

What really is Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion?

(United Nations, 2016) explain that several attributes such as age, sex, disability, religion, race, ethnicity, or economic status can put an individual at risk of becoming socially excluded. It highlights that with these attributes people are met with barriers as well as discriminatory attitudes and behaviours from others. (United Nations, 2016) describe social inclusion as being a process that strives to tear down such barriers and behaviours allowing for equal opportunities for all in areas such as education and health care. (United Nations, 2016) stress the difficulties in categorising those at risk of social exclusion due to the many domains of life that one may be excluded from such as social, economic, political and civic. For this reason, social exclusion is defined as being multidimensional as well as context-dependant. (United Nations, 2016) explain that this means a full assessment of social exclusion globally would not only need to consider peoples income, employment, land ownership, education and healthcare but also their perceptions and judgements which is dependent on their country and culture. (The Welsh Affairs Committee, 2001) also express the concept that social exclusion has no clear test as to whether an individual is at risk rather, they explain it to be subjective and often unrecognised by those experiencing social exclusion. While social exclusion is clearly a difficult umbrella to list individuals under (*The Equality Act*, 2010) developed a number of protected characteristics that ensured those with such characteristics do not experience discrimination in both opportunities and the attitudes of others. The protected characteristics issued in (*The Equality Act*, 2010) are age; disability, gender reassignment; marriage or civil partnerships; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation. The presence of these characteristics should allow individuals to be socially included in all of life's domains, but is that truly the case? In today's society many claim to be caring and kind individuals with open minds and a willingness to accept everyone. While this may be the case, we must focus on how larger organisations and their systems ensure that no one faces any barriers to being completely socially included.

Disability: a protected characteristic

Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010 (gov.uk, n.d) define a disability to be an impairment, either physically or mentally that has a substantial and long-term effect on your ability to complete normal day to day activities such as getting dressed. Adding to this definition (Office for Disability Issues, 2011) list several impairments in which disability can stem from such as auto-immune conditions, developmental conditions, sensory challenges, mental health conditions and learning disabilities along with many others. While (*The Equality Act*, 2010) may cover a range of disabilities and be in place to ensure the social inclusion of those who fall into its classification we can see that this has not yet been wholly successful. Rahul Verma (2018) shares some worrying statistics such as out of 2000 working age disabled people 41% do not feel valued while just 42% of the same cohort felt that the United Kingdom is a good place for them to live. (Department for Work & Pensions, 2021) found that in the year 2019-2020 22% of all people in the United Kingdom classed themselves as having a disability with 8% of children identifying as disabled. Also found was that Wales had the largest number of disabled individuals with 27% of the population being disabled while Scotland followed with 25%, both higher than the national average. (Department for Work & Pensions, 2021) also found that while in working adults, impairments such as mobility and mental health had the highest rates, in children the highest rates were seen in social/behavioural impairments as well as learning difficulties. In Wales, Children receiving care and support by local authority and disability (Welsh Government, 2021) share that in the year 2020, 3,600 disabled children were receiving support from their Local Authority. This number may seem low to some, and that is where we may find shortcomings in the system. How common is learning disability?

(Mencap, n.d) inform us that in Wales alone, 16,000 of 0–17-year-olds have a learning disability. If not supported by their Local Authority, what barriers are these children meeting not only socially but also within their education? By comparing these sets of statistics, we can see that not all children with learning disabilities are supported. We must question what affect this has on them both as young people and when they become of working age and older. Do the difficulties they faced during their childhood continue without the correct support and does that create further barriers within their perception of their own social status leading to the being socially excluded adults?

