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Special Education Needs Edition

Editorial

For edition 134 of Education Politics I have chosen to look at how the education system functions for children and young people with SEND. The SEND system has been through significant reform in recent years, and the consequences of this reform, as well as wider education reform have come under the spotlight in recent months.

The introduction of the 2014 SEND Code of Practice (CoP) made some powerful promises to children and young people with SEND and their families. The new reform would introduce a culture of co-production where the SEND provision was personalised and each child would be supported to achieve their potential. The reforms are highly aspirational, with preparation for an independent adulthood a key focus of the new Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). These warm promises and aspirations have not been matched by sufficient investment from the Government. This means that education professionals delivering SEND provision often have their hands tied with inadequate training, resources and unmanageable workloads getting in the way of delivering the promises made by the SEND CoP.

There are not enough places in special schools to match the growing demand (a major trend in recent years has been a move toward pupils with EHCPs to attend special schools rather than mainstream ones), and other reforms and pressures have appeared to undermine rather than promote inclusive practice. Local Authorities, who have many statutory duties relating to SEND, have been placed in a difficult position, with inadequate funding and powers to discharge their duties fully—ensuring that all academies support pupils with SEND adequately is a particular challenge.

The National Curriculum reform appeared to initially forget pupils with SEND altogether. The assumption that every child could progress and learn at the same rate is a nonsense, a nonsense that has condemned some children to permanently “not reach the expected standard”. The Rochford Review sought to extend National Curriculum assessments to include those pupils that can not access the SATs papers, and whilst they serve a purpose are only tinkering within a deeply flawed system. Whilst curriculum levels had many flaws, they were able to track the new learning that all children acquired and offered the flexibility for those with specific difficulties, such as spelling or handwriting, to have that learning recognised. The new system functions as a deficit

model, focused on what children can not do. This sets up many children with SEND for failure and fails to recognise their development and achievements. One consequence of the SEND reforms was that between 2010 and 2017 half a million pupils lost their SEND identification. These children and young people are unlikely to have lost their additional needs, but have lost their entitlement to support. The funding crisis hitting schools and colleges has already had a huge impact on the quality of provision available to children and young people with SEND. The Chancellor’s failure to commit meaningful additional money to the education system in the Budget will inevitably make it even harder to schools and colleges to maintain their existing offer. Support staff, who play such a crucial role in delivering SEND support, are often the first staff to go when funding cuts lead to redundancies. At the time of writing this editorial the BBC have been running a series of daily features highlighting the challenges faced by children with SEND and their families. Tales of parents being forced to home educate their children due to illegal exclusion or a lack of special school spaces, and the fights many parents have to take through the tribunal process to have SEND identified and the then provision adequately funded should be a national disgrace. Education DataLab have highlighted the scandal of “off-rolling”, making pupils who are not data lucrative disappear from schools in year 11 before GCSEs. Whilst the practice is not limited to academies the prevalence of the practice raises serious questions about the toxic consequences of high stakes school accountability measures that focus on narrow attainment data. Given that pupils with SEND are likely to attain lower progress scores than pupils without SEND, the new progress measures may not help address this practice and might even make it worse.

In this edition:

Does Scotland need Teach First?

What is it like to navigate the SEND system? One parent’s experience

How can the system support pupils to Autism Spectrum Conditions?

What should the Nation Education Service offer FE?

Does school accountability work for SEND pupils?

The case for residential special schools.

The experience of one teacher with SEND at primary to secondary transition.

Support Staff Need a Pay Rise!

There are also reports from the 2017 annual Labour Conference and Caroline Benn memorial lecture.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

Anne

Education Policy Update

The Government finally published their long awaited Mental Health Green Paper, here are some key points:

The government is proposing to commit £310 million in new funding to supporting mental health in young people.

£95 million of the funding will train “senior mental health leads” to work in schools from 2019. These people will be responsible for developing a “whole-school approach” to mental health and wellbeing. The remaining £215 million will pay for new support teams. These will be expected to improve the link between schools and local health services.

Pupils will be taught about mental health and wellbeing in classrooms through the new relationships education and PHSE curriculum.

New research will be commissioned to fill “evidence gaps” across children’s mental health, including a focus on how best to support vulnerable families. There will also be a new working group to look at mental health support for 16- to 25-year-olds.

A four-week waiting time for child and adolescent mental health services will be piloted. Mental health awareness training will be offered to teachers in every primary and secondary school.

On the 4th of December, West Yorkshire Police confirmed that they are investigating the collapsed Wakefield City Academies Trust after being contacted by Wakefield Council. The focus of the investigation is thought to center around the funds handed from schools to the trust, and the trust’s refusal to return this money.

Ofsted have published a new Early Years curriculum report called *Bold Beginnings*. This report claims that a third of all 5 year olds are failed by their reception year. The picture for disadvantaged children is even worse, with nearly half of them failing to meet expected levels of development at this unique and vital stage. The report highlights missed opportunities and the consequences of falling behind. The recommendations have proved controversial, with an emphasis on introducing more formal teaching methods causes significant debate in the Early Years community.

In a recent speech, Amanda Spielman (HMCI) said that a “culture of fear” surrounded the Ofsted’s ratings and some school leaders obsess about its judgments. Unease felt by teachers and school leaders about Ofsted was an “enormous challenge” and a myth-busting effort about the inspection system involving all in education to lower the stakes was required. She said: “There are . . . quite a few heads in the system who write blogs that spin up levels of anxiety, so it’s not just the various parts of government, central and local government, there’s also a responsibility in the whole education system to not manufacture tension that shouldn’t be there.”

Performance measures will be updated to recognise T-levels. The Government’s new vocational T-level qualifications will be introduced in 2022 for 16 to 19-year-olds, with funding of £500 million a year.

Ministers say they will modify school and college performance measures to “ensure that students can make an informed choice between technical or academic education in time for the introduction of the first T levels, recognising them as equally valued routes”.

The Government has announced a package of support worth nearly £45 million to provide additional help for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The package of funding announced includes:

£29 million to support councils and their local partners to continue pressing ahead with implementation of the reforms to the SEND system; £9.7 million to establish local supported internship forums, which will create work placements for young people with SEND to provide them with the skills and confidence they need to move into paid work. The funding could also be used to train job coaches, who are vital to the success of supporting those with learning difficulties into paid work; and £4.6 million for Parent Carer Forums, which bring parents together with local decision makers and help to provide them with a voice in the process.

Teach First

We need 'TeachFirst' in Scotland just as much as we need an unqualified teacher workforce. The Scottish system of teacher education is a good one and is highly regarded in other countries but has suffered to attract students due to the damage caused by systematic education cuts over the last ten years.

Scotland needs to learn the lessons from the English system. The Westminster Government has attempted to fill teacher vacancies by the use of a graduate teacher programme. This 'on the job' training called 'TeachDirect' with graduates paid as an unqualified teacher on £16,626. TeachFirst has been a provider of teachers since 2002 and uses a two-year programme, but with a six week condensed course in the summer with graduates paid as unqualified in year one and as a qualified teacher with a salary of £22,917 in year two. The consequence of this programme has seen 23% of new teachers having left the profession since 2011. Over half of the teacher workforce (52%) have less than 10 years' teaching experience. The impact upon standards cannot be underestimated with one in five maths teachers being non-specialist.

