

Inclusion: the role of special and mainstream schools

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For children with special educational needs, seeds were sown for the move away from segregated settings to inclusion in mainstream settings following the 1978 Warnock Report. However, the 'special versus mainstream school' debate was re-ignited in 2005 when Warnock recommended a more significant role for special schools than previously envisaged. Furthermore, an increase in special school placement has been reported, prompting this investigation of the role of special schools in the current climate of inclusion. Literature from Britain, Europe and New Zealand, including research that listens to 'the voice of the child', which compares experiences of children with special educational needs in special and mainstream schools, is reviewed. The findings give no clear indication that either setting leads to better outcomes. Tensions between the inclusion agenda and standards agenda are highlighted. It is concluded that special schools in reduced numbers are likely to remain a feature of the inclusive education system, with recommendations for the development of special-mainstream school partnership links. The quality of the setting, regardless of the type of setting, is emphasised, highlighting implications for staff training in special and mainstream schools. Further research comparing outcomes for children educated in different types of provision is recommended.

Key words: inclusion, special school, mainstream school, child's voice

The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) and subsequent 1981 Education Act sought to revolutionise educational provision for 'handicapped' children by introducing the term 'special educational needs' and advocating the integration of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools, as opposed to segregation in

special schools. However, the Department for Education (DfE, 2016) has reported an increase in recent years in special school placement, prompting this investigation of the role of special schools in the current climate of inclusion.

The review begins with a discussion of literature relating to changing policy and practice regarding the role of special schools, from Warnock's (1978) vision of the integration of children with special educational needs to the present day (Male & Rainer, 2007; Norwich & Gray, 2007; Norwich, 2007, 2014; Galton & MacBeath, 2015). Secondly, research highlighting the benefits and challenges faced by special schools is investigated (Hornby & Witte, 2008; Parsons et al., 2009; Parsons, 2015; Day et al., 2012; Reed et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2014; Black, 2014; Cook et al., 2016). Thirdly, research emphasising the value and challenges of inclusion in mainstream settings is reviewed (Frederickson et al., 2007; Lindsay et al., 2016; O'Hagan & Hebron, 2016; Broomhead, 2013, 2014; de Graaf et al., 2013; Waddington & Reed, 2016; de Boer et al., 2013; Glazzard, 2014; Webster & Blatchford, 2015). Research that listens to the voice of 'disabled' and 'non-disabled' children regarding mainstream and special school provision is the final theme (Griffiths, 2007; Prunty et al., 2012; Gasson et al., 2015; Geordiadi et al., 2012; Tuersley-Dixon & Frederickson, 2016; Roberts & Simpson, 2016; Feiler, 2013; Skovlund, 2014). Throughout the review, an international perspective from Europe and New Zealand is also presented, because most developed countries have established policy supporting the inclusion of students with special educational needs within mainstream schools and therefore face comparable issues.

Discussion

Special and mainstream schools: evolving policy and practice

Over the last 37 years, policies about 'integration' and subsequently about 'inclusion' have been the subject of controversy. The Warnock Report (DES, 1978), followed by the 1981 Education Act, aimed to transform special educational provision: categories of handicap were abolished and the concept of special educational needs was introduced and integration (later inclusion) was advocated. In this review, 'inclusion' refers to inclusive education for children with special educational needs, as opposed to the concept of social inclusion of children with a wide variety of differences, difficulties and needs. Throughout the literature review, reference is made to different degrees of inclusion of children with special educational needs: full inclusion in mainstream provision with only temporary withdrawal (CSIE, 1989), and inclusion in classes attached to or within mainstream schools. Regarding the term 'special educational needs', Hornby

(2011) pointed out that this label can be seen as stigmatising, but there is a risk that without the label children will not get the teaching they need.

