



Alliance for Inclusive Education

The Case for Inclusive Education

The What, the Why and the How

What is inclusive education?

Why is it of benefit to all learners?

How can we transform the current education system?

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What is inclusive education?

In an inclusive educational setting, the culture of the education provider is transformed. Disabled and non-disabled learners are welcomed and valued, feel safe and confident that they will get the support to assist them to develop their talents, pursue their aspirations and make a contribution to the school whilst achieving their personal goals. Disabled pupils and students (including those with SEN) are welcomed and educated within inclusive education settings. Inclusive education providers adopt attitudes, approaches and strategies that ensure no learners are excluded or isolated from mainstream educational opportunities. Disabled pupils and students work alongside their peers on mainstream courses with flexibility of teaching, learning and assessments that support ALL learners to reach their full potential.

"Inclusive education is a social justice issue because it creates a society that values ALL equally - not only does it benefit disabled students, but all students, because they learn the strength of diversity and equality, lose their fear of difference, and develop empathy for others"

Tara Flood CEO, ALLFIE



The UK has taken some proactive measures to end institutional discrimination, including the Equality Act 2010 and the Children and Families Act 2014 (replaced Special Education Needs and Disability Act), but it has stopped short of creating and embracing an inclusive education system. Since 2009 disabled people have had a 'human right' to mainstream education under Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which has cross-political party support. But finding a school or college with good inclusive education practice is still not easy, in fact the Department for Education's own figures has shown a steady increase of disabled children and young people going into special schooling and an increase in exclusions from mainstream education. There has been a gap between understanding and practice in the UK.

Why is it of benefit to all learners?

Separating disabled learners from their non-disabled peer-group is discriminatory. It limits individual life-chances and produces an unfair and unjust society. Our experience of education shapes both who we are and the type of society we want. From early years, children learn about inclusion and segregation from their experiences whilst at school. The experiences of segregation and inclusion cannot be underestimated.

"[the UK Government] have rejected our recommendation for the Department for Education to commission research on the impact of segregated education. The Government made the point that quality of provision rather than setting is important. However, the Commission believes that setting may also be important and that separating disabled children from their peers at an early stage may have a long-term impact"

EHRC 2012, 'Out in the Open - tackling disability-related harassment'

Inclusive education benefits all of us. An inclusive education system provides opportunities for learning, friendship and growth within a diverse society which fosters respect, tolerance, understanding, and celebrates diversity.



"Natasha is more sparkly when she knows William will be in school. She gets up and says, 'It's a William day today'. She never wants to miss school when he is there, even when she is ill. They have a special friendship" **Parent**

Funding an inclusive education system will not require additional resources, but it will require a redistribution of funding from the special education sector into mainstream education to enable a programme of capacity building.

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How can we transform the current education system?

ALLFIE has identified 6 practical and achievable Manifesto demands that if implemented, would be the basis of an inclusive education system.

1. All disabled learners have the legal and human right to attend mainstream courses in mainstream educational settings

Currently disabled pupils and students do not have an absolute 'legal' right to mainstream education. UK legislation enables institutional discrimination to continue under the guise of parental 'choice' and 'reasonable adjustments'.

"The Local Authority has refused vital SEN support for Michael, despite it being included in his SEN Statement, because he is not attending the special school. Where is the "choice" for young disabled people and their families if they want to be included in mainstream education?" **Parent**

2. All disabled learners have the legal right to individualised support

Disabled pupils and students do not have an automatic entitlement to support whilst attending a mainstream educational setting. A disabled student with an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP) has a legal entitlement to Local Authority's funded SEN support, but a disabled student without an EHCP must rely on support being funded via the school's budget. For mainstream education to be a positive learning experience, disabled students may need support with their studies and engaging with student life. Assistance may include learning support, mentoring, counselling, providing curriculum materials in alternative formats and personal care. If we are to remove the inconsistencies in education support funding, it must

be provided through one funding stream, regardless of level of study, age of student and type of institution attended.

