

## **Critical Review: Making Sense of Special Schools from Sociological Perspectives**

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### **Abstract**

Special schools have increasingly been questioned in terms of being discriminatory and segregatory, especially under the political and academic context of inclusive education. This paper explores the nature of special schools from the sociological perspectives of rights discourse, charity discourse and corporate discourse, as well as social model and medical model in the debates over special and inclusive education. The review draws from the theoretical framework of Vygotsky's defectology that describes disability as an incongruence between individuals' biological maturation (or psychological structure) and socialisation process (or the structure of cultural forms), and Foucault's power/knowledge relation that identifies three mechanisms of the power control of knowledge at the institutional level - hierarchical observation, normalizing judgments, and examination. Based on these two frameworks, this paper argues that because public schools inherently fail to accommodate differences, children with special educational needs (SEN) are often not able to benefit from the learning activities designed for the majority of students in mainstream settings - an incongruence that makes separate provision such as special schools necessary. From sociological perspectives, special schools can be understood as a result of disciplinary exclusion, a "charity" that helps those in need, an "expert" that has the best interest of a child at heart, or a strategy for optimum social economy. This paper concludes that although the existence of special schools may be seen as an institutional expression of segregation and discrimination in education, the root of the problem may rest with the whole education system that is insensible and inflexible to diversity. This paper therefore posits that special schools should still be an indispensable part of the diverse educational provisions. As a suggested way forward, efforts towards educational diversity and inclusion require cooperation among different provisions.

*Keywords:* special schools, sociological perspectives, educational provision, diversity, incongruence

## 1. Background

For decades, special schools, together with other forms of alternative schooling, have been a complementary part of mainstream education, accommodating students identified as having special educational needs (SEN). SEN, defined as “a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them” (Department for Education [DfE], 2001, p. 6), includes communication and interaction difficulties, cognition and learning difficulties, emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, and sensory and/or physical disabilities (DfE, 2014a). In recent years, however, special schools have been increasingly questioned and criticized as being segregatory and discriminatory under the political and academic context of inclusive education (Farrell, 2010; Riddell, 2007).

Inclusive education in England was first given momentum by the *Warnock Report* (Department of Education and Science [DES], 1978), which helped to change the assumption that special schools were optimum for children with SEN towards a new belief that mainstream schools could also be encouraged to meet SEN. Following this initiative, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE; 1997) gave specific instructions for inclusion: it saw inclusion within mainstream schools as having strong educational, social and moral grounds as well as being an important part of building an inclusive society, and it acknowledged the continuous role for special schools, but only as supporting services providing resources and expertise to mainstream schools rather than as an independent provision (DfEE, 1997). *The Code of Practice* (DfE, 2001, 2014a) proceeded to offer further guidance of School Action<sup>1</sup>, School Action Plus<sup>2</sup> and Statementing<sup>3</sup>. The statutory guidance *Inclusive Schooling* (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2001a) also reiterated all children’s entitlement to mainstream education.

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<sup>1</sup> School Action refers to a child is not making progress at school and has a need for actions to be taken to meet his or her learning difficulties. Actions include extra teaching and possibly different learning materials, special equipment or a different teaching strategy (DfES, 2001a).

<sup>2</sup> School Action Plus involves school seeking external advice from the LEA's support services, the local Health Authority or from Social Services, when School Action is insufficient to help the child make adequate progress (DfES, 2001a).

<sup>3</sup> Statement of Special Educational Needs is a statement issued by the local authority describing all the special educational needs (SEN) of a child and the special help a child should receive. This is usually given to a child when all the special help he or she needs cannot be provided from within the school’s resources (DfE, 1981).

Under such governmental imperatives, up to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the number of full-time pupils in special schools in England dropped dramatically by 27.5% from 131,000 in 1979 to 95,400 in 1991 (Education and Skills Committee [ESC], 2006). Furthermore, under the former Labour Government's inclusion policy, 117 special schools closed down from 1997 to 2006 (Paton, 2006).