But what is 'TeachFirst'? It is a registered charity with HRH The Prince of Wales as the Patron. It is "working towards a day when no child's success is limited by their socio-economic background". This is no different to any local authority in Scotland. But TeachFirst 2016 accounts show an income of £64m of which £4m came from donations the remainder was public money laundered through various government agencies. TeachFirst does not have a workforce of volunteers doing 'good work' but had a workforce of 521 full-time equivalents of employees. £24m was spent on 'key management personnel'. Twenty-one of whom earned more than £60,000, five more earned more than £100,000 and a chief executive earning more than £160,000. Since 2002 TeachFirst has placed 10,000 people into schools. But TeachFirst provided 1441 unqualified teachers for schools last year despite a target of 1750.

TeachFirst played a part in breaking the English teacher training system by appearing to focus



on teacher shortages in deprived areas. The government of the day was desperate to find a quick solution and TeachFirst appeared to be the answer by providing highly qualified graduates into teaching posts, with the support of big corporation 'partners'. These partners saw the opportunity for good work experience for future employees who were allowed to defer starting with them for two years. However, TeachFirst was used by government in reality to allow public money to be channeled into a 'glorified recruitment agency' with a charitable status.

The children who need the most experienced and highly trained teachers get the most inexperienced and less trained unqualified teacher. The number of teachers who remain in the system after this form of introduction is difficult to find but anecdotal comments from headteachers in London is that they don't stay very long.

The Scottish government needs to invest in its current teacher workforce with better conditions, significantly higher salaries and a rewarding and motivational career structure. It is better to keep the teachers we have and entice back those who have left than to be constantly looking for quick fixes. The government needs to find the resources and puts it to good use instead of giving valuable public resources to a recruitment agency. I fear with the pressure to find a quick solution and pressure from HRH The Prince of Wales it may bend. That would be a sad day for teachers in Scotland and more importantly our children who only get one chance.

Seamus Searson
General Secretary SSTA

Labour Party Conference Report – September 2017

The conference was conducted in a very positive and enthusiastic climate, following the second election of Jeremy Corbyn with an increased majority and following Labour's excellent performance at the general election.

The main conference hall was always packed and during every debate there were large numbers of speakers from the floor, some who spoke two or three times. Some shadow ministers' speeches had been cancelled in order to facilitate more delegates and visitors to speak.

Jeremy Corbyn's speech has been extensively covered in the media. It was by far the best of the three that I have seen – confident, wide-ranging and delivered very much in the style of a Prime Minister in waiting.

Angela Rayner, however, appeared to be the darling of the conference since her name lent itself very readily to the musical refrain, 'Oh Angela Rayner'. She outlined Labour's commitment to a National Education Service to provide education from the cradle to the grave. She pledged £500 million a year for Sure Start and free high quality education for all 2-4 year olds. She praised the parents, teachers, governors and Labour Party members for the excellent anti cuts campaign but made it clear that 88% of schools will still face cuts in real terms funding, hitting the most disadvantaged areas hardest. She said Labour would end the public sector pay cap and provide greater support for teaching assistants and other support staff. Angela pledged £8 billion for new school buildings, £13 billion for upgrading existing schools, bringing an end to the wastage of £ millions on the 'inefficient free schools programme'. She pledged £1 billion for further

education to deliver 'gold standard T levels' and further develop workplace education.

There was no reference to bringing an end to grammar schools or to bringing academies and 'free schools' back under democratic accountability of local authorities. The National Policy Forum (NPF) document stating that 'Labour's policy should be about raising standards in all schools regardless of type' was moved for a reference back in an excellent speech by a delegate from Colne Valley since it automatically assumes that Labour has unquestioningly accepted the existence of academies and 'free schools' despite inequity, inefficiency, corruption and lack of democratic accountability represented by these schools. The reference back was overwhelmingly carried by conference so the NPF will need to recast its position on this for next year's conference.

I attended several education Fringe meetings and asked Angela Rayner how she was going to set up a National Education Service when more than half of schools were now run by private academy trusts. I asked her to commit to re-nationalisation of the education service along the lines of John McDonnell's other re-nationalisation pledges.

It was a good conference but Angela Rayner's speech made it clear that there is much for the Socialist Educational Association to do. We must ensure that a Corbyn led Labour government provides us with a genuine socialist programme for education – a debate about private education, the conversion of grammar schools into genuine comprehensive schools, the return of academies and 'free schools' to local democratic accountability and a wide ranging, balanced curriculum that provides all learners with the opportunity to develop all their skills and abilities, academic, cultural and physical.³

Being “The SEND Parent”

I am ‘that’ parent, you know the one. The one who is always raising issues, demanding attention, nagging for appointments, who makes a nuisance of themselves, who seems to have read every book and (thinks they) know more about the system and what their child needs than trained professionals – in other words, the know it all pain in the backside SEND parent. However, for me and many other SEND parents out there, these traits do not come naturally, do not feel comfortable and are not how we would wish to interact with our children’s education, health or care. Becoming ‘that parent’ takes time, commitment, dedication, effort and increasingly, money – all of which are not in universal supply and creates further inequalities in an already deeply flawed system. For every SEND parent who has the Children and Families Act as bedtime reading, can recite the SEN Code of Practice backwards and in three languages, has gained the resilience to deal with every knockback and developed the agility to jump over every administrative hurdle, there are many others who cannot, will not or have given up, exhausted and broken. It’s a battle fought in dense jungle and can feel like your life is stuck in an episode of ‘Extreme Survival’. The impacts of this are felt not only by the children whose needs are not being met and whose futures are in the balance but by the whole education system which is straining to cope with the increasing demands placed upon it. Us SEND parents are first and foremost, ‘only’ ever parents and, unless our career paths overlap, do not have the years of training, skills and experience that teachers, doctors, lawyers, mediators and negotiators have. And yet the current situation often means that we need to be all of these things and more in order to navigate the system. This is on top of educating ourselves about the particular disability or learning difference that our child has and how to meet their needs. Despite the mantra about “trusting your instincts”, in my experience not much about having a child with complex needs is intuitive or instinctive. Working with the SEND system often feels like a war of attrition where every small step forward is met with another three steps back and where the goalposts are constantly being changed and new obstacles added. It feels as though it is designed to frustrate all who need to interact with it and yet, the principle is a very simple one – that all children and young people with SEND are entitled to an education that is appropriate to their needs, promotes high standards and enables them to fulfil their potential. Who would want to argue with that?

From my reading and understanding of the legislation concerning SEND in education, the intent is good, there

is adequate discussion of the obligations of institutions and the recently increased focus on involving the child and parents in the process is right. Of course, there is always room for improvement but if we could experience the law as it is currently intended, that would be a great improvement from where we currently are. However, as in so many instances of policy intent and policy delivery, the gap between the two is vast and ever growing. There is a fundamental mismatch of objectives and drivers between National SEND education policy and local education policy, where one is about increasing educational outcomes and, from a parent’s perspective, the other a purely academic exercise in making the finances work and is designed to block access.