Warnock (2005a), in a pamphlet entitled *Special Education Needs: a new look*, presented an opinion change relating to her original 1978 recommendation regarding the role of special schools, now advocating that some pupils were better suited to special schools. She questioned the extent to which inclusion for all can be achieved. Kikabhai (2014) points out that although the media reported on Warnock's (2005a) 'u-turn', in fact it was not a u-turn, because Warnock has never been in favour of full integration. In contrast, Kikabhai argued for the 'dismantling of segregated special school provision' in his outline of priorities for the next government.

In 'Special schools or not?' Warnock (2005b) concluded that children with severe learning difficulties are well placed in special schools, and admitted that children suffered in the present system of including children with special educational needs in mainstream, particularly those whose disabilities are not obvious or visible. Clearly, despite the best of intentions, not all policy initiatives are a success. Thomas (2009) suggested this is partly due to children being viewed at best as 'objects of policy' rather than 'political subjects', and at worst 'political footballs'. (Research that listens to the voices of children as 'policy makers' rather than 'objects of policy' will be discussed later in this article.) In Barton's (2005) response to Warnock's (2005a) pamphlet, he complained that the voice of disabled people and their organisations was not considered – at best because Warnock did not feel it was important, and at worst because she was unaware of their views. He argued against Warnock's (2005a) recommendation for a government-funded independent enquiry into the state of special education, suggesting instead that time and money should be spent on ensuring inclusion for all children in mainstream schools.

Contrary to Barton's negative views about special schools, in *Inclusion: does it matter where children are taught?* Ofsted (2006) found little difference in the quality of provision and outcomes for children in mainstream schools and those in special schools. However, they reported that mainstream schools with additionally resourced provision were particularly successful in achieving high academic, social and personal outcomes. The report was critical of mainstream schools in which the main support came from teaching assistants (TAs) rather than specialist teaching. Fewer pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) or those with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and challenging behaviour were placed in mainstream schools than other groups, even when specialist facilities

were available. The research involved 74 schools across 17 local authorities in a range of urban, rural and metropolitan areas. In addition, inspectors' specifically formulated criteria ensure consistent judgement about children's outcomes, giving validity to the conclusion that the most important factor determining the best outcomes for children with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) is not the type but the *quality* of provision.

Moreover, the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee's (2006) report on special educational needs supported the view that full-time mainstream placement for some children is unrealistic. Also, Male and Rainer's (2007) findings, which focus on policy and provision for children with PMLD attending special schools in England, supported the view that progress towards full inclusion will be slow and possibly never achieved. Their research should be considered valid, as the results were based on questionnaires completed by a large sample of headteachers in 321 SLD special schools across England. They also reported a lack of appropriately trained specialist teachers and inadequate provision by an increasing number of TAs.

The mainstream versus special school argument can be presented as a polarised debate. Conversely, Baker (2007) advocated that 'special schools and inclusion should be two sides of the same coin' and that the role of special schools is to provide for pupils with the most severe and complex special educational needs and to support mainstream schools. Similarly, Norwich and Gray (2007) argued that special schools need to be part of an 'inclusive system', working alongside a range of 'flexible interacting continua of provision' and linked more closely to the mainstream sector. Furthermore, Norwich (2007) advocated that in addition to asking where these children should learn, questions should be considered relating to how children with special educational needs can be identified and what the curriculum should be.

The Support and Aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability Green Paper (DfE, 2011) aimed to reverse the bias towards inclusion. The Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE, 2012) in their response to the Green Paper (DfE, 2011), suggested that the Government is out of step with disabled people, their families and education professionals, and concluded that building the capacity of mainstream education is the only way to create aspiration for disabled children and their families. In terms of the validity of their evidence, ALLFIE is a national campaigning and information-sharing network led by disabled people whose slogan is 'Education not segregation', resulting in evidence from a sample with an arguable bias against special schools. It should also be

noted that the evidence is not presented in a peer-reviewed journal. Nevertheless, the statistical evidence and views of the members and stakeholders, including parents of disabled children, disabled people and headteachers, cannot be discounted in the debate.