However, despite the governmental initiation of inclusion policy in the last century, the number of pupils in special schools has stopped decreasing and remained relatively steady since 1997 with only 4% decline from 1997 to 2005 (ESC, 2006). Today, 42.2% of pupils with an SEN Statement<sup>4</sup> still attend special schools (DfE, 2014b), a number that has been slowly but steadily growing compared to 36.9% in 2006 and 40.1% in 2010 (DfE, 2010). This trend may reflect the shift towards inclusion by choice and a continuum of provision that values needs over rights and acknowledges the necessity of provisions other than mainstream schools such as special schools for some children (e.g. Lindsay, 2007; Norwich, 2008; Terzi, 2010). In the policy paper *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES, 2004), it is acknowledged that children with severe and complex needs would still require special provision; *Inclusion Policy* (Counsel for Disabled Children [CDC], 2008) posits that inclusion is about being welcome and enabling the children to choose among forms of education freely; and the latest *Code of Practice* (DfE, 2014a) also puts emphasis on “increased choice, opportunity and control for parents and young people including a greater range of schools and colleges for which they can express a preference” (p. 6). Rix et al. (2013) describe the continuum of provision as:

... a range of services rather than just educational placement, and has been seen to encapsulate not only a wider notion of care but also a spread of individual needs to which care must be delivered... They can operate as preventative, targeted or individual approaches, aiming to be interconnected to meet the needs of all children (p. 23).

In short, it can be seen that after decades of efforts towards inclusion, the continuum

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<sup>4</sup> See footnote 3.

of provision and inclusion by choice is currently much debated in the literature and it seems to be signaling the way forward for special education (Lindsay, 2007; Norwich, 2008; Rix et al., 2013; Terzi, 2010). Nonetheless, in order to gain a better understanding of inclusion, special schools, central to the debates, must be further explored.

## **2. Overview of Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical frameworks adopted in the exploration of the nature of special schools are first Vygotsky's (1993) work on defectology. Instead of a language of deficiency as the name may have suggested, the theory is rather about offering a balanced view by seeing both sides of the issue: disability is seen *an incongruence* between individuals' biological maturation (or psychological structure) and socialisation process (or the structure of cultural forms). Vygotsky (1993) argues that "a child whose development is impeded by a defect is not simply a child less developed than his peers but a child who has developed differently" (p. 30). This view coincides with Söder's (1989) adaptability perspective and epidemiological perspective on SEN, which see disability as the result of individuals' maladaptation to the imposed expectations in society, and an abnormality that requires explanation with a variety of social and other factors, such as education systems, curriculum limitations (Ainscow, 1998; Norwich, 2008), economic systems, and social order (Slee, 1998). Skrtic (1991) similarly posits that "the problem of school failure was reframed as two interrelated problems of inefficient organisations and defective students" (p. 152).

The second theoretical framework adopted is Foucault's (1977) work on the indivisible relationship between power and knowledge. Foucault (1977) identifies three mechanisms of the power control of knowledge at the institutional level: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgments, and examination. This means the institutions first observe the learners from a hierarchical height, set norms and impose "new delimitations on them" (Foucault, 1977, p.184), and then compulsorily quantify and visualise performance and achievements via exams, holding the learners in a "mechanism of objectification" (p.187). This mechanism in schooling leads to the categorisation of learners for the sake of orderly control. As a result, in most mainstream schools, pupils are often categorised according to

certain criteria, such as age (curriculum designed according to age group), behaviour (merit awards, detention, etc.), interest (specialist schools such as musical and arts academies and grouping according to GCSE subjects), and attainment (intentional or unintentional ability grouping within school, and competing for league tables rankings between schools; Booth & Ainscow, 1998). This imperative of categorisation in schools on one hand may help to maintain order and maximise performance, yet on the other hand inevitably suggests that the current school system inherently fails to accommodate differences.

Drawing from Vygotsky's (1993) work on defectology and relating to Foucault's (1977) power/knowledge theory on the nature of schooling, it can be argued that the incongruence between what children with SEN need and what mainstream education could usually offer necessitates separate provision such as special schools (Bøttcher & Dammeyer, 2012). Tomlinson (1985) similarly sees the expansion of special schools as largely due to an increasing number of children "identified as being unable or unwilling to participate satisfactorily in a system primarily directed towards producing academic and technical elites" (p. 157). Indeed, if children with SEN are not able to benefit from the learning activities designed for the majority of students in mainstream settings, before the entire mainstream education could be reformed to be able to accommodate all, one logical solution could be providing alternative provision, such as special schools. In order to further explore the nature of special schools, this paper takes the sociological perspectives of medical and social models, and rights, charity, and corporate discourses, accounting for special schools in terms of disciplinary exclusion, benevolent humanitarianism, professionalism, and a strategy for optimum social economy.

