

The Alliance for
Inclusive Education

Manifesto

for Inclusive
Education



Introduction

“Our manifesto is about challenging the deep rooted systematic discrimination which unfairly locks disabled pupils and students out of mainstream education. Inclusive education benefits everyone. It allows disabled and non-disabled people to come together and learn to respect and value our differences. It helps to create inclusive communities that welcome everyone. Our manifesto sets out the importance of ‘educating not segregating’ and engaging in positive action to establish a fair and equal education system for ALL citizens.”

Michelle Daley, Interim Director,
The Alliance for Inclusive Education



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www.allfie.org.uk/manifesto

ALLFIE believes inclusive education is the basis of lifelong equality. It is only through disabled and non-disabled people playing, learning, working, growing up together, and building relationships with each other that we will achieve an inclusive society that welcomes all regardless of ability or background.

ALLFIE's manifesto focuses on realising the rights of ALL disabled people to mainstream education with all necessary supports and adjustments within an inclusive education system. It sets out our six demands, which would move us from the present situation to a fully inclusive education system.

We believe disabled people have the right to:

- An inclusive education system supported by human rights laws
- A coordinated education, health and social care system
- An inclusive learning environment
- An inclusive curriculum
- An inclusive assessment system
- An education workforce committed to inclusive education practice

These demands are framed around the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and, in particular, [Article 24](#). In 2017, the UNCRPD Committee concluded that the UK's special education needs and disabilities (SEND) legal frameworks are inadequate and discriminatory, violating disabled pupils' and students' rights to inclusive education. They recommended the following action:

“Develop a comprehensive and coordinated legislative and policy framework for inclusive education and a timeframe to ensure that mainstream schools foster real inclusion of children with disabilities in the school environment.”

Definitions

Who are disabled people?

Disabled people include individuals with and without Special Educational Needs (SEN). ALLFIE uses the Social Model of Disability to define what we mean by 'disabled'.

What is inclusive education?

Inclusive education is not integrated education, where disabled people are in mainstream but without adequate support or adjustments. Inclusive education involves the removal of the barriers that disabled people encounter in mainstream education (UNCRPD General Comment 4).

ALLFIE recognises it will take time to move from the current system to one that is fully inclusive. Fundamental changes in thinking, policy and practice would be required. As part of a transformation programme, separate special education settings would become community resources, no longer providing education but instead offering outreach services to support disabled people in inclusive education settings and community access to specialised equipment.



The Current Situation

The current focus on academic qualifications, ranking and performance league tables has increased pressures on education providers to meet academic attainment targets and segregate disabled pupils. As The Communication Trust (2016) warned:

“An unintended consequence of the target for EBacc. entry might be an increased referral and transition rate of children and young people with SLCN (Speech & Language Communication Needs) and SEND from mainstream secondary schools into special schools.”

In 2018, more disabled children with EHCPs were being educated in special than mainstream school after a decade of steady rises in special school placements.

“Many pupils with additional needs are currently taught in mainstream schools, but the council has decided that the needs of these children would be better met in specialist provision.” (Telegraph & Argus 2017)

Parents and children taking up alternative provision and special school placements are not making a positive and active choice.

“We were told that, for children like our son, inclusion was not meaningful, that there were no options and that he would have to go to a special school, even if we didn’t want it.” (ALLFIE 2018)

Education funding cuts have made it difficult for education providers to be fully inclusive of disabled people (NUT 2016, ACSD 2019) as these students explain:

"I had a teaching assistant, speech & language therapist, 1-to-1 meetings with the SENCO. With the cuts in government funding, even this level of support is under threat. I am very worried about how autistic school students will manage without it."

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC 2012) and the government recognise that segregated education has a negative impact upon outcomes for society.

"Segregated schools reduce opportunities for children and young people to mix with others from different backgrounds in their formative years and it can restrict pupils' outlook and education."
(HM Government 2018 p 26)

The government's latest destinations data, focusing on pupils finishing their GCSEs in 2012/13, shows that nearly half (45%) of young people leaving PRUs were not in education, employment, or training six months after the end of their compulsory schooling, compared to only 6% of students leaving mainstream schools and 11% leaving special schools. (Ministry for Justice 2014, Prison Reform Trust 2010). Apart from education, employment and training outcomes, increased segregated education is having a long-term impact upon disabled pupils' and students' mental health. In the period between 2016-2018 there has been a doubling of disabled children being placed in psychiatric hospitals (Children's Commission 2019).