Contrary to ALLFIE's inclusion ideals, the DfE (2016), citing school census data from 2015–2016, reported an increase to 42.9% in special schools attendance for pupils with a Statement or Education Health Care Plan. Norwich (2014) suggested that special educational needs and disability policy and practice are caught up in political and economic dynamics, and argued that schools are under great pressure to raise standards, which leaves less room for children with special needs. Likewise, Galton and MacBeath (2015) cited the negative impact of inspection, and current approaches of accountability, on inclusion. They believe that inspection should take into account the abilities of schools to innovate in the interests of children with special educational needs. They refer to the 'deception of choice' and suggest that the reason for parents 'choosing' special school settings is recommendations by headteachers who are afraid of the impact of children with special educational needs on Ofsted attainment measures. This study involved interviews with teachers, TAs, SENCOs and headteachers in 12 secondary schools and 10 primary schools in three geographical areas. The presented evidence highlights conflict between putting into practice inclusive education for children with special educational needs and the educational agenda of raising standards and accountability.

To summarise, over the last 37 years, despite an inclusion agenda, special schools have continued to exist, and the number of pupils attending them has increased. Indeed an ongoing continuum of provision is recommended whereby mainstream schools (including resourced provision) and special schools exist collaboratively to meet the requirements of children with special educational needs. The evidence raises the question of whether the reason for the increase is the impact of the education agenda focusing on the assessment of school effectiveness on the basis of pupil achievement, or whether it is due to the superiority of special schools in meeting the requirements of children with special educational needs.

Special schools: advantages and challenges

Hornby and Witte (2008) investigated learners' perspectives on their experience of a residential special school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD). Interviews with 21 graduates aged 10 to 14 years after they left a residential school for children with EBD in New Zealand focused on their experiences at both the residential and mainstream schools. The graduates were positive

about their experience at the special school but consistently negative about their experiences of mainstreaming. Better training for teachers in mainstream schools was recommended. Limitations in terms of the small sample size and the time lag between the recollections and the actual experiences are acknowledged. Nonetheless, the research highlights mainstream teachers' lack of understanding of how to deal with children with EBD.

More recently, Reed et al. (2012) compared the impact of placement in mainstream and special schools on the behavioural and social outcomes of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), concluding that special schools demonstrated superior performance and highlighting a need to re-address special school placement as an alternative to mainstream placement for children with ASD. Ten local authorities spread geographically across the UK ensured a range of socio-economic levels was sampled. Fifty-four five- to 12-year-olds attending mainstream schools and 86 from special schools were assessed using the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire and the Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scale. Similarly, Kelly et al.'s (2014) findings, based on questionnaires completed by 54 headteachers in Ireland, discovered the main reason for the increase in transfer from mainstream to special school of 40% of the 246 pupils older than 12 years over a five-year period: the failure of mainstream schools to meet their academic, social, emotional and behavioural needs and lack of access to health resources. Indeed Hornby (2011) suggested that placement in a special class or special school is more likely to lead to a sense of belonging for children with special educational needs because they are comfortable with peers who have similar disabilities. In the study by Reed et al. (2012), the perspectives came from solely special schools, and the researchers indicated a need to capture the views of mainstream educators regarding their ability to integrate and teach students with special educational needs. The researchers acknowledged that parent, student and teacher interviews would have given a deeper insight into the reasons why students were opting for special school provision.

Day et al. (2012) agreed that the needs of students must ground all decision-making on the future role of special schools. Their evidence, based on two special schools chosen as 'examples of good practice' in England and Ireland, supported the maintenance of special schools as an integral part of the provision for students with special educational needs. The Irish school featured in this study catered for 107 primary and secondary students with moderate and profound general learning disabilities (Mod GLD) and ASD. The English school had 185 secondary students with Mod GLD and ASD and also supported students with learning difficulties in over 30 mainstream schools. The findings, which are

based on student observations and staff interviews plus planning and record-keeping documentation, concluded that both schools catered for their students, firstly by way of organised teaching and learning, and secondly through links formed outside the school environment. Such links were referred to earlier by Norwich (2007), who argued that special schools should only exist when linked to mainstream schools.