### **3. Special School as a Result of Disciplinary Exclusion & Rights Discourse**

Wolpe (1985) argues that the orderly operation of educational apparatuses is guaranteed by discipline - the production of docile bodies ensures classroom order and is essential for learning. For example, in Inner Mongolia, China, a primary school classroom at a time can well manage 75 children, who are "quiet and obedient throughout a day of lessons that appear so repetitive" (Ainscow, 1999, p. 3). Wolpe (1985) further posits that discipline is

traditionally maintained via sanctioning practices on disruptive behaviours that exclude pupils from regular classrooms for long or short periods of time, such as suspension and detention. According to national statistics, in English state-funded primary and secondary schools, persistent disruptive behaviour remains the most common reason for permanent and fixed period exclusion, and SEN pupils have the highest rate of permanent and fixed period exclusion (DfE, 2014c).

It can then be reasoned that some special schools may be a form of disciplinary exclusion imposed onto students who breach the classroom codes with disruptive behaviours. It is a common characteristic of many SEN students, especially for those at the most severe end of the SEN spectrum, that their behaviours can be persistently aggressive and difficult to contain within mainstream settings (Harriss et al., 2008). Failing to manage disruptive pupils, mainstream schools may therefore choose exclusion to resolve the problem (Hornby et al., 1997). De Monchey et al. (2004) also found in their studies that behavioural problems did constitute a main cause of social exclusion. In this sense, separate educational provision, such as special schools, is negatively seen as a dumping ground for those who do not satisfactorily conform to the set disciplines in the mainstream system, and operates therefore as a synonym for exclusion, discrimination and segregation. This has inevitably put special schools as disciplinary exclusion under the moral scrutiny of human rights, social equality and justice.

Special schools are criticised as discriminatory and segregatory especially in terms of the rights discourse. The rights discourse advocates that it is a basic human right and matter of social equality for every child to be educated alongside their mainstream peers (Farrell, 2000; Florian et al., 1998; Lindsay, 2007). From a social constructivist perspective, which treats disability as socially constructed based on social beliefs (Allan, 1999; Slee, 1998), the rights discourse stresses “self-reliance, independence, and consumer-wants (rather than needs)” (Fulcher, 1999, p. 29).

However, Etzioni (1998) criticises modern democratic societies and argues that the balance between rights and responsibility might be heavily skewed towards the “rights” side. This may shed light on the debates over special and inclusive education: although the rights

discourse positively encourages equality and empowerment, it should not be pursued blindly, as it might go too far towards an end of political ideology rather than individual needs if not handled carefully and in good balance with other aspects such as responsibility, needs and choice. Allan (1999) similarly notes that rights discourse could be “explicitly political, although not always adversarial” (p. 9). An example here is the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE), which is strongly against special schools, positing that inclusive education is a basic human right, and special schools are a form of institutional segregation, discrimination, a major cause of social prejudice against people with impairments, and thus should be reduced and ultimately eliminated (CSIE, 1989/2002). This rather radical view of full inclusion does acknowledge inclusive schools as “the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994, p. ix). However, it may go too far and easily tip the scale of individual needs vs. universal rights. In this regard, Kauffman (1992) questions:

Under what condition, if any, is an approach to education “right” even if it doesn’t work? Can education or treatment be morally “right” if it provides no benefit, even if it does harm? Are we to assume that what is “right” for most students is “right” for all, regardless of benefit or harm in the individual case? (p. v).

Therefore, although special schools as a result of disciplinary exclusion may be criticised as an infringement on human rights, the rights discourse alone does not offer a perfect answer to special education,. It should also be borne in mind that the language of needs is not to be overlooked in the shadow of the rights discourse (Thomas & Loxley, 2001). Nonetheless, the balance between needs and rights is hard to keep, as Lee (1996) warns that “unless questions about what “need” means are thought about and resolved, resource allocation according to need will remain, at best, a process characterised by acts of faith” (p. 131).

