

## **What are the Key Social Elements that Affect a Pupil's Ability to Access Education?**

There are many different social elements that can cause a number of pupils to be limited within their education. These social elements can cause a process called social exclusion. As stated by Crous and Bradshaw (2017) (P.G 129) social exclusion can be described as a pupil having a lack of resources, not having the ability to participate in learning activities and not having a good quality of life. There is an array of factors that can result in social exclusion and these will be explained in depth within this piece of writing. Social exclusion has been proven to cause a drop in attainment levels as stated by Raabe (2019). Social exclusion can cause pupils to lose interest and their engagement levels will drop significantly. These two factors will cause attainment levels to drop alone. This will cause problems in their later years as they may not be able to reach their goals with the grades they get from their school life. Owen (2018). A report by the Social Exclusion Unit (2001) explains that social exclusion should be tackled extensively to lower the rate of people who are affected by it. The report elaborates on the fact that the matter should be tackled by recommending methods to deal with it. The first method is to reintegrate children back into the education they have missed to compensate for the crucial education they have missed. The report also states that everyone should have the basic standards. For example, a good level of education and health. By using these methods, the Social Exclusion Unit believe that the levels of social exclusion would drop meaning in higher attainment levels in the long run. There are many different characteristics that portray social exclusion. Some examples of these are poor mental/physical health, lack of confidence with a low self-esteem. All of these characteristics can be emphasised by social exclusion.

The first social element that can affect a pupil's ability to access education is a physical or a learning disability. These types of disabilities can cause a pupil to be defined as having an ALN. Section 20 of the Children and Families act 2014 as cited by Child Law advice (2018) states that a pupil can be classed as having an ALN if they have a disability that limits them from using facilities within schools or have a greater challenge learning than everyone the same age. The pupils with ALN's may be treated differently because of their disability. This can cause social exclusion as described earlier on. There are many examples of ALN's both physical and mental. For example, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and OCD. Some physical

examples are Epilepsy and Cerebral Palsy. Children with these sorts of disabilities may need extra help completing certain tasks such as reading, writing and understanding information. The disabilities listed above can cause problems in some children being able to access many different types of physical education. This could lead to the pupils not having the best physical health in the long run. As stated by the TDA (2009) teachers should aim to reduce the barriers caused by certain ALN's to ensure that all pupils can access physical education to an effective standard. Teachers should aim to find 'Parallel' activities so children with ALN's can work towards the same objective in a different way. When teachers execute these methods correctly, they can aid a child's access to education even if they have social elements against them. TDA cite the QCA, National Curriculum (2008) and they state that 'Schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils' This means that all schools should provide everyone the opportunity to access education to their full potential. In the event of a class having a pupil with an ALN, LSA's are put in place to help the children grasp their education easier. A report by the Dauncy (2016) writing for the welsh assembly states that in Wales, there are currently 105,000 pupils across the countries that learn with a recognised ALN. The Welsh assembly also stated that £362 million was budgeted by all local authorities to help aid the specific students across the country. The money could have been used to create specialised learning units for children or to even train staff around the country so they can help pupils with disabilities access education to their full potential, helping them in the long run. Disabilities can cause many problems for certain children to learn to their full potential. The first example is children with hearing difficulties. Many children across the UK will have to use hearing aids to help them grasp what their teachers are teaching. Many places in the UK have special plans to help children with these issues. Durham County Council (2014) have cited their plan to support children with impaired hearing. They state that schools should 'Provide an inclusive curriculum, for example making special arrangements for trips, after school clubs, assemblies and sports days' This statement emphasises that a hearing difficulty can cause many children to not be able to access their education to a full extent without extra help. The extra help provided will develop a child's self-esteem meaning that confidence will go up in the long run meaning for better attainment and better access to education. Durham County Council (2014) also state that quality first teaching is expected of all teachers. This type of teaching ensures

