alternative provision'. Only 1% of excluded children get the five good GCSEs needed to access post-16 training and apprenticeships. The bland response from the Department for Education to this report on exclusions was that 'any decision to exclude should be lawful, reasonable and fair, and should only be used as a last resort in response to serious breaches of a school's behaviour policy'. Yet the exclusions of so many thousands of students raise questions about how fair and efficient those behaviour policies are. Do they promote everyone's best interests?

Costs

Segregation is not cost-effective. Since the growth of academies and free schools, and of schools managing their own policies and budgets, LAs have far less influence, and they have to accept schools' decisions about exclusions. This can be very costly when no maintained school will admit the child, and only private schools will offer a place. In 2015-16, LAs spent around £20,000 per annum on each student with SEND who attended a state-funded school. Yet a day place at an independent special school costs more than twice as much, an average £52,000 per student, and much more for those who have severe disabilities. There are 1,037 maintained and non-maintained special schools in England, and over 6,000 students aged 4-19 who attend residential special schools.^{9, 10} LA records are not always definite, and estimates for residential private special schools vary up to (at 2012 prices) £230,000 per student per annum, without counting bought-in items such as social care or therapy (clinical psychologists charge an average £135 per hour), and expensive taxi transport costs to schools far from the students' homes.¹¹ On these calculations, a single child's residential schooling could cost over £3 million.¹²

⁷ K. Gill, H. Quilter-Pinner and D. Swift (2017) *Making The Difference: Breaking the link between school exclusion and social exclusion*. London: [Institute for Public Policy Research](#)

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/20/half-pupils-expelled-school-mental-health-issue-study-finds>.

⁹ DfE (2017) *Special Educational Needs in England: January 2017. Statistical First Release*. London, UK: DfE, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2017>

¹⁰ E. Pellicarno, V. Hill, A. Croydon, S. Greathead, L. Kenny, & R. Yates (2015) *My Life at School: Understanding the Experiences of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs in Residential Special Schools*. London, UK: Office of Children's Commissioner.

¹¹ J. Clifford & C. Theobald (2012). *Summary of Findings: Extension of the 2011 Cost Comparison Methodology to a Wider Sample*. York, UK: National Association of Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools. 4.10, 5.12.

¹² <http://www.nasschools.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2014/08/NASS-Cost-Comparison-Report-October-2012.pdf>

Many citizens would probably not be pleased to learn that their council tax is paying for highly priced private SEND schools and colleges, often many miles from the students' homes, when more could be achieved at much lower cost if students could enter local state schools and colleges with proper support. An added irony is that the private education system now supports and profits from public funds for segregated SEND systems, when its main purpose is to ensure and perpetuate the greater form of two-tier social inequality where the privately educated 7% live partly separate lives segregated from the other 93%. Numerous effects of this two-tier social inequality include severely deprived children having a higher risk of developing the 'hyperactivity' and sometimes the 'cognitive impairment' for which they may be excluded from ordinary schools. To confine children with learning difficulties and autism away from their 'normal' peers, depriving them of the full range of friendships, role models and a rich, broad pre-school and school curriculum, does not help them to improve their behaviour or learning, or help their peers to accept them as friends and colleagues, or increase their chances of becoming socially included as young people and as adults. *Enabling Education* shows the very different processes and relationships in ordinary and in segregated schools through the views and experiences of the children and young people.

Admissions policies

Admissions have become a key focus for policy-making, professional development and academic research, now that schools are increasingly able to decide which children they will admit. Despite their lost powers, LAs still hold full legal responsibility for all children with statements and EHC plans (education, health and social care), and for children who are 'looked-after' by social services, or who need safeguarding, whatever school they attend, and their schools 'must co-operate with the local authority'.¹³ Anecdotal evidence suggests that schools often breach the law, by refusing to allow local authority officers to enter the school and carry out these responsibilities. This is part of the general breaking up and part privatizing of public services that were formerly managed by democratically elected and accountable local and national government, with duties to ensure equal access to services.

*Education for the Good Society*¹⁴ by the Compass Education Group usefully focuses on admissions policy at both school and local authority level as the crucial starting-point for combating the fragmentation of the whole system. One of the authors, Ken Spours, writes of the importance of 'educating for togetherness', and asks, 'How can we encourage togetherness in a world of growing institutional diversity? The key may lie in ... a wider sense of responsibility that institutions should cater for all types of learners'.¹⁵ In support of this argument, he says, 'such a belief strengthens the

¹³ Children and Families Act (2014), Code of Practice I.14.

¹⁴ N. Lawson and K. Spours (eds) (2011) *Education for the Good Society: the values and principles of a new comprehensive vision*, London: Compass.

¹⁵ K. Spours, Rethinking the comprehensive ideal – new ways of conducting educational politics, in *ibid.*, pp. 58-61.

resolve to extend education throughout the life course, to link general and vocational education and to have a deep commitment to those with special educational needs’.

