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Removing barriers to achievement: A strategy for inclusion or exclusion?

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Taking as its starting point a critique of policy for inclusion which I published 6 years ago after the publication of the Green Paper *Excellence for All Children; Meeting Special Educational Needs* (DfEE, 1997), the present paper presents a critical analysis of subsequent policy relating to the inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the mainstream of education which claims to secure for them a genuinely equitable educational experience. The results of this analysis suggest that far from ensuring full participation as a right, the policy for inclusion can be seen to have done little to increase genuine access to the mainstream for these pupils and may well have even increased exclusionary practices therein. The paper focuses particularly on the potential of current government strategy, presented in *Removing Barriers to Achievement. The Government's Strategy for SEN* (2004), to drive forward and realize the inclusion agenda. This examination reveals that, as in previous policy, there is a failure to recognize the complex and controversial nature of inclusion; no attempt is made to address the exclusiveness of the curriculum, assessment procedures, and practices of mainstream provision and that the strategy is founded on notions of normalization, compensation and deficit approaches to SEN. The paper argues that there is a need to recognize that as long as policy is founded on the idea that inclusion into the mainstream of schooling, as it is currently conceived, and achievement measured against a set of norm related standards is the route to *good* education children with SEN will continue to be disadvantaged and to receive an inferior educational opportunity

Is current strategy for inclusion working?

Six years ago, in response to the government Green Paper *Excellence for All Children; Meeting Special Educational Needs* (DfEE, 1997), I wrote a critique of education policy for inclusion in the UK (Lloyd, 2000). This critique centred around the failure of policy and legislation concerning inclusion to challenge assumptions and misunderstandings, to define and clarify the underlying conceptual issues, and to address adequately issues of social injustice and equity in the education system, and indeed society itself.

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Since the publication of the Green Paper, there have been a considerable number of policy initiatives relating to the education of pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN), all of which build upon the idea enshrined therein that: ‘There are strong educational, as well as social and moral grounds for educating children with special educational needs with their peers and which aim to increase the level and quality of inclusion within mainstream schools ...’ (DfEE, 1997, p. 43).

The Special Needs and Discrimination Act (2001) and the Disability Discrimination Act (2001) further reinforce the agenda for inclusion within the mainstream of education as does the *Revised Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs* (DfES, 2002). In 2001, the DfES provided statutory guidance for Local Education Authorities, often referred to as the Framework for Inclusion, which states:

Inclusion is a process by which schools, local education authorities and others develop cultures, policies and practices to include pupils. With the right training, strategies and support nearly all children with special educational needs can be successfully included in mainstream education.

(DfES, 2001, p. 2)

While these policy initiatives all make reference to the need to recognize that the education of some pupils may need to take place in part, or in very exceptional cases wholly, outside the mainstream there is a clear imperative that for the majority, inclusion into the mainstream of schooling is the aim and intended outcome.

This concentration on policy relating to the inclusion of pupils with SEN into the mainstream of schooling has also been reflected in many other countries in Europe and further afield, and there is no doubt that it remains an issue of hot debate and concern to many. Significantly, however, many questions have been raised, and continue to be raised, about the efficacy and effectiveness of this policy, about just how far it is actually resulting in more inclusive approaches to education and whether it contributes to the needs of all children being safeguarded and adequately identified, addressed and met (Audit Commission, 2002).

In the UK, the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED), having examined the impact of the Framework for Inclusion on practice (OfSTED, 2004), found that while it had contributed to raising awareness about the benefits of inclusion and to some improvement in practice, it had made little difference to the numbers of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools or to the range of needs being met. Only a minority of mainstream schools were meeting the SEN of all pupils well and that:

taking steps to enable pupils with SEN to participate fully in the life of the school and achieve their potential remains a significant challenge for many schools.