Additionally, a survey by Parsons et al. (2009), focusing on the satisfaction of 562 parents with educational provision for their children with special educational needs in Great Britain, found the most satisfied parents were those of children attending special schools; in particular the parents of children with multiple learning difficulties and/or disabilities had the highest levels of satisfaction. They concluded that the success of the special schools tended to be judged on the basis of social and personal aspects of provision rather than academic achievement. They emphasised scepticism about the alternative interpretation that parents of children in special schools have low aspirations for their children and end up settling for less-than-adequate provision. They pointed out that CSIE (2004) cited this in their 'reasons against segregation', but stressed that they interpreted parents valuing social and personal – rather than academic – aspects of provision as reflecting parental focus on the specific needs of their child. Parson's (2015) later online survey of 55 adults on the autism spectrum, most of whom attended mainstream schools, about current life satisfaction and views of their education, recognised that younger respondents were more positive about their support. However, again, the findings suggest that schools need to improve with regard to supporting social difficulties and helping children achieve their academic potential.

Moreover, Black (2014), referring to the results of 102 questionnaires sent in 2010 to stakeholders involved in transfer to secondary school, discovered some common reasons for the over-representation of secondary-aged students in special schools in England: parental concerns; risk of bullying; school factors including size, school ethos and ability to personalise learning; factors within the child including vulnerability; the influence of professional placement recommendations; resources including staff expertise; and late identification and diagnosis. The response rate was only 25%. Nonetheless, it secured views of stakeholders including 40 parents, 28 local authority staff and 29 school staff, and highlighted the organisational factors at school and local authority level that prevented older children from being included in mainstream schools.

In Norway, like in the UK, there has been policy shift from a segregated system, to integration and mainstreaming, and now inclusion is considered the ideal

(Haug, 2014). However, also similar to the UK, there is a gap between ideals and realities. In particular Haug argued that for children with EBD the inclusion ideals have not been met. He cited Winsents (2006), who suggested a conflict of interest between segregated and inclusive provision and not all children are suited to attending mainstream classes. Like Norwich (2007), Haug believes the main challenge is not to give up on one approach in favour of another, but to establish where to draw the boundary between the two extremes.

Recent research in the Netherlands by Stoutjesdijk et al. (2012) compared 235 children with EBD in special schools with 111 children with EBD in regular education in terms of emotional, behavioural, environmental and academic variables. The research concluded that children coping with EBD and academic problems plus disturbances in relationships with their caregivers do not generally thrive in an inclusive setting. They advocated extra training and support in order to improve teachers' ability to deal with children with EBD and recommended involving caregivers in children's education. The researchers acknowledged that their research was based on two distinct types of education: special schools and mainstream provision. They recommended research on a larger range of settings on the special education continuum. They expressed the view that inclusive education cannot be achieved for some children with EBD and suggested that special schools or wholly or partly separated facilities will probably always be needed. Additionally, Cook et al.'s (2016) investigation in England of experiences of friendships, bullying and learning of boys with autism in mainstream and special settings, based on interviews with 11 boys with autism and with nine of their mothers, concluded that special schools facilitate social interactions and cope with bullying more appropriately. They recommended interventions in mainstream to promote a better school culture in which children with autism can flourish.

In summary, there is evidence for the positive impact of special schools. Nevertheless, evidence also shows that even with improved training and resources in mainstream schools there will always be a role for special schools, particularly for children with EBD and PMLD. The findings also indicate a need for further research investigating the effectiveness of special schools.