‘Educating for togetherness’ questions what an admissions policy to a fully ‘comprehensive’ system might mean. If the aim is a good society rather than a narrowly utilitarian one operating on purely productivist values, then ‘comprehensive’ would mean including all human beings. Various United Nations documents now support a fully inclusive education system, and these require a similar clarification. In a widely discussed initiative, UNESCO has noted the international trend towards de-professionalisation and the transformation of teachers and learners into ‘strictly utilitarian productive units’. UNESCO calls instead for ‘inclusive and holistic’ approaches to teaching.¹⁶

The word ‘inclusion’, in the field of education, was at first a highly specific usage in the mid-1980s. It described ordinary schooling for children who might otherwise have been segregated into separate schools away from their peers. In the UNESCO document, however, ‘inclusion’ describes a strategy for (among other things) recognizing diversity and overcoming social discrimination in general.

This second, broader usage is the offshoot of a general discourse across the political spectrum that began in the late 1990s, as our book was going to press. In the field of education there is a confusion between the two usages. Extending as far as the political right’s Big Society programme and its successors, the second one takes in along the way the Labour Party’s 2017 education manifesto, whose sole mention of ‘special needs’ is that ‘we will deliver a strategy for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) based on inclusivity’.¹⁷ The continuing existence today of a flourishing segregated sector seems an exception which glaringly tests and challenges that broader, more general ‘inclusivity’ rule of current political discourse.

Along with the widening political scope of the word ‘inclusion’, the disability advocacy movement insists that ‘inclusion is about everyone’¹⁸ and not just about disability or those currently segregated. The question is, who is ‘everyone’? The slogan is unhelpful if it detracts attention from the core problem of existing segregation. Discrimination around gender, ethnicity and sexuality are explicitly debated and routinely challenged across the social and political spectrum. But there

¹⁶ UNESCO (2015). *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. See also UNESCO (2005). *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

¹⁷ The Labour Party, ‘Towards a National Education Service’

<http://www.labour.org.uk/index.php/manifesto2017/towards-a-national-education-service>

¹⁸ T. Loreman et al. (2014), Conceptualising and Measuring Inclusive Education, in C. Forlin & T. Loreman (eds) *Measuring Inclusive Education. International Perspectives on Inclusive Education, Volume 3*. Bingley: Emerald, 3-17.

is a clear difference between the incidence of discriminating and excluding behaviours within mainstream schools on the one hand, and the legally sanctioned, publicly accepted complete segregation of children with certain disabilities or difficulties on the other.

What can be done?

We offer several suggestions. The first of these is to create a much stronger legal and political framework for children's human rights, which they largely share with adults. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) does not differentiate: it simply states 'that recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'. However, the 'developmentalist' model, inherent in educational psychology and much of modern educational practice, imposes a linear sense of time that is structured towards a normative goal of adult maturity or normality, historically derived from religious notions of perfection.¹⁹ It thereby defines children – that is, children *in general* – as incomplete human beings, and therefore imperfect, much as disabled people are seen. The conceptual separation of childhood as a whole from much of 'adult' society, especially for ethical purposes in the name of protecting children, is one of the barriers to conceiving of full inclusion.

An example of how this affects practice comes from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), which has quasi-legal status. The UK government has refused to fully endorse Article 24 of the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2007) with its duty to 'ensure an inclusive education system at all levels', and has been criticized heavily for its failure to implement the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.²⁰ The EHRC has pressed the government to have a more radical and urgent approach. At exactly the same time, however, it has insisted that for children 'with very severe learning disabilities [a mainstream school] is neither possible nor appropriate' – a contradiction which challenges the principle of what it is to be human in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and on which the EHRC has refused to retract when challenged by movements of disabled people.²¹ A much stronger legal and political framework for children's human rights would involve rethinking ancient prejudices about childhood as well as about disability.²²

¹⁹ Goodey, C (2011) *A History of Intelligence and 'Intellectual Disability': The Shaping of Psychology in Early Modern Europe*. London: Routledge.

²⁰ Children's Rights Alliance for England publishes annual reports on the Government's poor record, www.crae.org.uk.

²¹ J. Pring (2014). "Inclusion is only right for some disabled children, says Equalities and Human Rights Commission", *Disability News Service* 24 (also at <http://disabilitynewsservice.com/2014/01>).

²² Alderson, P. (2011) *Young Children's Human Rights*. London: Jessica Kingsley Press.

Our second suggestion involves listening to children's voices and acting on what they say. They are heard occasionally in the advocacy literature from organisations such as the Alliance for Inclusive Education, the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, and the Children's Rights Alliance for England. If there is still very little from disabled or excluded children, there is now a small amount of literature in which classmates prove the most capable of providing commonsense answers to so-called 'problems' of inclusion in the classroom.²³ This indicates the importance of including children and young people in policy making at local and national level: that is to say all children, not only those liable to segregation.