(OfSTED, 2004, p. 5)

OfSTED also found that schools were failing, in general, to evaluate systematically the provision they made for pupils with SEN and that teaching was of variable quality. Partnership and collaboration between special and mainstream schools were found to be the exception rather than the rule and, perhaps the most worrying finding, in more than

half the schools visited there were no disability access plans and that where these did exist they focused in the main on accommodation. The conclusion of the report states:

While most pupils with SEN are educated in mainstream schools progress towards inclusion in mainstream schools has slowed. ... Some pupils with SEN continue to face barriers to participation and achievement. ... Expectations of the success that pupils with SEN can have remains at the heart of the matter. Many of these could do better provided that the curriculum, learning and other support were better adapted to their needs and greater rigour was applied to setting and pursuing targets for achievement.

(OfSTED, 2004, pp. 23–24)

These are worrying findings indeed and reflect the doubts that many have expressed, for some time, about the policy for inclusion and its relationship with provision in mainstream schools (Fulcher, 1999; Armstrong, Armstrong & Barton, 2000; Dyson, 2001; Benjamin, 2002). As Warnock recently put it:

we need to ask whether children who have special needs, that is children who for various reasons have difficulties in learning at school, do in fact participate more in the enterprise of education if they are taught in mainstream schools

(Warnock, 2005, p. 40)

Reflecting on developments in the area over the last 37 years or so, in what she calls a 'new look' at SEN, Warnock offers a view of inclusion as 'a common enterprise of learning rather than being necessarily under the same roof' (2005, p. 39) and goes on to argue that:

the idea of inclusion should be rethought insofar at least as it applies to education at school. If it is too much to hope that it will be demoted from its present position at the top of the list of educational values, then at least let it be redefined so that it allows children to pursue the common goals of education in the environment within which they can best be taught and learn.

(Warnock, 2005, p. 54)

It seems timely, then, to revisit and once again interrogate the concept of inclusion in recent and current government policy and strategy to see if the criticisms above and those which I levelled at the Green Paper in 2000 still hold true today or whether the current agenda for inclusion has changed or developed.

Framework for the critique

Skrtic (1991, 1995) discusses the importance of critically analysing and reflecting on the concepts that underpin policy in SEN in order to reveal their problematic and controversial nature, which in his view is often ignored by policy-makers and unchallenged by practitioners:

As a method I use it as a way to look behind special education and to question and thus bring a sense of crisis to the unquestioned assumptions that ground the professional practices and discourses of the field of special education

(Skrtic, 1991, p. 29)

For Skrtic it is these assumptions and the failure to challenge them that prevent genuine change and development and enable the dominant deficit discourses associated with SEN to prevail. Skrtic proposes that education professionals should engage with a process of critical pragmatism as a way of illuminating and evaluating their practice:

Applied to the professions critical pragmatism is both a way of continually evaluating and reappraising what a profession does (critical practice) and a way of continually evaluating and reappraising how it carries out such critical appraisals of its practice (critical discourse) ... it does not seek objective knowledge or monological truth. ... It is a pedagogical process of remaking ourselves as we think, act, write, read and talk more about ourselves and our practices and discourses.

(Skrtic, 1991, p. 29)

Fulcher (1999) also highlights the need to interrogate and understand concepts that underpin education and to critique and theorize education policy in order to understand the effects on its implementation in practice and to narrow the gap between rhetoric and reality. She points to the complexity of the relationship between policy and practice:

Policy is made at all levels; no one level determines another, though it may establish conditions for other levels. One reason government-level policies may fail, then, is that their social theory of how that bit of the world works — the bit they hope to influence is wrong.

(Fulcher, 1999, p.15)

The aim and purpose of this critique is to participate in and engage with the process of developing critical practice and critical discourse by interrogating and questioning recent government policy for inclusion with a view to identifying its potential to successfully impact on practice in the area of SEN. The intention is also to illuminate and provide deeper understanding about the problematic and complex and often misunderstood nature of concepts such as inclusion and exclusion, participation, success and achievement, which underpin this policy. The critique will also address the potential of policy founded on concepts about which there is no clear consensus or shared understanding to improve, the experience and educational opportunities available to those pupils identified as having SEN. It is not the purpose of this paper to provide a critique of current practice or of research into practice but rather the intention is to attempt to add greater clarity and understanding about what policy for inclusion really means and its implications for practice in order that practice and research in the area can be better informed.