that all pupils have equal learning opportunities whatever their individual needs. They also state that all staff should have a good understanding of the 2010 Equalities Act. As stated by the government (2013) the equality act of 2010 protects everyone legally from discrimination in the workplace and wider society. Teachers having an understanding of this act will help decrease the level of discrimination in schools as it is present within groups of children with ALN's. Staff with experience in this field will have mostly had experience in seeing the discrimination within these groups of children. The Equality Act of 2010 also states that it is unlawful for any member of staff in a school or private setting to discriminate between pupils because of a disability, race, gender, religion or belief as cited by the CSIE (2018). Any discrimination within pupils will cause a drop-in attainment and engagement levels. Especially within pupils with a disability. This is due to discrimination making children with ALN'S to feel inferior to other pupils. The equality act aims to stop this indefinitely, meaning that every child has full access to their education.

As well as physical elements that could limit a child's access to education, there are also many social elements that will cause this. A main social issue that can cause this is poverty. Poverty is spread across all parts of the UK meaning it is a nationwide issue. According to the National Education union (2020) in 2016/2017 4.1 million children were living in poverty across the UK. The report also states that the number of children in poverty is rising every year. The number stated was after an increase of 100,000 children from the year before. A child is classed as being in poverty when the child's family is earning under the average amount needed to live. Poverty can cause a number of problems for a child throughout their school years. Education reporter, Burns writing for the BBC (2019) states that 'poverty is harming children's capacity to learn and it's getting worse' This is due to the children having physical problems due to the level of poverty. The article cites the NEU and states that pupils who come from a poverty-stricken home may go to school tired and hungry meaning that they will struggle to learn in the long run. These issues may stop children accessing their education fully as they will not be as engaged meaning a decrease in attainment levels. Many schools across the UK have introduced breakfast clubs to make sure children do not go hungry throughout the day. This will try and counter act the physical effects of poverty within schools. The Welsh government are very committed to eradicate child poverty and aim to stop the link

between disadvantaged children and their underachievement. As stated by Estyn (2012), schools have a big roll to ensure that children living in poverty are focused on and given extra support to help their learning. The information document supplied by Estyn (2012) (P.G 1) states that children in poverty are likely to have lower aspirations and a less developed skill set. These characteristics will mean that they are more likely to be low paid workers or even unemployed in their later life. All of these findings show that pupils in poverty will mostly not access their education due to their problems at their homes. Estyn (2012) also state that schools should have strategies to help the achievement of the individuals in poverty. For example, the report states that schools should ensure that all parents are engaged in the child's learning as well. Teacher to parent conversations should take place to ensure that the child can access their education to their full potential. This will also give teachers more of an idea of what the child is going through in their homes, this means that the parents can receive extra support to aid their problems. Child poverty shows that underachievement can stem from children lacking their basic needs within their own home. When children cannot obtain their basic needs such as food, warmth and rest they will not be able to work at their full ability meaning that they cannot be fully motivated to succeed. There is a theory that follows this idea, and that is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. As stated by McLeod (2020), Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a pyramid of needs that shows that humans must have their basic needs to be motivated and fully engaged with learning. The pyramid is split into 3 sections. These are basic, psychological and self-fulfilment needs. The bottom of the pyramid shows the basic and psychological needs. Maslow's theory states that humans need to have their basic needs to reach their self-fulfilment needs. This theory links to poverty in great depth as studies show that children in poverty cannot obtain their basic needs leading to struggles psychologically. As well as children not having the basic needs to learn, children in poverty may also experience bullying and social exclusion. As stated by Horgan (2007) (P.G 2-3), children who are in poverty are more likely to social exclude themselves due to feeling inferior to more advantaged children in their school. Children are mostly aware about the effects of poverty on them and they often compare themselves to other children surrounding them. The research conducted by Horgan (2007) also states that children are aware they are in poverty because they are not able to attend the same trips and experiences as more advantage's pupils. Uniform is also a tell-tale sign to children as they are often

worried that they do not have the 'right' uniform. Horgan (2007). Children of all ages will feel their social exclusion in situations when they are excluded from certain activities due to their family's financial situation. In many education practitioners' minds, parenting has a direct link to children's aspirations in later life. For example, if a child's parents are receiving benefits, they will be more likely to follow their social norms. As Katz et al (2007) (P.G 12) states 'deprivation can cause major changes in the ways parents nurture their children' For example, if a child is brought up in an environment where their parents do not work or show effort then it is more likely that the child will follow their parents in doing the same. This will cause children to lack enthusiasm towards their education meaning lower attainment over time. Schools need to ensure that children try to break family traditions if they are in poverty. Practitioners need to make sure that no child is discriminated against so that they can access their education fully.