The Children and Families Act 2014 replaced the 1981 Act but preserved much of the existing legal framework on inclusion and its caveat-laced permissiveness. The 2014 Act did, however, replace 'statements of need' with 'person-centred plans' across education, health and care. These are written in the first person, with parents as proxies in early years, and they expressly incorporate long-term life aspirations (such as friendships, then later on work and housing) among what were previously only short-term classroom targets. Person-centred plans are derived from the advocacy movement's work to resettle adults emerging from long-stay asylums in the 1980s. They mark for adults the biggest change, at least in a legal and formal sense, since the construction of medical identities in the nineteenth century. However, the plans do not in themselves bring new freedoms for children, since they feature in segregated schools, which do not prepare them for a life among their peers, as well as in ordinary schools. The plans informally depend on the values and attitudes of the adults involved, although the identity of individual children, who they are and who they might become, is now recognized as belonging to each child and is no longer wholly determined by the professions.

Our final suggestion is for political change. There is widespread awareness of the injustices, harms and anomalies of segregation, across governments and administrations, the professions, academic research and the advocacy movement (though less so in the charity sector). The Code of Practice attached to the Children and Families Act (2014) schools is very strongly worded about the responsibilities of mainstream schools. Yet few support the end of segregated schools and colleges, and this avoidance points to something deeper.

Psychologists work as if it is necessary, obvious and 'natural' to label psychological, behavioural and emotional states in the same way that physical or sensory impairments are named, although practical questions about including the two groups are quite different. Psychological descriptions and diagnoses, far from being natural, are the relatively recent products of the medical and psychological disciplines' deep-seated disablist values, influences and phobias.²⁴ 'Fear of the

²³ J. Allan, J. l'Anson, A. Priestley and A. Fisher (2005). *Promising Rights: Introducing Children's Rights in School*. Edinburgh: Save the Children.

²⁴ A broad literature, though rarely touching on children or disability, includes: psychiatry's application of the term 'specific phobia' about social groups as well as

unknown' can increase resistance to inclusion, but detailed analysis of the resistance is rare, and research into its deep psychosocial roots non-existent in the education literature.

This means that gently persuading a few individual educationalists to be more reasonable and correcting a few flaws in the present system will be insufficient. Instead, the whole segregated system, including the disablist phobia on which it rests, have to be rethought and replaced. Psychologists should be treating the phobia not propagating it. And inclusion advocates need to extend their concern for 'diversity' and 'equality' in ordinary schools into concern for all schools, emphasising that expensive segregation:

- deprives segregated students of access to the much-needed contacts, resources, broad opportunities and future prospects that well-run ordinary schools can offer them;
- deprives the majority in ordinary schools, especially the thousands of students with borderline disabilities, difficulties and mental health problems, of much-needed resources and expertise;²⁵
- deprives all students and teachers of the central educational experience (the exact opposite of the disablist phobia that disables all concerned into fear, mistrust and failure)²⁶ of learning to live with all sorts of other people in 'recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family [that] is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'.²⁷

New laws may be helpful, but the problem cannot be solved solely by rational means, or by overcoming pedagogical barriers, or by making the 'reasonable adjustments' required by law. Inclusive education works very effectively, especially

individual objects, in S. Rachman (2004) 'Fear of Contamination', *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 42(11); psychiatrist J. Gabel (1975), *False Consciousness: an essay on reification*, London, Routledge connects schizophrenic thinking to discriminatory socio-political ideologies; social psychologist H. Tajfel (1981), *Human Groups and Social Categories*, Cambridge: CUP sees phobic irrationality as the source of social stereotyping; the anthropologist M. Douglas (1966), *Purity and Danger*, London: Routledge analyses fear of dirt as a core principle of social separation. These are summarized in C. Goodey, *Learning Disability and Inclusion Phobia: Past, Present, Future* (Routledge, 2016), Chapter 2.

²⁵ Alderson, P. (2018) How the rights of all school students and teachers are affected by SEND (special educational needs or disability) services: teaching, psychology, policy, *London Review of Education*.

²⁶ D. Robinson and C. Goodey, 'Agency in the Darkness: 'fear of the unknown', learning disability and teacher education for inclusion', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13603116.2017.1370738>

²⁷ UDHR, 1948; UNCRC, 1989.

when all the children grow up together from their first years onwards.²⁸ One criticism of inclusive education is that it tries to pretend that certain children are normal when they are not. The children and young people we interviewed tended to expand their view of normality; they described themselves as 'normal' saying, 'I just want to get on with my life' and 'be with my friends'.

²⁸ For a study of a fully inclusive school in the words of the pupils and staff see P. Alderson (2013) *Learning and Inclusion: The Cleves School Experience*. London: Routledge Revivals, as well as examples in this book.