Recent and current government policy for inclusion

The latest government publication to address the issue of inclusion and provision in mainstream schools for pupils with SEN, *Removing Barriers to Achievement. The Government's Strategy for SEN* (DfES, 2004), claims to set out:

the Government's vision for the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities. It provides clear national leadership supported by an ambitious programme of

sustained action and review, nationally and locally, over a number of years, in four key areas.

(DfES, 2004, Introduction)

The four key areas addressed are as follows:

- Early Intervention: ensuring that children with difficulties and their parents have access to suitable help and childcare.
- Removing Barriers to Learning: by embedding inclusive practice in all schools and early years settings.
- Raising Expectations and Achievement: developing teaching skills and strategies and focusing on progress children make.
- Delivering Improvements in Partnership: a hands-on approach to improvement.

This agenda seems at face value to offer nothing but positive possibilities for children with SEN and their parents. It begins with the affirmation that: 'All children have the right to a good education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential' (DfES, 2004, Introduction). This is indeed a statement with which it is difficult to find fault. However, it then goes on to provide a strategy for action that is riddled with assumptions and inconsistencies and which fails once again, as did the Green Paper *Excellence for All Children*, to define adequately, or recognize the problematic nature, of the central concepts to which it refers such as inclusion itself, equal educational opportunity, a 'good' education, and achievement. The barriers to achievement themselves are not explicitly identified in the document instead a number of continuing challenges, highlighted by the Audit Commission's *Special Educational Needs: A Mainstream Issue* (2002), are used as the starting point for the strategy and action plan. These challenges centre around the failure of mainstream schools and their staff to adequately meet the needs of many children; the uncertain role of special schools and the variation in support available for families, from schools, local authorities and health services. The strategy presented to address and meet these challenge aims:

[to] personalise learning for all children with SEN, to make education more innovative and responsive to the diverse needs of individual children, so reducing our reliance on separate SEN structures and raising the achievement of the many children — nearly one in six — who are considered to have SEN.

(DfES, 2004, Introduction)

The document makes clear that inclusion and the embedding of inclusive practice by teachers who are skilled and have the expertise necessary to identify, address and meet children's diverse needs are central to the achievement of the aims and intended outcomes of the strategy. Running through and underpinning the whole strategy is the notion that inclusion itself has the potential to address issues of disadvantage and to remove barriers created by social deprivation thus implicitly inclusion is conceived as social inclusion. This approach reaffirms that proposed in the Green Paper *Excellence for All Children* where the impetus to increase inclusion within mainstream schools is linked closely with the idea that the majority of children with SEN will make

an economic contribution to society as adults and that their education alongside their peers will ensure that this contribution is better valued and *of* better value. Dyson (2001) identifies this approach to inclusion as a growing trend in government policy manifesting itself in initiatives such as Excellence in Cities and Education Action Zones, which although they apparently embrace the inclusion agenda in terms of SEN, go beyond way it, and in some cases sit uncomfortably with it as they seem to be concerned more with remedial, compensatory approaches geared towards creating a cohesive society, than with inclusion as an entitlement to full participation and equal educational opportunity:

In crude terms, whilst the *inclusion* agenda focuses on presence and participation, *social* inclusion focuses more on educational outcomes and, particularly, on the re-engagement of marginalised groups with learning, whether or not that engagement takes place in the context of the 'common' classroom, school and the curriculum.

(Dyson, 2001, p. 27)

Inclusion/social inclusion and equal educational opportunity

The social inclusion agenda is, then, concerned with ensuring access to the mainstream of activity in society and with preventing alienation and dissatisfaction. It is also concerned with compensating for social disadvantage and deprivation and is linked to ideas of accessibility and widening participation and can be seen as a move towards Rawls's (1972) social/democratic definition of social justice. Referring to the speeches of David Blunkett, when Minister for Education, Dyson (2001) points out that:

What is significant. ... Is the way that the notion of inclusion slips from a classic concern with access for 'SEN pupils' to a new discourse. ... What a more extended reading of Blunkett's speeches reveals, in fact, is that *social* inclusion is concerned with far more than where children with special educational needs receive their education. Rather *social* inclusion ... is about building a cohesive society, by ensuring that no social groups become alienated from the mainstream. This in turn means equipping potentially marginalised groups to become active citizens and crucially, with the skills they will need to survive in an increasingly competitive and skills-hungry job market.