Difficulties, Disabilities and Disorders

Learning disabilities (National Health Service, 2018) describe a learning disability to be something that affects someones ability to learn new things throughout the course of their life as well as something that can be mild, moderate or severe. While outlining information on the severity of learning disabilities, learning disabilities (National Health Service, 2018) make a key point that progression to independent living for those with learning disabilities depends greatly on not only the individual's abilities but also the level of care and support they receive. Learning disability is an umbrella term for many other disabilities and disorders often named Specific Learning Difficulties or SpLD's all of which can be recognised at different ages and within different developmental domains. Learning Disabilities and Disorders (HelpGuide, 2020) list many names for various learning difficulties such as dyslexia which produces reading difficulties; dyscalculia which presents in difficulty in math; dyspraxia which is a difficulty with motor skills as well as dysgraphia which presents writing difficulties. Learning Disabilities (HelpGuide, 2020) also explain how Individuals with other disorders such as Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder often possess further learning disabilities leading to the individual being up against multiple barriers throughout their lifespan.

Autism Spectrum Disorder and Education

Possibly the most known non-physical disability, Autism Spectrum Disorder creates a number of barriers to education and creates a number of difficulties for educators. It also has a very troubled past including the institutionalisation of children who did not fit into the current state education (Evans, 2014, pp.253-285). For many decades, children who have what is now known as Autism Spectrum Disorder would be deemed as uneducable and defective, therefore meaning they were put into homes for what was known at the time as psychotic children. Prior to the Education Act of 1970, very few autistic children were educated by state-state-funded schools. Post Education Act of 1970, special schools and classes saw an increase in the number of children with autism. There has been progress for many years in the education of autistic children with today's system striving to give them an inclusive education within a range of settings including special schools, units and mainstream schooling. Despite best efforts from all involved, children who fall on the Autism Spectrum Disorder still face several barriers to their education due to their protected characteristic of disability. Prevalence of autism up in schools across the UK (National Council on Severe Autism, 2020) shared that in the year 2018-2019 all UK countries saw an increase of school aged children with Autism Spectrum Disorder with Wales having a rate of 1.92% and England a rate of 2.25%. While these numbers may seem reassuringly low to some, we must consider alongside them the success in the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Autism Spectrum disorder can be recognised early on in childhood sin some cases, while some children are not diagnosed until their adolescents or even their adult years. Autism Spectrum Disorder' Screening & Diagnosis (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Autism Spectrum Disorder presents

itself in many different characteristics and no child with a diagnosis is the same. The education of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder has greatly improved over the years, however, it is arguably due to the spectrum aspect of the disability that many schools still struggle to provide an inclusive education to the diagnosed children. The concept of inclusive education is something even some seasoned educators may struggle to define. Inclusive education (unicef, n.d) define inclusive education to be where every child is educated in the same school and the same class. In practical terms, this ideology would mean that both neurotypical children, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and many other physical and mental disabilities would be educated together at the same time. However, this may not be the best method entirely. Many children with Autism Spectrum Disorder present the symptom of difficulties in socialising and sensory challenges. A mainstream class, full of confident, loud and energetic teenagers could create levels of anxiety for the autistic pupil that in fact hinder their access to education rather than enhance it. The ideology of the previous definition of inclusive education should not be seen as what should be done for autistic children but maybe what should be an end goal for them instead. This can be seen in (Schuelka, 2018) where successful inclusion is shown to be something that values a pupil's wellbeing, however it is also stated that inclusive education means that disabled students should spend the majority of their learning time in a mainstream classroom. It is in the fine details such as these that an individual's access to education must be just that, an individual approach. Education Choices Wales (National Autistic Society, 2020) list the five options for education of autistic children in Wales as mainstream schools, units in mainstream schools, special schools, residential schools and independent schools all while stressing that each autistic child will have different needs therefore require a different schooling structure. However, once a child has found their most suited school, there is still little assurance that they will not face barriers to education. If we are to look at the middle ground which is the units or bases for Autism Spectrum Disorder within a mainstream school, we can still see social elements effecting a pupil's ability to access education. For many autistic children, their disability also gives them mental health issues such as anxiety as well as great difficulty in social situations. Those autistic children who fit into the units within a mainstream school are often very aware of their condition as well as being very self-conscious of it which can lead to them finding mainstream lessons difficult to attend. Although the teachers of the unit and its support staff may have successfully transitioned autistic pupils into mainstream lessons, this does not always mean a child has full and comfortable access to that specific class. A current practice that is being seen more and more in mainstream classrooms is the No Hands Up classroom culture as part of formative assessment. The classroom experiment lollipop sticks (Nielson, 2011) show Dylan Williams encouraging a group of teachers to no longer tell pupils to raise their hand to answer a question but instead pick the pupils names at random from a pot of lollipop sticks and engage the pupils in a way where the same pupils do not always answer. While this method of current practice is great in engaging most pupils and assessing their knowledge on a subject, for a pupil with Autism Spectrum Disorder, this could be their worst nightmare. It is due to situations like this that an inclusive education cannot be achieved simply by ensuring everyone's timetables look the same but by ensuring each member of staff is aware of the unique strengths, weaknesses, triggers and likes of every pupil not just those with a disability or Additional Learning Need.