Mainstream provision: advantages and challenges

Stevens (2005) argued that special schools for disabled people should be closed, and compared the concept to the racist ideas and institutions of the twentieth century. Additionally, contrary to the perspective that special schools are the most appropriate setting for children with PMLD, Simmons and Bayliss (2007) called for an appraisal of the view that special schools provide the best educational

environment for such pupils. Their research, based on observations and interviews in a highly regarded special school in south-west England for children with SLD, concluded that because of a lack of staff knowledge and training it was inappropriate provision. The social limitations of the school were also stressed. The sample size was small, but offers an interactionist perspective, which considers social interaction as central to the development of children. The authors recommended additional research to investigate how children with PMLD can benefit from inclusion and to challenge existing practice in special schools.

This critical attitude towards special schools is shared by Frederickson et al. (2007), who concluded that the negative social and affective outcomes for children, particularly children with ASD, anticipated by Warnock (2005a) do not apply. Theirs was a larger sample: a special school and 14 mainstream schools supporting 14 Key Stage 2 pupils who had moved from special to mainstream provision. Group inclusion, social behaviour, bullying and feelings of belonging at school were measured, and results showed that pupils who had transferred from special to mainstream placements experienced positive outcomes. However, the study warned about complacency regarding bullying and suggested that peer reports of bullying need monitoring.

Furthermore, Mand's (2007) research, based on responses to student questionnaires and teacher questionnaires, concluded that children with behaviour problems are disliked in German special schools and in integrated primary classes to comparable degrees. She pointed out that these findings, based on 144 pupils with an average age of 10 in integrated school classes and 95 pupils in special schools, did not legitimise special school placement. Mand argued instead that children with behavioural problems need help in both systems. Correspondingly, Lindsay et al.'s (2016) large-scale interview study in England of the views of parents of children with language impairment (LI) or ASD highlighted that the quality of provision matters rather than the location per se. However, they concluded that parents whose child was included individually in mainstream were less positive about provision than those parents whose child attended a mainstream school with specialist resourced provision. O'Hagan and Hebron's (2016) smaller-scale exploration of perceptions of friendship among adolescents with autistic spectrum conditions attending resource provision concluded that the specialist resource provision influenced students' development of friendships as well as providing a 'safe haven' when needed.

Broomhead's (2013) research is concerned with the challenges faced with regard to the placement of children with BESD in mainstream schools. She interviewed

10 parents and 15 educational practitioners in BESD special schools and mainstream schools in England. Several parents and staff members in the special schools viewed children with BESD as ‘unwanted’ in mainstream provision. The remaining parents and practitioners reported the opposite, expressing the view that these pupils received ‘preferential treatment’ in mainstream. To address this perception, Broomhead recommended that staff have high expectations of pupils with BESD in terms of social behaviours. She referred to challenges faced by mainstream schools: lack of time to explore underlying causes of behaviour; league table pressure regarding academic achievement; ensuring the learning of other learners is not affected; and lack of training available.

Staff expertise is indeed crucial to the success of inclusion. Webster and Blatchford (2015) extended the literature on deficiencies in teachers’ and TAs’ special educational needs expertise in mainstream schools. The Making a Statement study tracked 48 Year 5 pupils with Statements for either moderate learning difficulties or BESD, because these categories were likely to detect school support factors connected to problems with learning and classroom engagement. The 45 school visits across six English local authorities were carried out in 2011–2012. This sample size and the use of triangulation – that is, interviews with SENCOs, teachers, TAs and parents/carers – plus field note data contribute to the validity of the following conclusions: Statemented children experience segregation in the classroom; TAs assume much responsibility for planning and teaching of children with Statements, which impacts negatively on learning experience; and there are gaps in teachers’ and TAs’ knowledge regarding how to meet the needs of pupils with Statements in mainstream schools.