(Dyson, 2001, p.27)

Dyson criticizes this approach as narrow and instrumentalist, particularly because it is inevitably linked closely to the wider standards agenda with its focus on outcomes and acquiring a common set of basic skills which are geared towards the labour market. He suggests that this demonstrates an ambiguous commitment to genuine educational inclusion for all children since it is possible for schools to achieve success and high 'standards' and the engagement of their disaffected pupils through what can be seen as a range of exclusionary measures which may well militate against full participation and engagement. This theme is taken up by Benjamin (2002), who points to the contradictions inherent in policy for inclusion which proposes that children with SEN should participate fully with their peers in all aspects of school life when schools themselves are dominated by the need to compete against each other in

the league tables and by the continuous drive towards improvement against national standards. Full participation for children with SEN means that they are inevitably set against their peers in a competitive race where they are doomed to fail. Benjamin presents an interesting thesis that schools deal with the presence of children with SEN by legitimizing failure within a model of continuous improvement and by adopting a 'can-do culture' (Benjamin, 2002, p. 138) where the position is taken that success is attainable for all. Children with SEN are grouped in such a way that where they are unable to attain the national assessment standards they are provided with learning support and individual education plans (IEPs) through which personal targets are set so that they can be seen to progress and achieve. While this can be seen in many ways to be a positive approach, having a great deal to recommend it in terms of developing learners' self confidence, it is nevertheless a deficit model in terms of their real life opportunities, since only those groups identified as having SEN are dealt with in this way and of course the reality is that in terms of national standards and the world outside the school they are still failures. Thus, exclusionary practices are legitimized within a policy for inclusion preventing the dominant discourse and approaches from being challenged:

For students who are not going to succeed in dominant terms, the standards agenda is instrumental in *constructing* barriers to their participation. Here lies one of the most fundamental contradictions at the heart of New Labour's education policy. The kind of full inclusion policy apparently promoted in *Excellence for All Children* implies a set of values about intrinsic human worth which has effectively been overruled by the competitiveness of the standards agenda.

(Benjamin, 2002, p.56)

There is no doubt that recent policy for children with SEN (DfES, 2004) is underpinned by the assumption that achievement is all about meeting national standards and targets and that the chief vehicle for ensuring that all children are able to do this is inclusion in the mainstream of education. This raises what can be seen as perhaps the central issue of contention in policy concerning inclusion, the move from assertions that the route to an equal educational opportunity for children with SEN is the removal of barriers to participation (DfEE, 1997) to the more recent idea that the 'right to a good education' (DfES, 2004) will be assured by removing barriers to achievement. While these do not seem, at face value, to be mutually exclusive ideas and can be, and indeed are, presented as complementary strands of the drive towards more inclusive education, the discussion above highlights the problematic nature of both when applied to the current context of mainstream schooling.

Barriers to participation and achievement

In order to interrogate these tensions further it is useful to look at the concepts of participation and achievement themselves and to determine how they are understood within discussions about inclusion and inclusive practice in current policy. Young (1990) points out that full and equitable participation for all requires a fundamental

shift in the ways in which public institutions, which can be seen to include schools, operate:

Groups with different circumstances or forms of life should be able to participate together in public institutions without shedding their distinct identities or suffering disadvantage because of them. The goal is not to give special compensation to the deviant until they achieve equality but rather to denormalize the way institutions formulate their rules by revealing the plural circumstances and needs that exist, or ought to exist within them.

(Young, 1990, p. 140)

Current policy for inclusion continues, however, to be founded on the notion that participation and access to an excellent educational opportunity for those groups identified as having SEN, and indeed many other groups, *the deviant*, is to be achieved through exactly the sort of compensatory normalization approaches mentioned by Young above. The barriers to participation are chiefly seen as these groups' lack of skill or ability to meet a set of norm related standards, or indeed to conform to certain predetermined norms of behaviour. The strategy for the removal of these barriers is concerned with providing early intervention and extra support; individualized learning; extra training for teachers to provide them with additional or specialist skills and strategies and in some cases extra resources (DfES, 2004). While these measures may be seen to be laudable, in terms of developing *good* practice, they are, however, all concerned with compensatory and deficit approaches geared towards the normalization and indeed standardization, of groups and individuals rather than contributing to the *denormalization* of the institutions, systems and rules which comprise education and schooling.