Thus segregated education can reduce disabled children's opportunities and cause emotional harm.

Manifesto Demand 1:

A fully inclusive education system supported by human rights laws

Disabled people do not have a legal right to inclusive education. The Children and Families Act 2014 includes the SEND framework setting out disabled students' and pupils' entitlements to education, health and social care assessments and inclusive education provision. Whilst there is a principle of the "presumption of mainstream education", the law allows local authorities and SEND tribunals the power to place disabled pupils and students in special education settings.

"The Children and Families Act supports parents' right to choose a mainstream education but it doesn't say anything about what to do when mainstream schools show little or no interest in educating our children." (ALLFIE 2018)

The Equality Act 2010 is the main framework governing the promotion of disability equality by education providers, local authorities and education funding agencies. Judges can decide whether a reasonable adjustment and disability-related discrimination is lawful on a case by case basis.

"I have been unlawfully discriminated against by a City University after having to spend my entire first year arguing unsuccessfully for the simple but vital reasonable adjustments I had previously been given throughout school and college." (ALLFIE 2015)

The education legal framework does not provide the same rights for all disabled people in any form of education.

Changes required

- Reforms to the Children and Families Act 2014 and Equality Act 2010 should provide all disabled people with support and adjustments required within inclusive education settings
- All education laws must include a statutory definition of inclusive education and comply with UNCRPD Article 24



Manifesto Demand 2:

A coordinated education, health and social care system

Disabled people do not have a legal right to a holistic assessment and joined-up education, health and care provision to remove barriers in learning and participation in social life (including extra-curricular activities) within mainstream education settings. A disabled higher education student and lecturer says:

"I used various forms of assistive technology to participate in class and complete my assignments; personal assistants were key to addressing my access requirements; I received appropriate travel assistance in order to journey between home, libraries, schools, colleges, and universities. I encountered numerous injustices in my attempts to access support." (ALLFIE 2019)

In many situations disabled pupils and students requiring therapies are forced into segregated education provision, as this disabled young person explains:

"I want to go a mainstream College but my mum still wanted me to stay at a special school which I didn't want to but I understand that I needed the OT, the speech and the physio." (Seb 2019)

Local authorities and education providers have made the assessment system, which should be used to identify and provide what disabled individuals require to flourish in mainstream education, a fraught process. This is because

there are no clear legal definitions of what constitutes SEND provision, reasonable adjustments and steps in the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Equality Act 2010.

Changes required

- Assessment of disabled people's support and equipment requirements must be handled by a body independent of the education provider
- Disabled adults should be given the option of arranging their own support and equipment in inclusive education as they currently do with their social care and Access to Work packages
- Local authorities must arrange transport, education, health and social care support and equipment in a manner that maximises disabled pupils' and students' inclusion in mainstream settings



Manifesto Demand 3:

An inclusive learning environment

There is no legal requirement for education establishments to incorporate inclusive design principles so that disabled people are able to participate in education settings. For example, the government has made it easier for schools to be refurbished or built without requiring all facilities to be fully accessible for disabled people, as this parent reported:

“The wheelchair accessible toilet was removed in mainstream school and used for storage. The other disabled toilet in the entrance hall wasn’t large enough for two adults to attend a student when needed so doors were left open... Unsurprisingly, we left the school.” (ALLFIE 2018)

Further, building regulations allow for education providers to develop designated areas for disabled students without having to consider the whole education campus. For instance, further education colleges may include self-contained accessible areas where disabled students are expected to complete their courses if they need to use specific facilities. As a result, disabled people are prevented from attending various mainstream courses because buildings continue to be inaccessible for all.

Inclusive learning environments involve building and interior design so that disabled pupils and students are able to access education buildings and learn in a comfortable setting. Lighting, acoustics, heating and ventilation, visual contrast,

signage, technology, seating arrangements and ease of coming into and leaving classrooms are amongst various design features which affect disabled pupils' and students' participation in learning.