According to de Graaf et al. (2013), in the Netherlands, in comparison to the UK, the amount of assistance for integrated children is low. They looked at questionnaires completed by 67 parents of regularly placed and 54 parents of specially placed children with Down’s syndrome. They cited UK studies (Buckley et al., 2006; Turner et al., 2008) to support their finding that children with Down’s syndrome learn more academic skills in regular education than in segregated provision. The researchers argued that the sample of parents was fairly representative, but acknowledged the possible element of subjectivity of the data from parents about child development. They recommended that special schools for children with Down’s syndrome should devote more time to academic learning. Conversely, Waddington and Reed’s (2016) comparison of the effects of mainstream and special school on National Curriculum outcomes in learners with ASD in four local authorities in England concluded that mainstream learners have no greater academic success than learners in special schools. Similar to Webster and

Blatchford (2015), they reported that access to TAs correlated negatively with academic outcomes for those children in mainstream provision. De Boer et al.'s (2013) Norwegian study also referred to a negative impact of TAs: reducing the possibility of contact between the student with special educational needs and his/her peers and thus reducing the potential for inclusion. They acknowledged the complexity of understanding the social participation of students with disabilities in mainstream education. They recommended in-class strategies to change peer attitudes, and support teams in schools to alleviate the social issues, particularly for girls with disabilities.

For the child, attendance in mainstream provision can eliminate the stigma associated with special schools. However, teachers in special schools can also experience stigma. Broomhead (2014) explored the stigma attached to the educational practitioner employed in BESD schools using interviews with six headteachers and three class teachers in BESD schools. She concluded that practitioners in BESD schools may not be perceived as 'proper' teachers due to the discourse of care surrounding them. Broomhead justified her small sample by arguing that the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach gained an in-depth understanding of how the practitioners made sense of their experiences. Furthermore, to avoid bias, she did not use the leading term 'stigma' in her interview questions. She believes that mainstream practitioners need exposure to the academic expertise of BESD teachers in order to dispel their perception that they merely support socio-emotional needs, when in fact they also support academic education.

Notably Glazzard (2014) considered that while resourced provision for children with communication and interaction difficulties in a mainstream primary school had a beneficial effect on the development of inclusive values, it led to a drop in the overall effectiveness of the school as judged by the children's achievement data. He argued that special schools are evaluated differently, and questioned why schools with resourced provision should be penalised for promoting inclusion. He also warned that while resourced provision can advance inclusion, we should be aware that it can promote insidious forms of exclusion. The research is based around an account from one school SENCo. However, Glazzard also cited literature (Lloyd, 2008) to support the validity of his conclusion that one reason for mainstream schools losing pupils to special schools is the impact of the accountability agenda and the focus on academic outcomes.

To summarise, evidence points to a negative impact of special schools in terms of stigma faced by pupils, parents and teachers. However, there are challenges

that need to be overcome in order for full inclusion to work: sufficient resources; trained teachers and TAs; anti-bullying strategies; and parental involvement. Schools with resourced provision need the freedom to present their performance data in different ways, because under the current system their effectiveness is being questioned. Also emphasised is the need for additional research that challenges existing practice in special schools. Mencap (2016a) argued that only when mainstream schools provide high quality education for all children will the demand for segregated settings decrease. The issue of reducing bullying of learners with special educational needs is not just a challenge for educationalists. Media campaigns such as Mencap's (2016b) 'Here I am' videos are crucial to inducing an inclusive societal attitude towards people with learning disabilities.

The role of special and mainstream schools: the voice of the child

If educational policy is going to be inclusive, the views of children, the key stakeholders, must be considered. The idea that children have rights to express their views regarding their education has become an integral part of UK special educational needs policy (Code of Practice; DfES, 2001), underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989). However, Kellet (2009) argued that some voices are harder to hear. Similarly, Harding (2009) referred to the lack of children's voices in much of the current literature. That said, what follows in this section is a review of recent research that does listen to the child.