#### 4. Special School as “Benevolent Humanitarianism” and Charity Discourse

Up to the late 1980s, the charity discourse and medical discourse (which will be further explored in the next section) informed and dominated special educational practices in the UK (Ford et al., 1982; Tomlinson, 1982). Tomlinson (1982) described the charity discourse as “benevolent humanitarianism” (p. 5) – the well-off feeling a moral duty to give help to those regarded as inferior, and in return expecting the recipients to be grateful. It saw individuals with special needs as tragic figures who needed help (Oliver, 1986), an object of pity (Borsay, 1986), or eternally dependent children who were low attainers by social standards (Fulcher, 1999). In the last century, this mentality encouraged the notion of special education being a charitable cause entirely separate from the mainstream education, and helped to enhance special schools’ (both maintained and independent) identity as places with charitable purposes<sup>5</sup>, where help for those removed from mainstream due to their special needs could be provided. Thus historically, children identified with SEN used to be taken care of by charities and churches before the public education system was established.

However, in contemporary disability discourse where inclusion is the main theme, the charity discourse is often seen as a language of deficiency and is generally regarded as distasteful (Smagorinsky, 2012). Nonetheless, studies (e.g., Hodgkinson & Devarakonda, 2011; Lodge & Lynch, 2004; Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2009) have found that today the general public’s prevailing attitude towards SEN still conveys a somewhat pitying and charitable mentality. Some independent special schools continue to be run by charitable organisations, such as Scope and Camphill.

The charity discourse, viewing children with SEN as in need of help, has created a language of needs that still pervades special education today. This is increasingly obvious since the introduction of the National Curriculum (NC) in 1988 (DfE, 1988), which, despite its good intention of raising standards, has thereby created the category of “low-achiever” or “low-attainer” for those who struggle to keep up with the imposed standards (Adey & Shayer, 1994). These students often fall under the broad umbrella term of SEN, and are seen as

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<sup>5</sup> The *Charities Act 2011*, chapter 25 defines a charitable purpose as being able to provide benefit to the public, and the advancement of education (Her Majesty’s Government, 2011).

different and “other,” and beyond mainstream teachers’ ability and responsibility; as a result, they are commonly seen as failing and in need of help. Thomas and Loxley (2001) argue that the language of needs reinforces the deficit and disadvantage concept of SEN and helps to secure the removal of the child from mainstream provision.

It can be reasoned, then, that the language of needs may lead to the negative labelling of SEN, which may limit some children’s learning opportunities (Riddell, 2007). This might be paradoxical if the purpose of identifying special needs is to provide better help.

Notwithstanding, it is often argued that it is not the *label* of SEN that is negative but rather the *attitudes and emotions* attached to them. Thus, all those involved directly and indirectly in special education including students, parents, teachers, academics, policy makers, as well as the general public will need to work together towards raising awareness of SEN and encouraging a positive mentality towards diversity. In this regard, Corbett (1999) suggests a shift of culture rather than a simple linguistic adjustment; Ainscow (2007) encourages “a new way of thinking” (p. 6) where the educators effectively respond to learner diversity; Florian and Spratt (2013) call for the public to stop seeing SEN in an alienating way by categorising children with SEN as different learners; Norwich (2008) also appeals for “finding ways to go beyond negative labels” (p. 198), and encourages a more positive public attitude towards SEN and disabilities. In short, the point, as Simons (1995) highlights, is “not to abolish identity but to transform the way in which we experience identity” (p. 121).

### **5. Special School as “The Expert” and Medical Discourse**

In addition to the charity discourse, another common way of thinking in special education is that of the “expert knowing the best,” or the language of professionalism. It constructs disability as a technical issue for the medical experts with their professional judgment, and argues that special schools offer specialist expertise, high staff ratio, protective environments, close collaboration with medical experts and therapists, and work specifically towards the best interest of the individual child. This language of “being the experts” helps special schools earn much support from parents and even from mainstream schools. Croll and Moses’ (2000) study in 48 primary mainstream schools shows that special schools not only

enjoy great support from parents but also from mainstream schools: 100% of headteachers and 98% of teachers interviewed saw a continuing role for special schools; 50% agreed that more children should attend special schools, especially those with emotional and behavioural difficulties; and two thirds were in favour of special schools.