Those identified as having SEN are only one of a number of groups which can be seen to be educationally disadvantaged and in many cases disaffected by the current system of schooling. Indeed the group identified as having SEN is not itself an homogenous group with a common identity. Full participation for all requires acknowledgement of these differences, respect for personal identity and an understanding that compensatory approaches aimed at providing access for all to the *same* educational opportunity by enabling individuals to fit into the *same* rule and norm governed school system are unlikely to contribute towards genuine inclusion. Indeed it is possible to see such measures as reinforcing the notions of deviance because of their failure to recognize the plurality of circumstances and needs highlighted by Young above. Nowhere in the strategy is there any attempt to address the inaccessibility of the schooling system itself with its rigid norm and standard related measures of success and achievement which, as discussed above, can be seen to be the greatest barriers of all to full participation for all children.

The view of individual educational achievement as success measured against a set of predetermined, norm related standards has become a given in education policy since the late 1980s and is linked closely to the notions of effective and successful schools. Schools where pupils are successful in meeting the standards achieve high standing in the league tables and therefore high status. This view of achievement for schools and pupils inevitably, however, creates many tensions for the project of inclusion:

The standards agenda operates as if standards are absolute, and the legitimizing narrative operates as if those absolute standards can be made accessible to everyone. The ultimate aim of the successful continuously improving, school is to produce entire cohorts of students who attain the national average standard or better. Such an aim is cruel, as well as being manifestly nonsensical, since an average standard, by its nature, requires half the population to fall below it.

(Benjamin, 2002, p. 47)

For children who are unable to achieve the standards and who fall below the average standard in spite of all their efforts and those of their teachers, who are constantly pressurized to become more effective at supporting them in the drive to reach the average or above, the whole experience is inevitably demoralizing. A system where achievement and success are measured in this way is also, by its very nature, going to be hostile to the notion of full participation for those who are identified as requiring the dedication of extra precious resources in order to support them in their struggle to attain standards which in the end they are unlikely to be able to reach, especially when elements of competition are also added in the form of league tables for schools. Benjamin argues that:

the normative, competitive and unsustainable standards agenda is itself central in the production of some very intransigent 'barriers to learning and participation' ... the standards agenda positions students to whom normative versions of success are not accessible as marginal, thus producing the conditions of exclusion within a system that claims to be moving towards inclusion.

(Benjamin, 2002, p. 136)

For these marginalized groups the barriers to achievement, measured as success against the standards, are insurmountable and compensatory measures of support, such as individualized learning, extra resources and specialized teaching skills, can only lead to the reinforcement of their failure. Achievement conceived in this way can be seen to create the greatest barrier to success. To remove the barrier it is necessary to reconceptualize achievement in such a way that it is attainable and accessible to all. If the aim is to ensure that all children can genuinely participate and achieve in a really inclusive educational experience, and not just observe from the margins, it is necessary to develop a new and very different set of rules and measures of success.

Far from *removing* barriers to participation and achievement, then, the current Government policy, with its continuing preoccupation with national targets and standards can be seen to be maintaining them or indeed even contributing to erecting them while the strategy for SEN proposed in *Removing Barriers to Achievement* simply ignores this fact.

The strategy also lays emphasis on the importance of the context in which children with SEN are expected to participate:

Inclusion is about much more than the type of school that children attend: it is about the quality of their experience, how they are helped to learn; achieve and participate fully in the life of the school. But we know that the reality does not always match this. Schools and

early years settings still vary enormously in their experience in working with children with SEN, and in the specialist expertise and resources available to them.