In a recent discussion, a representative of a local education authority has likened the need to make adequate provision of services to the need to have a library - but have no books in it. Education Services in my local borough have now been ‘spun out’ to a recently established private limited company, who holds all schools’ Dedicated Schools’ Grant (DSG) and whose latest model is to ration access to services, such as Educational Psychology , on a first come first served basis. In the health arena , it has also been proclaimed that for the size and demographic of my Borough, there are ‘too many’ children with autism diagnoses so to solve this ‘problem’ the CCG has proposed that access to diagnosis is restricted. Too much demand and not enough supply, so let’s restrict supply – as if disability is a free market commodity. After some local campaigning, the proposal is currently under review and it is hoped that the desire to work together with local parents and stakeholders in co-designing a diagnostic pathway is now established (watch this space); however, the reasoning has been made and serves to highlight the thought process that is going into the whole SEND system at a local level. We all know how local authority budgets have been slashed and that, like the W1A initiative “More of less”, many LAs are struggling to deliver even basic statutory services within severely compromised budgets (so perhaps “Less of Less” is a more appropriate descriptor) but this still does not excuse poor and badly evidenced decision making and disregard for the law.

It has been a fairly long journey for my son from identification of needs to provision of support but our story is by no means uncommon. He was first referred to CAMHS at the age of two and following many repeated concerns and multiple re- referrals, received a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder at age 7, following his suicide ideation. He is also dyslexic and has significant sensory processing difficulties, both

diagnoses which we had to pursue on a private basis. He is now in year 6 and an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has been issued this summer, just before his transition to secondary school, following multiple appeals and an aborted SEND Tribunal case. We are now hoping that he will receive one of only a handful of placements in an ASD base within a mainstream school that are available across our borough, which, if he does, will feel like finding Willy Wonka's Golden ticket. He is among the minority of SEND children who need an EHCP and while his needs are not so very complex and can be largely accommodated within a mainstream setting with appropriate support however we, his parents, his educators and most importantly, him, have to fight every single step of the way just for him to access his right to a level playing field with his peers, which is his right. At the risk of sounding crass and callous, if you didn't have fragile mental health at the start, you may well have by dint of interacting with the system.

Two recent reports have been published which draw stark attention to the poor application of SEND policy. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman published a report "Education, Health and Care plans, our first 100 investigations" in October 2017 which concludes that "... families have to push, persist, and go well beyond the call of duty just to confirm the type of support they should receive, and to get it provided. It can be tough enough for these families, without the disproportionate burden of having to fight the educational system just to get the support to which they are entitled". Another, the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted report into "Local Area Inspections, One Year On" reporting on how well the SEND Code of Practice is being delivered in 30 local areas is another damning report of the current state of affairs. A common finding was that children and young people with SEND were found to have a much poorer experience of the education system than their peers. These are just the tip of the iceberg. My experience and that of many of my fellow SEND parents confirms and elaborates on the findings in both these reports.

But what is going to happen as a result? Where's the accountability? The buck is passed from pillar to post – schools refer to the LA, the LA blames the government, the government blame the LA, the LA puts it back to the school to meet needs 'within existing resources'. Whilst this circular debate is going on those SEND needs are not being met, which widens the gap and increases the level of necessary interventions and cost. As Co-Chair of a local National Autistic Society Branch, which I run in my 'spare time' with other parents, we see many stories where SEND families are being constantly failed. In many cases, it is all too obvious that a little early intervention and appropriate support via targeted input could make the world of



difference to the child or young person and would also save the system millions of pounds in much more costly interventions when the child, and their family, arrive at crisis point. Due to the removal of all sorts of statutory and non-statutory Special Needs support in our borough including staffing cuts to the local Independent Parent Partnership team, membership of our volunteer led group has soared to over 500 families and is growing rapidly. We receive referrals from GP surgeries, Job Centers, Social Workers and SENCOs for services which we do not and cannot deliver, which is not appropriate, adequate or fair to those young people and their families who find themselves with nowhere to turn.

With increasing restriction of access to diagnostic pathways, reduction in the willingness of Local Authorities to carry out assessments of SEND let alone issue EHCPs, limitation of access to schools of specialist advisory services and therapies the responsibility falls increasingly on to schools and teachers who do not have the training or resources to deal with increasingly complex SEND needs within mainstream settings.

The impact this has on teacher workload and stress is huge as is the impact on all children and young people within the settings, not just those with SEND and it will continue to grow whilst education cuts hit ever harder. Becoming 'that parent' is often the only way to work with the system and to try to give our SEND children an opportunity to access the rights they are entitled to but there are never any guarantees or assurances. There is no fairness in the system, only survival of the fittest. It's a jungle out there.

Roberta Fusco

A National Education Service for FE?

Each year my students make amazing progress, achieve fantastic results and progress to worthwhile jobs, careers and higher education courses. I have had students go on to study Law at the University of York, Midwifery at the University of East Anglia and Children's Nursing at King's College London. Former students are now Social Workers, Primary School Teachers, Youth Justice Workers and Paramedics.

Yet, each year these students are missed out of the headlines. They aren't seen jumping for joy on newspaper front pages in August because they studied a Btec Extended Diploma or an OCR Cambridge Technical.

Each year I have students who struggle against adversity, poverty, family breakdown, bereavement and health issues. These students battle against external forces, previous education experiences and against all odds increase their attendance at college, achieve an excellent level 2 qualification and go on to work in social care, progress onto an apprenticeship or go on study a level 3 qualification.

They do this each year despite challenging personal circumstances, often a hatred of 'school' and the ever present label that they are an educational failure at the age of 16 because of the way we currently measure success.

As a teacher of a vocational subject I strongly believe we have got to value all qualifications and education sectors equally. As a trade union leader I have to question why successive Governments have had a problem with Post 16 Education? Why is there such disparity of esteem between vocational qualifications and A Levels? Why has it been de-professionalised, underfunded, undervalued and even at one point exiled from the Department of Education? I have to question if there is actually a problem with FE? And if there is are they trying to solve the right one?

I think the problem is too many people, including those in education and politics, don't



know what exists outside of their own experience of A Levels. Those in power often don't seem too bothered about finding out what we do, but see FE as something that needs "fixing". A section of society that needs something 'doing to it'. A something to be fiddled and meddled with.

As a sector it isn't perfect, it has suffered decades of gross neglect and underfunding without significant investment we risk funding FE at the same level as the 1980's. Successive governments of different political hues have inflicted ridiculous amounts of curriculum change. But it isn't completely broken.

I have been teaching in the Post 16 sector for all of my teaching career, mainly in a general FE college but I have also taught in a school based 6th form. I currently work at an inclusive 6th Form College teaching OCR Cambridge Technicals an applied vocational qualification in Health Studies, Social Care and Early Years. Like many teachers in FE teaching is my second career having spent many years in Youth Work and the Probation Service. I work in a department with a former Midwife, Community Psychiatric Nurse and Research Scientist. This is not unusual and

will be replicated throughout the land in different FE colleges and departments. Engineers teaching engineering, Performers teaching Performing Arts, practicing Photographers and Artists teaching Film, Photography and Textile Design. Local FE colleges are training Chefs, Hairdressers and Mechanics all with input from local industries and professionals.

After years of testing and a tough exam regime students get to learn from passionate teachers with industry experience. They learn knowledge *and* skills, demonstrate how they apply their knowledge and understanding in the workplace and academically through rigorous coursework.