However, this viewpoint of special schools being the experts is in fact derived from the deficit language of the medical discourse of disability. The medical discourse, also known as the essentialist perspective (Slee, 1998) or medical/clinical perspective (Ainscow, 1998; Söder, 1989) treats disability as “individual’s inability to function” (Barton, 1993, p. 237) and finds faults within individuals according to their deficits (Fulcher, 1989). Brisenden (1986) remarked that “the social world...is steeped in the medical model of disability” (p. 174). Tomlinson (1982) similarly noted that medical practitioners had had a considerable influence on special educational practices. The medical discourse is regarded as a “divisive discourse” (Fulcher, 1999, p. 8) or a “discourse of deviance” (Skidmore, 2004, p. 113) that constructs the notion of abnormality/normality, dividing the school population into those with SEN and without, and creating the illusion of certain children belonging to particular places of certain expertise. Thomas and Loxley (2001) criticise the medical discourse in which, although the main theoretical rationale for special schools is that they are the experts who have the child’s best interest at heart, the “theory was usually empty and the empirical evidence often illusory” (p. 21).

Nonetheless, although the medical discourse is heavily criticised, its reconstruction rather than its total abandonment is called for (Corbett, 1993). It may be that some types of SEN, especially severe learning difficulties such as severe cases of autism and Down Syndrome, with their associated neurological or genetic aspects might be better addressed with medical expertise. Geneticist Professor Roger Reeves from Johns Hopkins University and his team have recently discovered a breakthrough pharmacological compound that may help those with Down Syndrome improve in cognitive functioning (Laidman, 2014). Although this new compound is subject to further clinical trials, it may offer a more

encouraging prospect than the radical social model approach to SEN that claims disability is entirely socially constructed.

## **6. Special School as A Strategy for Optimum Social Economy and Corporate Discourse**

The on-going corporate discourse in special education is identified by Allan (1999) as the “most significant discourse to develop in the 1990s” (p. 10). It uncritically uses the language of effectiveness, economic benefits, optimum outcomes, strategies, excellence, and standards in the mass media (Fulcher, 1999). Rouse and Florian (1997) identify that legislation and policies have shifted from “the principles of equity, social progress and altruism, to new legislation underpinned by a market-place philosophy based upon principles of academic excellence, choice and competition” (p. 324). Similarly, Terzi (2010) comments that “we were moving rapidly away from the idea of education as an intrinsic good to which all were entitled towards the idea of education as a means of producing an improved economy” (p.18). Although this marketisation of schooling was originally introduced with the intention of improving the quality of education, it might have inadvertently over stressed “survival of the fittest” in a modern society that claims to be equal and fair. Commenting on this view, Dyson (1997) argues that children are bounded within an essentially alienating and indifferent public education system. Cornwall (2002) also criticises the public education system which is, he argues “inherently exclusive” (p. 138), as education in England has historically been “not so much as a right to be enjoyed by all, but more of a privilege for those considered most likely to benefit from it” (Florian et al., 2007, p. 3).

From this viewpoint of corporate discourse, special schools can be seen as a strategic alternative which allows mainstream schools to raise standards and remove “defective and troublesome children” (Tomlinson, 1985, p. 160), so as to ensure the optimum academic results which are often linked to the development of social economy. This “economic imperative to raise educational and skill levels for all” (p. 283) is identified by Tomlinson (2012) as a major rationale for the expansion of special education. It has especially been the case since the 1980s when the UK government declared that only raised standards and better quality in education could shape national prosperity (Organization for Economic Cooperation

and Development [OECD], 1989). This impetus could be clearly seen within the *Education Reform Act 1988* (DfE, 1988), which promoted a system of competition and league tables of academic attainment, with the consequence that a good education became “a prize to be competitively sought, not a democratic right for every child” (Thrupp & Tomlinson, 2005, p. 551). Commenting on this, Norwich (2008) argued that the *Education Reform Act 1988* had a major impact on special education in that it radically altered school governance and provision patterns by adopting market-style reforms and an assessment-oriented NC to raise student attainments. Bines (1995) showed that, overall, this competitive assessment-led schooling system had a segregatory impact, helping to create the necessity of special school provision. In addition, Barton (1997) noted that publishing exam results, creating winners and losers, and encouraging competition in education aggregated the impetus for exclusion and segregation. Addressing this, Cornwall (2002) sharply questioned: “how can there be inclusion within an exclusive, competitive and elitist system that does not recognise the links between poverty, deprivation, social behaviour and learning difficulty?” (p. 135). He continued to argue that the competitive ethos within the public education system had been and was still helping to encourage the removal of those said to be failing (Cornwall, 2002).