"I got my Level 1 Diploma in the post yesterday! I am so proud. So many people thought that I couldn't do it and I have proved them wrong! The external examiner even said my portfolio was the best in the year!" **Sterre**, Student



3. Education buildings to be made accessible to all disabled learners

With an increasing premium placed on building space, there has been a tendency for education providers to compromise on the standards of access for disabled students. Inclusive design is often neglected in education building projects. As well as continued barriers to physical access, many disabled students find the educational environment a difficult one to navigate, with poor colour schemes, no induction loops, no appropriate signage, inadequate lighting and noise levels. However there are education providers that have taken steps to make their classrooms welcoming and inclusive of disabled learners.

"I need classrooms with very little echo or reflective light, where the lights are soft and glow upward rather than downward projecting light. Now everything in the classroom remains the same so I know where I am and where things are" **'Donna'**, Student

4. All mainstream course curricula are accessible to and inclusive of disabled learners

As the law stands now, inclusion relates to getting through the front door, rather than actual choice of study. This is because 'mainstream education', in law, does not cover course enrolment. Too often disabled

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students are placed into SEN units or enrolled onto segregated courses designed specifically for disabled people.



"Inclusion doesn't mean sometimes, it means always.. all students. This is how the atmosphere in school changes and everyone starts to treat one another better"

Robin, Student

However, when staff can and do rise to the challenge of working in inclusive ways, as they did when all schools were required to implement the National Curriculum, there is the opportunity for innovative new and effective practice. Such practice has inspired school teachers to develop their own teaching practice.

"We see every person as a student first and then we look at the support that student might require to achieve their goals. This is undertaken without a discrete or segregated curriculum" **Blackburn College**

5. All education assessments and accreditations are inclusive

GCSE and A Level assessments are currently based only on end of course written examinations. Such assessments are not in line with the skills and demands of the workplace. We know that disabled people who are unable to complete a written assessment at the end of course will be disproportionately disadvantaged without flexibility such as provision of examinations in braille or being made available on the computer. For some disabled students the option of continued assessment (formative), course work, presentations, portfolios, documentary essays, e-journals, etc., are often much more representative of the range of abilities, and far more beneficial, in terms of acquired knowledge and skills.

6. Compulsory disability equality training for all education staff

There is a gap in the training needs of all aspiring new teachers, to be responsive to a changing population, to embrace the varying demands of a rapidly changing sector, to respond to equality legislation, and to support disabled people's rights to be realised within an inclusive education system. Training (including CPD) plays a crucial part in the development of inclusion. Unfortunately the education sector is moving away from an equality focus in favour of training on specific health conditions. Such training reinforces the traditional Medical Model approach to disability which focuses on perceived 'needs' and interventions to make disabled students fit into an existing and unchanged mainstream education setting with minimum support and adjustments. Disability Equality training, however, takes a Social Model of disability approach focusing on barriers to participation, changes that need to be made by education providers so they are better able to include and support disabled students in mainstream educational settings.



"I had mixed experiences at school. Some of the staff seemed unwilling or unable to have any understanding, like the one who patted my head one sports day and said, 'it's great you can join in, even though your legs don't work'" **Brandon**, Student

The cost of segregation has a lifetime impact on those who experience it. When the Government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009 it committed to building the capacity of mainstream education to ensure the development of an inclusive education system. Now is the time for this important work to start. We can act now by joining together to call for a fully inclusive education system with inclusion and equity at the heart of educational provision at every level. It is only when all disabled people have a fundamental right to inclusive education, where everyone is welcomed and equally valued that we will have a community based on everyone having a right to be there.

This document sets out the case for inclusive education: what it is and the reasons why an inclusive education system is of benefit to all learners and how a transformation of the current education system can be achieved.



Get in touch:

The Alliance for Inclusive Education
336 Brixton Road
London SW9 7AA

Tel: 020 7737 6030

Typetalk: 18001 020 7737 6030

Email: info@allfie.org.uk

Website: www.allfie.org.uk

Charity No: 1124424 Company No: 5988026

The Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE) is a national campaigning and information-sharing network led by disabled people, supported by allies including parents and those working in the education sector. ALLFIE campaigns for disabled people to have the right to inclusive mainstream education.