Qualifications similar to the one I teach have been around for over 30 years and yet EVERY year at year 11 advice and guidance time I have to explain to young people, parents and schools that yes, a level 3 equivalent to A level and yes, universities and employers recognise them, I also find myself explaining their very existence.

Career and course advice and guidance has got worse since my time at school, worse in my time working in education. If young people are to get the Post 16 education and life chances they deserve we need a commitment that the National Education Service will address this.

We need a commitment that the National Education Service will be built upon a skills based curriculum and not a continuation of the knowledge based exam factory that burns out young people and teachers, is purely about teaching to the test and is devoid of critical thinking, exploration or simply the love of learning.

Too often politicians, reformers and commentators complain that the qualification system is too complicated in vocational education. I believe there is a genuine and legitimate reason for this. The industrial world is complicated! We need skills training and qualifications that reflect that. The skills and

qualifications needed from level 1 to 5 in the hair industry for example cover a technical chemical certificate, health and safety, skin conditions, communication and as well as the artistic elements of design and use of technology. In the same way the Plumber who fits my boiler needs significantly different skills and training to the Heating and Venting technician fitting the air conditioning system in the new office block.

We have an obsession that everyone needs to leave with a level 3 qualification. Good level 2 qualifications followed by excellent on the job training in the form of real apprenticeships, with FE colleges involved in that delivery can enable young people to achieve industry specific qualifications at appropriate levels.

We need the National Education Service to recognise the contribution already being made by post 16 education. Involve the professionals in any development of T Levels or other new qualifications.

As a society we have got to value skills development and the whole range of qualifications open to young people and adult learners. We have got to value all qualifications.

We need more people like Eben Upton, the inventor of the Raspberry Pi, to speak out about how much he values ALL of his qualifications. Because whilst he is very proud of his 4 degrees from Cambridge University, the one qualification he knows he wouldn't have got where he was today without is his RSA Typing qualification. That's the qualification he uses EVERYDAY!

The National Education System has to value all aspects of education and learning. FE Colleges, teachers, lecturers and the National Education Union should be seen as major contributors to the development of that system.

Niamh Sweeny is President of the ATL Section of the National Education Union

Are Good Intentions Good enough?

The Department of Education asked Dame Christine Lenehan, Director of The Council for Disabled Children and Mark Geraghty, Chief Executive of the Seashell Trust to review residential special schools and colleges, *Good Intentions, Good Enough?* was published in November. Among its recommendations for improvements across the system is “need clearer commissioning process for local authorities”. One key finding is that ‘local authorities don’t commission residential schools, they shop for them’. This, they say, “is not good enough and shows how these children can be undervalued.” The report concludes: “Some residential special schools seemed professionally isolated, with weak networks inhibiting the sharing of good practice and learning from bad practice.” For young people who have autism, autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and Asperger’s syndrome this could be a minefield. Will the good intentions be good enough?

Autism: being parachuted into a desolate country where you cannot understand the language

Someone once said to me that having autism is like being parachuted into a desolate country where you cannot understand the language and everyone you meet yells and screams at you. Insightful practice in working with young people who have autism, autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and Asperger’s syndrome depends heavily on the successful negotiation and exploration of communication links with those young people in their educational and broader engagement settings and contexts. This is at the heart of the challenge faced by SEN providers and practitioners and will be crucial if the improvements across the system are to be successful and understood.

What causes autism?

The exact cause of autism is not known, but research has pointed to several possible factors, including genetics (heredity) and environmental

factors. Studies strongly suggest that some people have a genetic predisposition to autism, meaning that a susceptibility to develop the condition may be passed on from parents to children. Researchers are looking for clues about which genes contribute to this increased vulnerability. In some children, environmental factors may also play a role. Studies of people with autism have found abnormalities in several regions of the brain, which suggest that autism results from a disruption of early brain development while still in the uterus. Other theories suggest that the body’s immune system may inappropriately produce antibodies that attack the brains of children causing autism. Abnormalities in brain structures cause autistic behaviour. Children with autism have abnormal timing of the growth of their brains. Early in childhood, the brains of autistic children grow faster and larger than those of children without autism. Later, when the brains of children without autism get bigger and better organised, autistic children’s brains grow more slowly.

Social disconnect

With onset in the first years of life, autism presents as a disorder of profound social disconnect rooted in early brain development. A child with autism may appear unaware of their surroundings. They may also fail to respond to the sights and sounds of a social world. Often, with limited speech and language skills, the child follows a different development pattern compared to other children in the same age group. They may have difficulty playing with other children and making friends. The child may engage in restricted, repetitive behaviour that can be hard to understand.

Communication is governed to some extent by the need to understand what is meant by the concept of autism and ASD in its clinical features and diagnostic criteria. There is also a need to understand the relationship between autism and learning disabilities; the range of difficulties that

The Case for Residential Special Schools

can stem from autism, ASD and Asperger's syndrome and the emotional and social aspects of autism that add complexity to the already complex nature. It is only then that we can begin to communicate effectively with someone who has autism and support them. Otherwise, they are likely to remain stranded and isolated in that desolate country.

Autism and learning disabilities

There is no proven link between autism and learning difficulty and disability; however, two-thirds of those on the ASD spectrum do have a learning disability. These commonly lead to problems with deficiencies in adaptive skills, communication, social skills, sensorimotor skills, deficiencies in general cognitive abilities, attention to stimuli, short-term memory deficits, processing and language. A range of social problems and accompanying language and communication issues, coupled with the potential for good intentions not to be good enough mean that children with autism might end up being prisoners in that desolate country. Ian Duckett is Deputy at Acorn Park School in Norfolk and a member of the SEA's National Executive



In recent months there has, rightly, been a focus on mainstream schools who illegally exclude pupils with SEND. Many of these pupils possibly could thrive in mainstream settings with the right support, and it is correct that schools that are acting unethically are challenged on this practice. There are, however, some pupils that will never be happiest in mainstream and require a different kind of provision to achieve their full potential. There are those that believe that every school should be able to cater for every child, but frankly the current system cannot deliver this.

On visiting a residential special school recently, I was shocked to learn that every pupil at the school had experienced formal exclusion prior to securing a place at the school. Exclusion essentially functioned as a gateway to accessing adequate provision, the final piece of evidence that . These pupils had to endure the trauma of rejection from mainstream settings, before being allowed to access a school that could offer a welcoming and safe environment. This trauma had to be worked through and trust in the education system rebuilt with every child before they could relax and thrive at school.

When a child has the best chance of success and happiness in a residential setting why are these placements treated as a the "last resort"? How can we make sure that every child can access the best provision for them without needing to experience exclusion or other "academic trauma"?

Yes, a residential placement costs more than a place in either a day special school or in a mainstream setting. But, getting the right support to a young person that equips them to enter adulthood ready to live happily and make a positive contribution is an investment in that young person and wider society.

As the spotlight has turned in recent months, rightly, on those mainstream schools that appear to be pushing pupils with SEND out, let's remember that not every child can thrive in mainstream and there must be high quality alternatives. If the destination is still reached, maybe we should accept that there are different ways of taking the journey?