Additional Learning Needs and the role of the ALNCo

In Wales, the individual needs of pupils not only with Autistic Spectrum Disorder but also any other disability or learning difficulty are being brought into tight focus through the new Additional Learning Needs system. (Welsh Government, 2018) plan to improve their

support for learners aged 0-25 in overcoming barriers to learning and putting in place appropriate interventions for learners with Additional Learning Needs. An increase in the participation of those children and young people with Additional Learning Needs will ensure that each individual has their views considered as well as the views of their parents/carers (Welsh Government, 2018). It is this implementation by the Welsh Government that shows a clear recognition of the individuality of those with Additional Learning Needs and their own wants and needs from an education. By allowing a pupil to be part of the planning process that involves them we can ensure that while their education may not be inclusive by the definition of it, it can in fact be the education they want, and feel is correct for them. Along with the transition to a new system in Wales, the job role of Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator has now become a compulsory position that each school has had to fill with the correct person for the job. It is each school's ALNCo who will be responsible for reviewing a child's progress, monitoring and recording any decisions made about a child, securing appropriate services for the child's support as well as advising teachers about differentiated teaching methods which are fitting for each individual (Education Wales, 2021). The role of an ALNCo is not an easy one, it includes having to find a middle ground in some cases that allows for a pupil to feel safe and comfortable while often having to encourage them out of their comfort zone in order to reach the goal of a fully inclusive education for each child. Although a difficult task, these things can be achieved with the correct interventions, planning and support. Mainstream lessons can be a huge success for a pupil providing there is effective communication between staff members that ensure that pupil is known, understood and catered for. Within a unit or base in a mainstream school, a common practice is to simply make baby steps. All young people struggle with transition, whether that be from primary to secondary or from the unit at lunch time to a mainstream class after the bell. It is the careful strategic planning over a number of years that can allow children with all disabilities to gain the confidence and ability to learn alongside their peers. While an inclusive and mainstream education is what is seen as the goal, we must be very careful not to think of any other education settings as being inadequate.

Awareness, Understanding and Adaptation

While we know we cannot group our disabled learners and crash their barriers to learning all at once we can see how progress can be made through understanding and planning. When thinking of the other protected characteristics that can impact a pupil's access to education, it could be a great step in the right direction if these children were also understood and planned for. An example could be a pupil of Muslim religion who requires time to pray throughout the school day in order to participate fully in their religion. With a staff force aware of this and a staff force that understand this, as with disability, adaptations can be made to ensure this pupil does not miss out on their education due to their religious commitments. Similarly, a pupil who is undergoing gender reassignment may be struggling with their attendance due to bullying from peers. Again, with staff members aware of this from an early stage, could the bullying be stopped? Or could the pupil in question be offered a safe space away from the torment of peers? A crucial step that must also be taken by educators is just that, education. Pupils are affected not only by their situation but also by the perception of their peers and the school community. It is the responsibility of educators to ensure that we do not disadvantage pupils' access to education ourselves while also striving to educate others that social inclusion is a right not a privilege. Our younger generations are far more inclusive than our old, while social exclusion may exist there is hope for a socially inclusive future one day.

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