"I had to leave.... college after two months because the social and sensory environment was too overwhelming and distressing."
(Joe, ALLFIE 2019)

Further, inclusive learning environments are about ensuring that there are facilities where disabled people can go to ensure their health and social care needs can be met whilst in mainstream education. Some examples of disability facilities that ought to be provided are changing and therapy rooms or places to store medicine safely.

Changes required

- All education buildings must comply with statutory building guidance and incorporate the inclusive design principles in British Standard 8300: 2018
- All education buildings must be designed to accommodate all disabled pupils and students, including those who are neurodiverse



Manifesto Demand 4:

An inclusive curriculum

Disabled people have no legal right to participate in mainstream courses in mainstream education settings. Course curricula are usually based on normative academic standards informed by what pupils and students are expected to achieve by certain ages and milestones. Rigid adherence to the national curriculum has meant less flexibility for schools in making the curriculum inclusive, as a teacher explains:

"We are extremely concerned that these pupils [SEN] are expected to follow the same curriculum and achieve in line with national levels regardless of their particular needs and circumstances."
(NUT 2015)

Education providers have no incentive to develop flexible course curricula, and disabled people who struggle to access the work are less likely to be welcome in mainstream settings, as this parent of a disabled child experienced:

"The removal of children from subjects is a bespoke package that the school have for children they do not think will pass GCSE. My son was taken to a classroom they called learning support."
(ALLFIE 2018)

There is no clear legal duty placed on education providers in the Children and Families Act 2014 or the Equality Act 2010 to differentiate courses and to make learning materials available in accessible formats.

Inclusive education is about educating people for the type of society we want and therefore it should include the values of citizenship and being part of our local communities. For instance, a mainstream school introduced a signing choir to break down the communication barriers between deaf and non-deaf people. BSL must be part of the curriculum and offered as an examined subject.

"It's amazing that there are so many languages that children can learn at school as a GCSE, including other British languages such as Welsh. I have just chosen my GCSE options, my school encouraged us to choose a language, but even though my first language BSL was recognised as an official British language in 2003, there is no GCSE yet...A BSL GCSE is so important to me, this is my language and part of my culture and deaf identity.. (Disabled pupil 2019)

Changes required

- Education providers to offer a broader range of courses including non-academic courses for all
- Curriculum design and learning materials to be adapted to accommodate pupils' and students' level of understanding and style of learning and made available in a variety of formats
- A broad curriculum offer consisting of accredited courses, including better representation of disabled people and our lives

Manifesto Demand 5:

An inclusive assessment system

There is no legal requirement for qualification systems to be as inclusive as possible for disabled examination candidates. The assessment methods used for high stakes tests and qualifications affect how inclusive the learning environment is for all pupils and students. Since the GCSE and A Level reforms there has been a negative impact on inclusive teaching as written examinations have become the primary form of assessment:

“The new GCSEs have been characterised by teachers as encompassing a one size fits all approach which makes it much harder for teachers to respond to the diversity of students’ needs and disadvantages students who are less able to perform well in exams.” (NUT 2015)

However, GCSEs and A Levels do not reflect an inclusive approach to assessments of students’ work used elsewhere. For example, the work of further and higher education students is assessed by a range of methods, such as artefacts, course work, case studies and live performances.

Changes required

- All education providers should be evaluated for their inclusivity alongside the academic progress rather than attainments of pupils and students
- Regulators of academic, vocational and professional qualifications and Standard Assessment Tests must ensure that their assessment criteria and assessment methods reflect equality and inclusivity

Manifesto Demand 6:

An education workforce committed to inclusive education practice

There is no legal requirement for all education staff to be trained in inclusive education practice. The NCTLNQT Annual Survey (2014) reported that trainee teachers were unprepared to work with disabled pupils in mainstream settings. A primary school teacher said:

“The thing that has let me down most with the training was not knowing enough about intervention strategies and dealing with SEN. We had three major sessions at college but it wasn’t practical enough in helping you deal with six SEN children with very different needs in a class of 29.”

With a shrinking number of qualified staff such as SENCOs, staff are having to do unpaid work because there are insufficient resources to oversee and develop inclusive education practice (NESAN 2018). Similarly, disabled university students have reported lack of staff training in accommodating disabled students in higher education settings.

Changes required:

- Continuing Professional Development programmes which focus on inclusive education for ALL education and support staff
- Anyone with direct contact with pupils and students to be legally required to undertake training in inclusive education practice