Anne Heavey

Caroline Benn

Memorial Lecture 2017

Report from John Bolt

If there was one killer statistic in Rebecca Allen's Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture, it was that teachers are now working an hour a day longer than they did ten years ago. That is something that everyone needs to really reflect on we face up to the crisis in teacher recruitment, retention and morale.

The title of Dr Allen's lecture was "Making Teaching a job worth doing(again)". It was delivered, as is now traditional, in a crowded House of Commons committee room presided over by Melissa Benn, daughter of Tony and Caroline, and of course a formidable campaigner in her own right.

The core of the argument in the lecture was that workload has been driven by two fundamental features of the current school system. One is the constant stream of initiatives and changes driven by politicians working to an electoral timetable rather than an educational one. Then other is the high stakes accountability regime that now dominates so many schools.

Dr Allen argued that there is now a fundamental lack of trust in the school system. There has to be a detailed paper trail to prove the learning is taking place and pupils are making progress. It's from that necessity that absurdly elaborate marking requirements and constant demands for data and intervention come.

At the heart of this is the Ofsted process and as Dr Allen pointed out, short no notice inspections mean that data counts for even more and schools have to be ready at any time. So there is no let-up in the demand for more and more so-called evidence. But arguably, Ofsted are themselves just reflecting flawed assumptions that are baked into our current thinking.

Our school system is now on threats and coercion. At every level, jobs are on the line and so is the reputation of the institution. As a result, Rebecca Allen argued, a herd mentality develops. If a school does what everyone else does, it's harder to criticise it. Those happy to conform to the received wisdom rise to the top and innovators and original thinkers are selected out. This applies at headship level but also in

the classroom. It can be argued that years of central prescription have deskilled the profession in important ways.

One slightly more provocative thought was that, under the Labour government, more money led to more managers who had the time to create more and more elaborate systems of checking and monitoring. Not an argument for lower budgets but a warning that there is a huge temptation for managers to prioritise more management as the answer to all problems.

Dr Allen argued that the accountability regime is not just burdensome – it is also ineffective in helping teachers to teach better and pupils to learn better. She quoted Dylan William as describing marking as "the most expensive public relations exercise in history". She also contended that there are so much simpler ways of identifying issues that need to be addressed – whether its individual pupils who need support or teachers who are underperforming.

After analysing the problems, Dr Allen turned to offer some solutions all of which would require us to rethink some basic aspects of our current system. They included:

- Legislation to require a 4 year lead in to any major change in curriculum or exams.
- A new contract for teachers that sets working hours in relation to the whole job – not just directed time.
- Ofsted to rethink expectations about what constitutes evidence of effectiveness

But fundamentally change will need to be led by school leaders who need to be brave enough to develop a different kind of culture in schools. Dr Allen said that "I don't think for a moment that school leaders enjoy doing the job the way they do right now. I think they'd prefer to trust their staff to get on with their jobs and concentrate on supporting the professional growth of colleagues.

The lecture amounted to a fundamental challenge to many of the assumptions that have driven the school system under governments of both parties. Turning the oil tanker round will be hard and will take time. But if we don't listen to the teachers who are saying this is no longer a job worth doing, the future is surely bleak.

The full text of the lecture is available at <https://sosedassoc.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/caroline-benn-lecture-2017-by-rebecca-allen.pdf>

Where it all went wrong for me—Key Stage 3

I am a primary school teacher, I've been teaching for 4 years now. I am a teacher with SEND, and I want to tell you my story about being a pupil with SEND. I was diagnosed with Autism and Dyslexia when I was in primary school. My primary school was great – my teachers understood my individual needs and helped me to feel safe and learn well. They helped me to develop strategies to cope with the school routine, express myself when I was feeling uncomfortable and find ways to work through my difficulties with spelling, reading and handwriting. I had lots of friends and when I did have meltdowns I was treated kindly by staff who helped me to calm down and get back into learning.

Unfortunately, it all went a bit wrong. Moving to secondary school was very difficult for me because everything changed.

In primary I had one teacher, one classroom and one set of rules and routines and although it wasn't always easy I was ok. I could learn in lessons and felt like the teachers and teaching assistants understood me as a person, not just the labels I had.

Travelling to school on my own was ok when I was in primary school, in fact I felt really proud to walk to school on my own from year 4. I found the journey to secondary school really hard though, because I had to walk, get a bus, then a train and then walk again. So many things could go wrong! I found delays and cancellations very stressful and the cramped bus and train very overwhelming. This meant I always arrived at school stressed and exhausted—I was not ready to learn! I couldn't find a quiet place to calm down, and didn't know how to ask for one.

I don't know if anyone, apart from my mum, told the secondary school that I have Autism and Dyslexia, but my class teachers and form tutor definitely didn't seem to know. I didn't want to let my mum down either, so tried to keep my stress hidden from her. I didn't want her to think that I

had failed. I wish someone at school had been looking out for me from day one.

I went from a nurturing environment, to one where I was on my own and felt lost and alone. Keeping on top of my timetable was really hard, and I struggled to understand why each teacher had different expectations for behaviour and running the classroom. I often got frustrated, fell behind with my work and started to find excuses to stay off school or miss lessons. I spent a lot of time in detentions for not doing my homework, arriving late to class or blurting out. It wasn't until the SENCo got involved in year 8 that things started to get better, but by this point I was already in lower sets for maths and English and had really lost confidence. At primary because my teachers understood my autism and dyslexia I didn't feel that they got in the way at school, whereas at secondary because people didn't understand them they became a real block. Things did get better over time, I got a mentor, sessions to help me develop my social awareness and confidence, and felt that people could see me not just my labels.

Now that I'm a teacher I'm worried about transition from primary to secondary school for children with SEND. I was doing ok in primary school so everyone assumed that I would do ok in secondary school. I thought I would do ok! But, it would have been helpful to have spent time before year 7 learning how the school was laid out, meeting teachers and knowing that the teachers would understand my specific needs. I didn't have a statement, and I worry that whilst transition planning is more likely for pupils with EHCPs, those who have SEN Support might get lost in the system, like I did.

I think that there is a danger in primary school that we focus so much on getting children to the end of primary school, and through the SATs especially, that we forget that they are also moving into the next stage.

The author of this piece wished to remain anonymous. They are a Labour Party member from London.

Accountability and SEND

Some Challenges

Progress measures

Progress is now the leading performance measure for schools, and whilst attainment targets remain, schools have to maintain “good” progress scores to stay above coasting and floor standards. The consequences for failing to do so can be harsh, leaders can lose their jobs and schools can be forcibly converted to academy status or transferred to a new Multi Academy Trust (MAT).

The Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening, has made several significant commitments to lowering the stakes around accountability data and supporting schools to improve working with the current leadership of a school. But, until school performance data is believed to be the start of the professional conversation and supportive improvement process and not the trigger for harsh intervention, the role of league tables in undermining inclusion is likely to remain.

