



## **Social exclusion repeated through school exclusion**

At TCES Group we are entering into our 20th year of educating children and young people with special educational needs; SEMH and ASC pupils with co-morbid conditions. These pupils come to us after a lifetime of multiply marginalisation and social exclusion. They have often been marginalised and socially excluded since birth from housing, local communities and community resources. They are further and regularly excluded, both on a fixed term and permanent basis, from schools, PRUs, home tuition services and one to one services. These 'hard to reach' schools have let down these children and their parents and carers time and again.

A large percentage of our pupils are Children in Care who have suffered multiple moves of placements, schools and multiple changes of social workers. These Children are in Public Care (our care) and have been moved out of their family homes for various reasons, including abuse and neglect. They are supposed to be looked after by the Local Authorities and all its vessels and the grave decision to remove them from their families should result in them experiencing a better life.

These children rattle around a system made unsympathetic by years of cuts to services, disastrous austerity policies and an increasingly right-wing blame culture that blames the victims and their families. The reasons for their very significant gaps in education lie complicitly with Local Authorities who deliberately obfuscate SEND rules to confound and confuse parents around their legal rights and opportunities. These Local Authorities cannot afford to provide the pupils' statutory rights. Their repeated requests for additional funding are lost to a government that has cut back every meaningful support service to the most disadvantaged and poorest families that statistically contain the biggest percentage of SEND pupils.

The one place that these socially marginalised children should find succour is within the state education system, which was set up to provide education for all children irrespective of social or economic status.

Instead, we have engaged for almost a decade in creating an education system that measures success in academic scores rather than the inculcation of values of excellence through fairness and inclusion - the very best of British values. This obsession with league tables and academic results is led by a government confused by both desperately attempting to emulate the academic scores of countries on the other side of the planet whilst engaging in withdrawing from the wealth and security that the community of neighbour countries afford us here in Europe.

The drive for academic excellence has led to a one-size-fits-all approach, where everyone is assessed under an Ofsted system that prides itself on its Common Inspection Framework devised to bring maintained schools and Independent Special Schools for pupils with SEN disabilities under the same regulatory requirements and standards. A system that has deliberately made itself blind to the social and economic conditions and the disabilities of our most disadvantaged pupils.

This 'blindness' has resulted in significant changes to exams to 'increase standards' that have completely disregarded the special educational needs of our pupils. With a single final exam rather than continuous assessment and ongoing coursework, our pupils with anxiety disorders, poor memory and mental health difficulties are discriminated against. In truth,

because there was no proper consultation on this sea change they were completely forgotten.

The drive for ever increasing A\*s has led to the new champions of this government's hallmark policy of academies and free schools becoming increasingly more desperate to produce the perfect results. SEND pupils with their inconvenient needs and disabilities do not smoothly fit into this drive for increasingly better results. Their gaps in education and irksome habits of needing expensive adaptations for their disabilities make them deeply problematic for some Academies, Free Schools and comprehensive schools who are singularly judged on results.

As a result, fixed term exclusions are on the increase and for the most innocuous reasons; SEND children and CiC are being excluded for the wrong uniform, for displaying behaviours intrinsically linked to their autism and triggered by a lack of adaptations being made by the increasingly underfunded schools. Basic training for autism or social, emotional and mental health is not available and large academies have a single SENDCO for their huge numbers of pupils. The government underfunding means that these disabled children and young people cannot expect the most basic of adaptations that would legally have to be provided by an employer to a disabled employee.

And then we have the excuse makers; the rights of the many in class vs the rights of the few, but what messages do we deliver to the many when we fix term and permanently exclude the few; our disabled children. These exclusion leaders see disability as in the purview of others, outside of their hallowed school walls but fail to see that inclusive education is the basic right of all and that no part of a moral future society should see the behaviour of our most vulnerable SEND pupils as anything other than a communication of unmet needs, which simply requires the teaching profession to reach out to them and to provide 'real' and not symbolic inclusion. It will not be easy, but then nothing truly worthwhile is, but imagine the feeling of accomplishment to emotionally hold our most vulnerable and meet their needs as an intrinsic part of our schools.

Instead, exclusion leaders tell us that they don't have the funding, the experience or the expertise to help our SEND pupils and that they are someone else's problems. They are dumped out the back doors through secret agreements for multiple mis-managed moves and some of our Academies, Free Schools and Comprehensives tell us that it is a results business, but at what cost.

We can do much better than this. As school leaders we can set an example to our school staff, which should be that we teach in communities for all our children and their families and not just for those who fit in best and who achieve best.

If we cannot deliver inclusive schools then what do we really stand for? If we claim success through high expectations then do we really succeed if we 'dump' our most vulnerable children out the back door? Are we not cheating? Is this not a 21st Century Darwinian form of selection?

And what becomes of these multiply excluded children. There are grave and pernicious effects of early fixed term exclusions, which often result in permanent exclusions or mis-managed moves (the same thing) on these pupils' self-esteem and future prospects. This means that sadly they are overrepresented in all the worst statistics; unemployment, homelessness, mental health in-patient treatment, alcohol and drugs, young offenders institutes and prisons.

There is another way. After almost 20 years of providing education, health and care to SEND pupils with the most complex circumstances, co-morbidity of needs and conditions, we have

never permanently excluded a single one of these thousands of children. We will not perpetuate another single loss of placement or mis-managed move unto our already marginalised children and young people. Instead, we see our children as multiply talented and we see our roles as enabling them to become aware of their talents and to channel these talents into making them young leaders who have the values that we need for the 21st century.

Before we hear the multiple cries of 'you are set up to do that' and 'you have the resources' and 'we are mainstream schools' my clear and unequivocal response is if we can do this as a Social Enterprise with the most complex and challenging children in the country, then you can do it as a preventative measure five steps earlier, when all your children and young people need from you is to believe in them and formulate trusting relationships and to work together as inclusive schools.