(DfES, 2004, p. 25)

Specialist support and resources and advice provided through a range of partnership and multi-professional collaboration are seen as vitally important means to ensuring that inclusion in the mainstream of schooling is the route to success and achievement for children with SEN. Without doubt properly resourced, multi-professional, collaborative approaches to supporting children identified as having SEN can be seen to be essential to the project of inclusion. However the notion that they are sufficient to ensure that these children will be able to participate fully and achieve successfully in the competitive, rule governed, exclusive mainstream of schooling demonstrates a lack of genuine understanding of the complexity of concepts such as participation, success and achievement.

Perhaps a useful and very simple metaphor which may assist with illustrating what barriers to participation exist in mainstream schooling is that of a game with a set of fairly complex rules which has been played for some time. There is a group of players which is very successful at playing the game, achieves high scores and continuously wins in competitions. Over the years the successful players from this group have dominated the game and been responsible for developing it, teaching it and have also become responsible for making policy relating to it. Various groups of watchers, who have until now been excluded from the game on the grounds that they don't know or understand the rules or that they do not in some way meet the criteria for entry, now want to join the game and it has been agreed that they should be allowed to do so. Of course, in order to move from the position of excluded watchers these groups have to learn the rules and to be coached, and in the initial stages of play, possibly to be supported, with allowances made for ineptitude. Almost inevitably there are some, who in spite of all this coaching and extra support, are not able to catch up with the nuances of the game and very few, if any, are able to play at the standard attained by the group which has played and had ownership of the game over a long period of time. Full and equal participation in the game for the excluded groups is therefore impossible. All players are dissatisfied, the original group because the game has been diluted and altered, scores lowered and competitions lost and of course because the game no longer fully belongs to its members. The other groups also have problems because their members are unable to feel any ownership for the game or to experience any real success. It is only possible for these groups to play the game on the terms of the original group and by conforming to the original rules. For some this is simply not possible and for others it is possible to conform but they are not prepared to do so. For full participation to take place in a game for all these groups it is necessary to join together and to create a new game, agreed by all, in which all can have a role, feel ownership and therefore participate equally. This of course is a difficult project since power struggles will inevitably arise between the groups but if the outcome can be visualized as an exciting, innovative new game perhaps it can be achieved.

Although this is an extremely simplistic way of looking at the issue of participation it is useful in that it highlights at least some of the barriers to participation experienced by children identified as having SEN in mainstream settings and indeed by many other groups and individuals. The imbalance of power between groups; dominant norm and rule governed concepts of success and achievement and behaviour, which are inevitably unattainable for all; compensatory deficit models of support; competition; tensions and struggles arising from attempts to challenge and change the status quo, are all barriers which exist in the mainstream of education and militate against participation. Success and achievement for players in the original game, just as in current schooling, depend on the ability to learn, know, behave and play effectively within a set of long established rules or norms, to gain high scores and to compete well in competition and league tables. The removal of barriers to participation and the inclusion of all children, as a right, in the mainstream of schooling can be seen then to require, like the game, a redefinition of these dominant rules and norms and a total reconstruction of what is meant by success and achievement if there is to be genuine full participation by all.

Specialist provision and the mainstream of schooling

Ideas about making mainstream schools more special in order to support the inclusion agenda go back a long way (Dessent, 1987) and can be seen to have influenced the development of special units and resource centres attached to, and located within mainstream provision. In some countries, for example the Netherlands, mainstream schools have been grouped together with special schools in collaborative clusters which work together to share their resources and expertise in an attempt to address the demands of education policy for inclusion. *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES, 2004) sets out an agenda for special and mainstream schools, their staff and pupils to work closely together through; staff movement; pupil movement; federation clustering and twinning arrangements and partnerships. There is also a great deal of emphasis on the need to develop regional planning and collaboration within local communities with health and social services and voluntary organizations in order capitalize on resources and expertise and to support school improvement and to develop more inclusive practice. In addition a set of standards for SEN support and advisory services will be devised and will be monitored by OfSTED in order to 'achieve greater consistency in quality, availability and cost effectiveness' (OfSTED, 2004, p. 27).