In secondary schools Progress 8 is now the leading headline measure, and in primary schools new progress measures for reading, writing and mathematics have been introduced. The DfE have presented the new primary progress measures as fairer for schools:

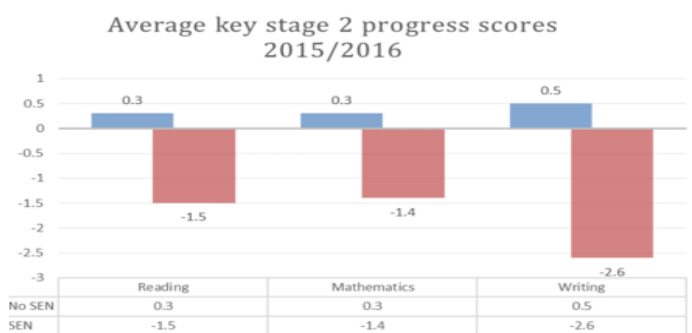
There are 2 main advantages to the new progress measures:

- they are fairer to schools because we can compare pupils with similar starting points to each other
- they recognise the progress schools make with all their pupils, highlighting the best schools whose pupils go furthest, whatever their starting point

The new Progress measures were introduced to be a “fairer measure” but due to their design pupils with SEND have average progress scores significantly lower than pupils without SEND who have the same prior attainment.

Here are the 2015/2016 progress scores for pupils in primary school with and without SEND:

Children with SEND are already likely to receive lower attainment scores than their peers without SEND, last year just 14% achieved the expected standard in reading, writing



and mathematics, at the end of primary school compared to 62% of children without SEND. The progress measure should come in to recognise the development of these pupils and the progress they make, but with average progress scores of -1.5, -2.6 and -1.4 (as shown in the table above) these progress measures are not truly reflecting the achievements of these pupils either. This is due to the design of this progress measure in which the lowest attainment groups include many pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL), as well as those with SEND. Pupils with EAL often make significantly greater progress than their peers without EAL, which distorts the expected progress for pupils with SEND. In this system, expectations are too low for children with EAL, but too high for those with SEND. If the Government presses ahead with the introduction of a new reception baseline assessment then this will entrench these distorted expectations for both EAL and SEND pupils.

Progress 8, the measure used in secondary schools also has design flaws which disadvantage pupils with SEND. Whilst the DfE is now considering the “impact of outliers”, there are real concerns that in their current form progress measures do not promote inclusion. The Progress 8 score for pupils with SEND was -0.55 compared to 0.06 for those with no SEND.

The impact of having a large cohort of pupils with SEND on a school’s progress measures could be significant, and given the high stakes attached to meeting floor and coasting standards, one could understand if school leaders wanted to limit the numbers of pupils with SEND at the school. Whilst this would be unethical, in the current high stakes accountability context, it is not unimaginable.

The need to achieve “good” progress and attainment scores for pupils with SEND can lead to schools putting pupils with SEND through a barrage of “interventions” at the expense of experiencing the full school curriculum. The balance here between delivering personalised SEND support and school accountability support is a fine one, one might reasonably ask who these interventions are actually for - the child or the school?

Financial accountability

Ensuring that Local Authorities and schools are spending money allocated for SEND provision appropriately is reasonable expectation, but this area of accountability is undermined by the fact that there simply is not enough money in the system.

Some of the approaches that Local Authorities use to allocate a tight High Needs pot are opaque, require excessive workload on the part of applicants and fail to recognise the full cost of provision. Banding, matrix and other calculation tools can feel impersonal and remote from the pupil and their parents, whilst “bidding” approaches rely heavily on the staff completing the application to have the knowledge of the pupil and process to secure the right provision. Both approaches can be

problematic, and the sheer variety of methodologies used by Local Authorities to allocate the High Needs budget makes evaluating the fairness and effectiveness of decisions very difficult. The pressure placed on special schools to cut the cost of their services, so that LAs can balance the books, denies children the quality of provision they need and makes retaining suitably qualified staff difficult. Local Authorities often take much of the blame for inadequate resources of SEND provision - but without sufficient funding from central government LAs remain in an extremely difficult position.

One could suggest that the introduction of the new High Needs Funding Formula represents a missed opportunity to address some of the most problematic approaches used across LAs. Introducing a national, or at very least regional, complex needs fund to commission places and provision for pupils with the most complex SEND could serve the dual purpose of allowing LAs to create special school places where they are needed whilst also ensuring that in areas with high demand for residential places the local high needs pot remains available to all those pupils who require it.

SEND funding is not ring fenced, and individual schools do not always outline SEND spend in a transparent way. The expectation that schools should spend up to £6000 from their core budget on each child identified at SEN Support is a disincentive to identifying SEN at a time that school budgets are under significant strain. SENCos are not always sufficiently involved in spending decisions that impact on commissioning SEND provision, and unless they are on the senior leadership are often unable to challenge spending decisions. Understanding how spending decisions around SEND provision are made is essential for genuine accountability, and for holding Local Authorities and Central Government to account for the resources they put into the system.

Tribunals

Tribunals function as a form of accountability, where parents can address concerns and failings in SEND provision. The high success rate for parents (88%) suggests that system is unable to meet the promises laid out in the SEND Code of Practice. Whilst tribunals may be successful in securing better outcomes in individual cases, they are problematic. Bringing a tribunal relies on individual parents having time, knowledge and financial resources, which means that they are inaccessible for many. Speaking to one parent who recently went through the tribunal process, her impression was that the Local Authority viewed tribunals as an additional category of EHCP, EHCP+, accessible only to pupils with parents who can fight to secure necessary provision. Whilst this is arguably an effective approach to managing inadequate resources, requiring parents to fight to secure statutory entitlements goes against all of the principles underpinning the SEND Code of Practice. Arguably the tribunal serves to widen the provision gap between those with cultural capital and those without, as

well as addressing injustices in the system. The tribunal instrument also fails to address system level failings, which means that long term problems are not addressed.

The challenge of holding schools and Local Authorities to account

Schools and Local Authorities are subject to significant accountability for the quality of SEND provision that they offer, but are operating at a time where they lack sufficient resources to deliver the quality and quantity expected.

Schools are facing huge teacher recruitment and retention challenges and experiences considerable financial pressures. Given that high quality SEND provision does involve cost, including on resources, training or additional support and specialist staff, it is understandable that some schools are struggling to deliver the quality of provision expected. Recent reports of schools cutting support staff to balance the books, leaving pupils without necessary support, are alarming and indicative of a system in which too often support staff are seen as expendable, even wasteful. Indeed, the latest DfE financial efficiency benchmarking tool could be seen as encouraging school leaders to focus on reducing support staff when finding savings in the school budget.

Local Authorities, who have significant statutory duties relating to SEND, have faced both severe financial cuts and limitations on their ability to discharge these statutory duties. LAs are unable to intervene in academy schools where concerns are raised about SEND provision, and compromised in part often by the desire to engage academy schools as commercial partners through “buy-back” and “traded services” arrangements. Cuts to LA budgets have also had an impact on the breadth of SEND services offered to schools, as well as capacity to attend meetings and complete EHCPs within statutory deadlines. As a result of rules surrounding the opening of new schools Local Authorities face significant burdens in commissioning special school places, which may explain why the numbers of pupils “awaiting provision” has significantly increased in recent years (2015: 3,438, 2016: 5,414, 2017: 8,304). Whilst these changes to LA powers were not introduced to undermine SEND provision, they have. Giving LAs statutory duties, but not sufficient powers or funding to discharge them is a failing at Governmental level.