The third and final element in this essay is also a social element. Gender is often explored as an issue for some pupils not being able to access their education to a full extent. In recent times, there has been a lot of research into the 'gender gap' in education and how boys underperform compared to girls. According to a research document from Dera (2009) on gender issues in school, educational strategies have been taking place to try and close the gender gap and raise the achievement levels of boys across the UK. The research states that practitioners believe that many boys underperform due to their attitude and motivation towards their education. If a pupil's attitude is against their education, then their attention will not be fully engaged meaning for lower attainment. If a pupil is showing no effort, then more than often a school will punish the pupil in question. By doing this they may be removed from their education, meaning less access to it. According to Broecke and Hamed (2008) (P.G 5) since O-levels were changed to GCSEs the post-16 participation rates has shown a greater gap between male and female than ever before. The statistics show that 82% of girls stay in full time education post-18 whereas boys are at 72%. The stats show that girls are also more likely to be entered for A levels than boys. This statistic shows that the lack of boys going into higher education is increasing over time. This in turn, could lead to boys having a lack of confidence before even trying to achieve grades in their a-levels. Over time, this would stop many boys accessing higher education which will stop them from reaching their aspirations or even lower their aspirations. Gender is also a current issue within the primary sector of

education. This issue is not within the pupils, it is a problem with staffing. According to Gov.UK (2020), in '2018 three-quarters of school teachers were women' And within all ethnic groups in education there was always more male teachers. This is a problem for male students as they do not have a role model to look up to and talk to. The lack of male teachers could make some males lack confidence to talk to teachers in depth whereas females mostly have the comfort of this. In my personal experience of volunteering, I have noticed the gender difference within staff in primary schools as I was the only male working in the school. Staff within the school informed me that the children thought it was beneficial having a male role model in school. As stated by the NAHT (2020) a child's most important years are their younger ones within the primary setting and they should always have a role model to look up to in their education setting. A male role model in schools is vital as all children should have a role model to look up to and be inspired by. More male teachers would help more children in schools have confidence and an amplified access to their education. Gender reassignment is a current issue within education. Some children may experience discrimination for gender reassignment in schools. This could lead to social exclusion from activities meaning less access to their education. The Neu (2019) state that no child who is transgender should have to be asked to be included. Schools should take measures and all these children into account. They also state that schools should not create stereotypes about gender to ensure that all children have an open view around it.

The Welsh Government have adopted a plan to stop children facing problems accessing their education. This plan is called 'The Seven Core Aims' These aims try to ensure that all children have an equal journey through their education (Welsh Government 2015). The government have taken the UNCRC's rights into consideration to ensure that the aims follow the rights of the child. Core aim 2 of the 7 is made to ensure that all children are provided an education and equal learning opportunities for all (P.G 18) This aim elaborates on the fact that children have the right to be educated. The aim also states that education should 'develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to their best' (Welsh Government 2015) (P.G 82) This aim is to aid children make the best of their life and have high aspiration in their later life. Core aim 7 links directly to poverty to make sure that all children have an adequate standard of living. All of these aims will ensure children have the right access to education.

In conclusion, many children face issues that may stop limit them from accessing their education fully but there are ways to try and reduce the levels of this. The Welsh Government especially are trying to flatten the levels of poverty in schools and also make sure all children are education equally. There are many other examples of this. For example, race, religion, social class. But this essay goes into detail on three issues. Schools should do their best to ensure that all pupils can learn equally and access their education to their full potential.

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