Warnock (2005), concerned about the lack of expertise and resources in mainstream schools and the often inadequate and inappropriate support provided for children with SEN, has proposed what she sees as a more radical solution where children's needs cannot be met by the normal resources available in the school. She proposes the development of small high profile 'specialist' schools which she sees as providing a real opportunity for inclusion:

One possibility would be the setting up of special (or 'specialist') schools based on a new concept of inclusion. Instead of the simplistic ideal of including all children 'under the

same roof, we should consider the ideal of including all children in the common enterprise of learning, wherever they can learn best.

(Warnock, 2005, p. 14)

In Warnock's vision Statements of SEN would be the vehicle providing access to such schools and indeed no child with a statement would be educated within the mainstream. The only children with SEN in mainstream schools should be those whose needs can be met within the normal resources of the school. The statement would come to be seen by parents, in Warnock's view, as an entry pass and would be regarded as a privilege for the child.

These small schools, with small classes and specially trained teachers, and a reduced curriculum, would provide a haven for children who are not able to cope with the hustle and bustle of a large mainstream school. Warnock's argument is based on the idea that for some school is not a microcosm of society and children are not adults and that 'even if inclusion is an ideal for society, it may not always be an ideal for school' (Warnock, 2005, p. 43). She believes that an equal opportunity for children with SEN is not necessarily best secured by those children having the same educational provision as their peers and that only in the sort of schools she suggests above can some of these pupils really feel included.

It is difficult to see the difference between what Warnock is proposing here and a return to the segregated special school system. Her arguments seem, indeed, to echo the arguments which have been made for its continuance, very often by professionals with vested interests who work within that system, since the early eighties when integration first became government policy in the UK. This perpetuation of the idea that there is a need for special schools with special teachers who have special skills and expertise and are therefore specially equipped to teach 'special' children a reduced curriculum has been greatly criticized by those who believe that children with SEN have a right to full participation and access to equitable educational opportunity (Oliver, 1992; Barton, 1995). These criticisms centre around the notion that this so called special expertise is a myth perpetuated by those with vested interest in the continuance of the segregation of children with SEN in order to preserve and safeguard their own positions and professional status. Their *raison d'être* no longer exists in a system where all children are included as a right and have their educational need addressed and met. There is recognition by these critics of the value and importance of experience but they believe that it should be used so that all teachers and educational professionals can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to identify, address and meet the needs of the whole range of ability if such an inclusive system is to develop. The notion of a reduced curriculum as a means of providing equal opportunities and life chances for children with SEN is also a concern, given the current examination system and the very powerful standards agenda which are so tightly linked to the mainstream curriculum. As discussed earlier the idea that success and achievement should be measured for some against a reduced curriculum and personal targets can clearly be seen as a deficit model in terms of national standards (Benjamin, 2002).

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of Warnock's proposal is that although at face value it appears to be inspired by the best of intentions and a desire to ensure that vulnerable children are protected and have their needs adequately met, it fails to recognize that the segregation of these children can only serve to legitimize those exclusionary practices of the mainstream which, as discussed above, can be seen to militate against full participation and access. The status quo in the mainstream of education remains unchallenged by this proposal and the potential of education as an agent for transformation and change in society rather than as a vehicle for the transmission of its dominant norms and values is ignored.

Removing Barriers to Achievement presents a rather different strategy for capitalizing on the experience of special schools and proposes a new role for them. Special schools should not feel threatened by inclusion as they are seen by the strategy as having a role to play in its development:

We believe that special schools have an important role to play within the overall spectrum of provision for children with SEN — educating some directly and sharing their expertise with the mainstream schools to support greater inclusion.

(DfES, 2004, p. 34)