The Ofsted and CQC report *Local Area Inspections, One Year On* highlighted significant concerns about the capacity of schools to deliver high quality SEND provision— but who will make sure that improvements are made?

Anne Heavey

School support staff need a pay rise

"I'm a single parent with four children, so obviously my pay looks after my children. I haven't taken my children on holiday for the last three years because I haven't been able to afford it."

GMB school support staff member

Teachers, the headlines say, may finally receive a real pay rise next year. Uncertainty remains, however, over the position of the support staff. All public sector workers have suffered significant real-terms wage cuts, and school support staff have been especially disadvantaged. It is vital Labour continues to campaign until all public sector workers receive the pay rise they need.

Where support staff terms and conditions were tied to local authority wage structures, they endured an additional year of wage freezes after local government employers failed to make a pay offer in 2009/10. They did not receive the £250 increase that was targeted at other low-paid workers during the two years of national pay freezes. Schools have been encouraged to opt out of national pay structures, terms and conditions have been undermined, and the lack of a uniform approach to calculating term-time-only pay has left support staff in some areas hundreds of pounds worse off each year than others on nominally identical wage bands.

Estimated cumulative real-terms wage losses	
Occupation	Real-terms loss 2010 to 2020
Lab Technician	£8,637
Teaching Assistant	£8,868
Library Assistant	£9,042
Cover Supervisor	£9,722
HLTA	£12,492
Library Manager	£13,421
School Business Manager	£14,052

GMB calculations; see www.paypinch.org

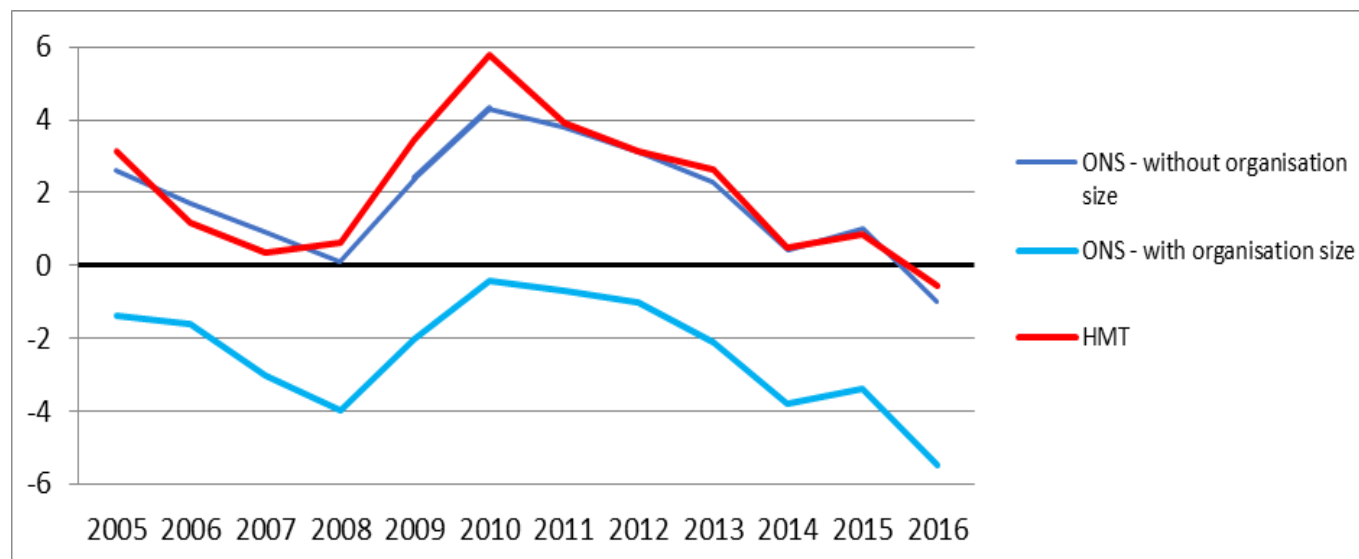
School support staff are poorly paid by any definition. The DfE says that the average teaching assistant earns £19,100 on an FTE basis; the ONS estimates that take-home pay averages about £12,000. According to one-off data released in Parliament, average teaching assistant wages grew by just 2.7 per cent over six years (and TA pay in free schools is about 12 per cent lower than the national average.)

Average FTE Teaching Assistant salaries DfE estimates from the School Workforce Census

	All schools	Free schools
2011	£18,600	~
2012	£18,500	£15,700
2013	£18,700	~
2014	£18,700	£16,500
2015	£18,900	£16,900
2016	£19,100	£16,900
Change 2011 to 2016		
↗ TA pay	2.7%	
↗ CPI	7.8%	
↗ RPI	11.9%	

According to figures obtained by GMB through the Freedom of Information Act, the Treasury itself now estimates that public sector pay has fallen behind comparable private sector rates. The ONS has said that in large organisations (including schools employing more than 250 staff), pay rates are 5.5 per cent lower than in the private sector. As the unemployment rate continues to fall, pay cuts are having a real impact on schools' ability to recruit and retain support staff.

Public/private hourly pay differential for comparable roles – percentages



One of the legacies of Michael Gove's decision to scrap the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) is that there is now a huge evidence gap between teachers and support staff – a gap which the DfE has done nothing to fill. Meaningful data is published on teacher recruitment and retention pressures through both the School Teachers' Pay Review Body and the School Workforce Census; there are no equivalents for support staff. This is one of several reasons why Labour's commitment to restore the SSSNB is so welcome. Data on comparable roles in the NHS and police forces does demonstrate rising turnover rates and falling applications for vacancies, supporting the idea that local examples of schools struggling to recruit and retain are reflective of a national trend.

Real pay rises may now finally be on the horizon for at least some school support staff workers. A two year pay offer has been tabled by local government employers following campaigning by support staff unions and pressure from Labour-led councils. This would raise rates for most support staff above inflation and restore some of the real wages that have been lost during eight years of wage austerity, and set an important benchmark for support staff not covered by the National Joint Council local government pay spine. Important questions remain, however, over funding.

There is a human cost to public sector pay cuts. Our members have reported being driven into debt, into reliance on family financial support, and being unable to afford necessities for their children. This ultimately impacts on children's quality of education, with a disproportionate impact on the SEND and EAL children with whom classroom-based support staff spend most of their time.

School support staff are the hidden professionals of the education system. They perform essential tasks for little recognition and inadequate wages. They urgently need a pay rise – and it is vital that Labour continues to support their cause until all support staff achieve a fair wage.

Laurence Turner
Research and Policy Officer, GMB

Book Review

Neurotribes—Steve Silberman

Our understanding of autism is contested from all sides so an attempt to write a fair-handed history is unusually brave – but Steve Silberman's *Neurotribes* achieves its aim with passion and humanity.

Autism has 'belonged' at various points to the medical profession, parent activists, Hollywood and now, perhaps, to autistic people themselves. All these voices are represented, although the author's sympathies seem to lie predominantly with the last group. Indeed, the unfinished history recounted here of institutionalisation, quack medication and prejudice that has afflicted so many autistic lives forms a powerful case for a social model of disability.