Prunty et al. (2012) reported on the views of 38 children in Ireland with mild and moderate learning disabilities and children with physical disabilities. The six focus group and four individual interviews led to the conclusion that in special schools and special classes there is more favourable support for social issues and learning than in mainstream classes. The study also identified a need for professional development for teachers in inclusive education. In particular, support for learning was given as a reason for preference for special schools. A minority of pupils reported accounts of bullying in mainstream schools, prior to attending special school. This study demonstrates the ability of students with special educational needs to provide insights that are crucial to decision-making regarding their educational provision. Gasson et al. (2015) used poetic transcription methodology to capture the perspectives of four learners with EBD on transition from a dis-established residential school to mainstream schools. The data, including interviews with their caregivers and headteachers, led to the conclusion that more needs to be done to make schools fully inclusive of learners with severe and complex behaviours. It is also suggested that time spent with teacher aides in mainstream provision can isolate students from their peers.

In addition to listening to children with disabilities in order to gain insights that can influence special education policy-making, it is important to listen to the views of ‘non-disabled’ children. In a study by Griffiths (2007), a teacher-researcher, the views of children from both mainstream and special school provision regarding their preconceptions about themselves, each other and the educational setting were gathered in ‘circle time’-style interviews. The children in special schools reported feelings of exclusion, and fear of the mainstream setting and pupils. However, the mainstream children were generally positive about inclusive practices. Bullying and self-esteem issues were identified as the greatest potential barriers to inclusion. Griffiths acknowledged the small sample size, consisting of eight children from a mainstream school and eight from a special school for children with GLD. That said, Griffiths’s reference to self-deprecating and overly cautious comments made by the special school students, and the positive attitudes towards inclusion of the mainstream pupils, warrants attention concerning the potential value of inclusion for both ‘disabled’ and ‘non-disabled’ children.

The views of *all* children regarding inclusion are vitally important, because one of the major benefits of inclusion is the creation of an equal society free from discrimination, which benefits the ‘non-disabled’ child and society as a whole. Georgiadi et al. (2012) investigated typically developing children’s attitudes towards children with intellectual disabilities, with reference to the type of school they attended. A total of 256 Greek children (135 in inclusive settings) aged nine to 10 completed a questionnaire and adjective list and drew and commented on their drawing of a child with intellectual disabilities. Drawings are an appropriate way of obtaining data from participants who lack verbal skills. The results showed that children from inclusive settings had more positive attitudes towards their peers with learning disabilities. The authors concluded that inclusive practice should be promoted to foster acceptance of children with learning disabilities. According to Tiersley-Dixon and Frederickson’s (2016) assessment of social inclusion among 528 typical classmates of 20 children with complex needs (CN) attending mainstream settings in England, increased visibility of the disability is associated with greater acceptance by peers. Roberts and Simpson (2016), referring to peers’ difficulties in understanding students with autism, wondered whether these difficulties would be less pronounced if autism was a more visible disability. Clearly children with CN with less visible disabilities may require greater social inclusion support.

In Denmark, Skovlund (2014) used role-play interviews with eight children aged seven to 11, with a diagnosis of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), autism or non-verbal learning disorder, to gain an insight into their views

regarding their diagnosis and behaviour. These interviews involved dolls representing a teacher, peers, a psychologist and a doctor. In addition to perceiving the school as an educational institution, the children also saw it as a medical institution. He concluded that the children view themselves as different from normal children and incapable of being involved in shared learning in state schools. He argued that we risk teaching children in special schools that they are only capable of functioning in special needs areas and not in common learning communities. Instead of special schools and mainstream schools being counter-defined, he advocated their integration into one unified educational concept. Again there are similarities between the findings of this small-scale research and Norwich and Gray's (2007) concept of 'flexible interacting continua of provision' discussed earlier.