The divide between special and mainstream schools should be broken down and greater staff and pupils' movement between them encouraged. Collaboration and partnership should be developed in the interests of school improvement. The number of children being educated in special schools should fall but some special provision will still continue to exist for those with very severe or complex needs. Collaborative communities led by the local authority with special and mainstream schools, health and social services and specialist support services and, of course, parents, working in partnership and developing networks is proposed as the way to ensure that inclusive practice is developed and the needs of children are met. This can certainly be seen as the way in which the resources available to support children with SEN and their parents could be most efficiently and effectively used and the development of collaboration and partnership in this project can be seen as eminently desirable. The strategy, however, fails to recognize that the development of effective partnerships between such an array of groups, some of which can be seen to have competing agendas and indeed very different interests to pursue, is not without problems. Perhaps more worrying, however, is the failure to really challenge whether the existence of all these different agencies is actually necessary, or indeed desirable, if the outcome of the collaboration is to be genuinely inclusive education with full participation for all. The idea, for example, of the development of genuinely collaborative partnerships between segregated special provision and the mainstream in the development of an inclusive system has been tried and tested many times in many countries and has been riddled with problems. In the Netherlands for example, where this is currently a major part of the policy to move towards inclusion it has resulted in a greater number of referrals to certain types of segregated special provision and a reinforcement of reliance on *special expertise* (Limpens *et al.*, 2003). The whole strategy is geared towards the idea that there is a group of children, identified as having SEN, who require extra

services, support and resources in order to cope with and be included in the mainstream of education and that these resources should be directed as efficiently as possible towards those children to facilitate this process. Once again then, in spite of its claims to be a strategy for more inclusion, it can be seen as a strategy aimed at compensating for SEN, normalizing children and supporting them in their attempts to jump over the barriers rather than at dismantling and removing the barriers in order to provide full participation.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to re-examine the policy for inclusion for children with SEN to see if 6 years on from a critique which I wrote of the Green Paper *Excellence for All Children* there has been any attempt to address the central issues raised at that time. In spite of the fact that in the intervening period there has been further legislation and policy documents have proliferated relating to the topic of inclusion, the current examination seems, unfortunately, to reinforce my original conclusions rather than demonstrate any really positive change or development. Indeed, the current government strategy for SEN and inclusion (DfES, 2004), like the Green Paper (DfEE, 1997), presents a simplistic view of inclusion that fails to recognize its problematic and controversial nature and reaffirms deficit, compensatory approaches to provision and practice as the route to ensuring an equal educational opportunity for children with SEN. There is no recognition of the inherent injustice of an education system where the curriculum continues to be exclusive and to emphasize narrow academic content, and where the measurement of success and achievement is concerned with attaining a set of norm-related standards. Just as in previous policy the latest strategy is founded on a deficit view of children with SEN and once again resorts to notions that compensation and normalization are the means to ensuring access to equal educational opportunity. There is also a failure to recognize the potential of the current system of schooling to construct difference as a negative condition and to create SEN by perpetuating the notion that access is dependent on conformity rather than on celebrating difference as enriching and recognizing that genuine access to educational opportunity is dependent on a concept of full participation such as that discussed above. The assumption remains, as before, that inclusion for children with SEN means access to the mainstream of schooling as it is currently conceived and that in order to achieve success they must be assisted, by a range of support measures, to strive for the goals dictated by the standards agenda. There is nothing in the strategy that challenges the mainstream of schooling to change in order to become accessible to all children, irrespective of ability, by expanding and changing the curriculum or developing and broadening what is meant by success and achievement or altering the way in which they are measured. As with the metaphor of the game used above, members of the excluded groups can join the game if they submit to the rules and demonstrate that they can play and behave at a standard which is acceptable. Nowhere in the documentation is there any indication that there is a willingness to

change the game or even a recognition that inclusion conceived as full participation requires that a new game is played altogether.

In my earlier critique of policy for inclusion I suggested that if education is to become more equitable, ‘to meet the challenge of providing excellence for all children’ (Lloyd, 2000, p. 143) and to offer real participation for all children that it requires considerable reconstruction:

... I believe that we need to move away from this preoccupation with effective and efficient schools and schooling, as currently conceived, to the notion of an optimal learning environment. A barrier — free, flexible, responsive inclusive learning environment where everyone is entitled to participate fully and to develop his/her potential.

(Lloyd, 2000, p. 146)

This belief remains unchanged and in spite of the fact that the current strategy purports to centre around the removal of barriers, it seems unlikely to secure this entitlement because, as with previous policy and legislation, it totally fails to meet the challenge of deconstructing and reconstructing what can be seen as the really insurmountable barrier — the current mainstream of education.

Notes on contributor

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