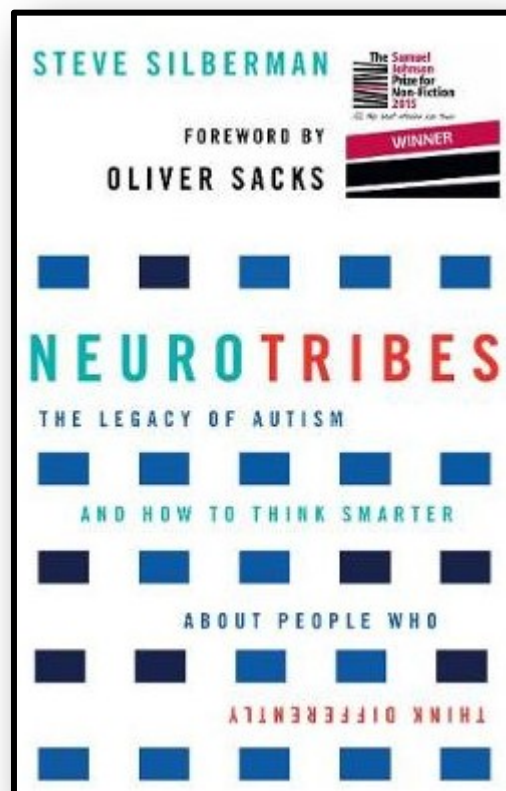
Refreshingly, this book consciously rejects the clinical (or pseudo-clinical) language that still characterises much of the literature on neurodiverse conditions. Indeed, even modern preconditioners may feel challenged by *Neurotribes*. Given that autistic people can reach development milestones such as speech at asymmetric rates, we are asked, is the phrase 'high-functioning' really valid?

If history is the foundation of collective identity then *Neurotribes* performs a valuable service for those who self-identify as autistic. Many will feel a kick of recognition in Hans Asperger's 1930s identification of a broad and 'not at all rare ... continuum,' a breakthrough sadly forgotten in favour of monolithic and limited American models from the 1950s onwards. The parallels between contemporary employment rates at GCHQ, and Asperger's attempts to save the lives of his 'little professors,' who risked death under a regime that systematically murdered disabled people, by suggesting that (in Silberman's words) they 'would make superior code breakers,' are truly striking.

There are small regrets about *Neurotribes*. The duel between the approaches of Leo Kanner and Hans Asperger, though valid as a narrative device, can feel overwrought. This a long and at times imbalanced book: we read a lot about

early to mid-20th century American psychiatry, but disappointingly little about the charlatan Andrew Wakefield and the modern anti-vaccination movement. As Wakefield has found a second lease of life in Trump's coattails (*Neurotribes* was published in August 2015), this is an unfortunate omission.

These few complaints aside, this is a remarkable book. *Neurotribe's* sub-heading – 'the legacy of autism' – looks to the past, but it is really about autistic people's future. The cold and limiting certainties of the last century are being replaced by an acknowledgment of the diversity of autism and how much we are still to learn about the autistic spectrum. The view of autism that is emerging is less prescriptive, more individual, and more human. This is a book that all people interested in neurodiversity should read.



A National Education Service - 10 Principles, as announced at Labour Conference 2017

- 1 Education has intrinsic value in giving all people access to the common body of knowledge we share, and practical value in allowing all to participate fully in our society. These principles shall guide the National Education Service.
- 2 The National Education Service shall provide education that is free at the point of use, available universally and throughout life.
- 3 The National Education Service provides education for the public good and all providers within the National Education Service shall be bound by the principles of this charter.
- 4 High-quality education is essential to a strong and inclusive society and economy, so the National Education Service shall work alongside the health, sustainability, and industrial policies set by a democratically elected government.
- 5 Every child, and adult, matters, so the National Education Service will be committed to tackling all barriers to learning and providing high-quality education for all.
- 6 All areas of skill and learning deserve respect. The National Education Service will provide all forms of education, integrating academic, technical and other forms of learning within and outside of educational institutions, and treating all with equal respect.
- 7 Educational excellence is best-achieved through collaboration. The National Education Service will be structured to encourage and enhance cooperation across boundaries and sectors.
- 8 The National Education Service shall be accountable to the public, communities, and parents and children that it serves. Schools, colleges, and other public institutions within the National Education Service should be rooted in their communities, with parents and communities empowered, via appropriate democratic means, to influence change where it is needed and ensure that the education system meets their needs. The appropriate democratic authority will set, monitor and allocate resources, ensuring that they meet the rights, roles, and responsibilities of individuals and institutions.
- 9 The National Education Service aspires to the highest standards of excellence and professionalism. Educators and all other staff will be valued as highly-skilled professionals, and appropriate accountability will be balanced against giving genuine freedom of judgement and innovation. The National Education Service shall draw on evidence and international best practice, and provide appropriate professional development and training.
- 10 The National Education Service must have the utmost regard for the wellbeing of learners and educators. Its policies and practices – particularly regarding workload, assessment and inspection – will support the emotional, social and physical wellbeing of students and staff.

Correspondence

Dear Editor,

May I add my congratulations to Martin Johnson for his editorship of Education Politics and wish him all the best for his future endeavours. Please allow me to make some comment on a 'A National Education Service' as a proposal by the Labour Party for the next election manifesto. The attempt to get some kudos for the term from the huge esteem the NHS is held in by the people of our country is understandable. As is the point that we should have a coherent education system. However, so far there has been no indication that there will be a national coherent system. What about Grammar schools? (What about independent schools though I recognise this may be a hot potato too far at this stage?) And of course, what to do about academies and free schools, which I note were not directly mentioned in the last issue. For the NHS, a large problem is the shortage and cuts in funding, but the biggest problem is the large and growing scale of the provision of its services by private companies covered up under NHS branding. In education, we have faced the same privatising process which is still increasing despite the victory on stopping all schools being academised in one fell swoop by Nicky Morgan in 2016. Labour must have an unequivocal election policy of ending the fragmentation and privatisation of education. I am not surprised that the section on education got referred back by a large majority at the Labour Party conference. It did not state that the academy and free school programme must be ended and that schools handed over to the privateers should be taken back into local and democratic control. There is no need to invent a new system or a more remote regional system. We already have local democratically elected bodies. Bring back LEAs. If they wish to work together, as with the previous peerless ILEA abolished by Thatcher, so be it. A National Education Service must be thoroughly democratic at its base. If not, what might happen, should the Tories unfortunately be elected sometime in the future, with command of a centralised National Education system bent to the will and diktats of neoliberal capital rather than serving the interest of the many rather than the few.

Hank Roberts, National Education Union ATL section Executive & Joint Executive Council

Forthcoming events

SEA Meetings for 2017-18

Finance and General Purposes at 11.00; Executive at 12.15;
Members' meeting open to all SEA members 2.00 pm

Sat 13th January	Birmingham
Sat 10th March	Manchester
Sat 12th May	Cardiff

Inaugural Meeting of Greater Manchester SEA Branch — 30th January

For further information about the event please contact Naomi Fearon
missnaomifearon@gmail.com and Debbie Burton (debbieburton_1999@yahoo.co.uk).

SEA Annual Conference

This will be held on Saturday 23rd June in London. It will be followed on Sun 24th by the first meeting of the 2018-19 SEA Executive.



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