Also mentioned earlier was Norwich's (2007) reference to the importance of the special education curriculum. Feiler (2013) used interviews to investigate the opinions of 14- to 19-year-olds attending three special schools and a secure unit, on the curriculum and teaching and learning in England. The students had speech and language difficulties, hearing impairment, ASD, physical disabilities or learning disabilities. The findings revealed that the students valued academic and vocational achievement, and regarded examinations, good grades and qualifications as important. Also of importance is friendship with peers within the schools, possibly attributable to the fact that journeys to school can lead to exclusion from neighbourhood peer groups. The students valued small class sizes and help given by teachers. Significantly they were positive about their visits to other schools because they felt it prepared them for leaving school. Again the importance of links with mainstream settings was highlighted (Norwich & Gray, 2007). Feiler (2013) expressed the view that just because students have learning difficulties should not mean they are overlooked in debates about qualification development.

In summary, the research reveals some reoccurring themes. Children feel they receive specialist help in special school; on the other hand they also feel 'different'. It is apparent that inclusion fosters acceptance by 'non-disabled' children. Overall, there are implications for the continued existence of special schools with links with mainstream schools and the wider community. There is a need for further research that listens to the perspectives of learners as key stakeholders in special education.

Conclusion

This literature review has identified that although inclusion is desirable in principle, it is challenging in practice. Additionally, defining the role of special and

mainstream schools is problematic due to polarised opinions about the existence of special schools. Furthermore, despite a Government commitment to inclusion, there has been a continued increase in special school placement (DfE, 2016). Research that validates an ongoing role for special schools emphasises the superiority of special schools in meeting the needs of children with special educational needs, and particularly children with PMLD and EBD, in terms of staff expertise, and the ability to give a child a sense of belonging and protection from bullying (Hornby & Witte, 2008; Haug, 2014; Stoutjesdijk et al., 2012; Cook et al., 2016). An alternative explanation for the rise in special school provision is the impact of the current educational agenda of assessing school effectiveness by pupil achievement (Norwich, 2014; Glazzard, 2014; Galton & MacBeath, 2015). Despite the fact that some organisations, including CSIE and ALLFIE, favour the abolition of special schools, there is a scarcity of recent evidence that challenges existing practices in special schools. Nevertheless, evidence commending inclusion for children with special educational needs emphasises the negative impact of special schools on children in terms of the stigma faced by pupils, parents and teachers (Simmons & Bayliss, 2007; Frederickson et al., 2007; Georgiadi et al., 2012; de Graaf et al., 2013). However, research highlights deficiencies in mainstream provision relating to resources, teacher and TA expertise, bullying and peer acceptance, the latter particularly for girls (Waddington & Reed, 2016; de Boer et al., 2013). Also impacting on the success of inclusion is the visibility and severity of the disability (Tuersley-Dixon & Frederickson, 2016). There is evidence that resourced provision in mainstream education has a positive impact on students' emotional and social needs (O'Hagan & Hebron, 2016) and that such provision is preferable to individual in-class support (Lindsay et al., 2015). Indeed the literature review findings show that there are claims of improved educational outcomes being made by both special and mainstream schools, resulting in the lack of a definitive answer to the question of which type of setting is best for children with special educational needs.

Overall, current research, including research that listens to learners' perspectives, leads to the conclusion that there is an ongoing role for special schools in special education in the form of a continuum of provision whereby mainstream provision (including schools with resource provision) and special schools work collaboratively to meet the needs of children with special educational needs (Norwich, 2007, 2014; Feiler, 2013; Skovlund, 2014; Gasson et al., 2015). The 'mainstream versus special school' debate will continue to rage. In the meantime, to ensure the needs of children with special educational needs are met in the current climate of inclusion, this literature review proposes the following recommendations for special and mainstream school policy and practice:

- development of special–mainstream school partnership with strengthened links and expertise sharing;
 - special education curriculum and pedagogy training for teachers and TAs in both special and mainstream schools;
 - extension of the measures of school effectiveness to reflect aspects other than academic outcomes;
 - accessing and taking into account the perspectives of all learners, using appropriate methodologies;
 - research into outcomes for children educated in different types of provision;
 - research into how societal attitudes towards people with disability and initiatives aimed at promoting positive attitudes can impact on inclusion.
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