However, alongside the criticisms, a strong supportive voice seeking formal acknowledgment of SEN has interestingly emerged, as the corporate discourse also commodifies the label of SEN and makes it a guarantee for additional resources, resulting in a surge in requests for SEN statements in the 1980s (Allan, 1999; Riddell et al., 1994). Ainscow (1991) identified that there was evidence of a dramatic increase in the number of pupils being categorised as having SEN in order for their parents and schools to obtain additional resources. Yet, in recent years, under the pressure of the ever-growing emphasis on resource allocation and value for money, LEAs are increasingly concerned about the tendency for the special education budget to surge out of control (Croll & Moses, 2000). It is estimated that 4.5 times as much is spent on a special school pupil as on a mainstream pupil, and the figure is still rising continuously and dramatically (The Audit Commission, 1992; Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2008).

The expensive cost of special schools hence seems rather ironic if the rationale of their very existence is to optimise social economy. It seems that the initial intent for eagerly promoting economic progress via devising separate educational strategies may have backfired in the long run. By following the *Salamanca Statement*'s appeal for inclusion being most cost-effective (Farrell, 2000; Lindsay, 2007; UNESCO, 1994), LEAs have been attempting to transfer funds from special schools to mainstream by encouraging inclusion. This inadvertently reconfirms that educational priority is placed on the mainstream education that is seen as the driving force for social economy. Therefore, unless the public education system adjusts its headstrong prioritisation on competition and assessment-led elitism in the mainstream, the entire inclusion rhetoric may as well sound just like a glory-veiled hypocrisy that in its most stripped form may be purely about the political and economical interest of the government rather than the rights and needs of the individual child.

## **7. Conclusion and Implications**

Having explored special school provision from different theoretical perspectives, it can be seen that the nature of special schools can be understood as a result of disciplinary exclusion, a "charity," an "expert," and a strategy for optimum social economy. It is then clear to see that the condemnation of segregation and discrimination targeted at special schools may lack rigor and fairness, as this analysis shows that it is the whole education system that is heavily laden with disciplinary control, prescribed standards, rigid institutional boundaries, and academic competition that create exclusivity. As Tomlinson (2012) notes, the reality of the current education system is never so much "oriented towards a common good but continues to be based on sectional, social and political interests" (p. 276). Therefore, it can be concluded that although the existence of special schools may be seen as an institutional expression of segregation and discrimination in education, the root of the problem rests with an education system that is insensitive and inflexible to diversity (Robinson, 2013).

As a way forward towards education for all, the question which has to be answered is not simply "which form of schooling is better?" but rather "how do we want to live with each

other?” Special schools or mainstream schools, the common goal is a better education for all children, regardless of individual differences. One of the possible solutions is a more flexible system with more choices where special and mainstream schools cooperate towards this common goal. Academics (e.g., Allan & Brown, 2001; Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; Lindsay, 2007; O’Keefe, 2004) observe that many special schools are increasingly seen as a valuable resource in the sense that they can offer individual students specialised support, share their expertise with mainstream schools, and develop link or outreach programmes in cooperation with mainstream schools where pupils have access to both forms of provision. Studies (e.g., Frederickson et al., 2004; Gibb et al., 2007) have found good examples of such collaboration where some children with SEN from special schools are also successfully included in mainstream schools on a part-time or full-time basis. This change reinforces the notion of diversity in the educational apparatus. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the UK government has recognised the demand for a more flexible and diverse education system, encouraging a diversity policy in educational provisions where collaboration and sharing between schools are promoted (DfES, 2001b). This has signalled the way forward: what is needed today is the development of an education system that features flexibility, diversity and collaboration between schools across various educational service providers. After all, as Cooper and Jacobs (2011) reiterate, the diversity of SEN can only be fully met with a diversity of education provision.

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