

## What Works in Inclusive Education? – Summary

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### ***The 'What Works?' series***

Some ways of dealing with problems work better than others. Every child has the right to expect that professionals intervening in their lives will do so on the basis of the best available knowledge. But the majority of interventions in social care are not evaluated before they are introduced. In that sense, much of the work done with children is an uncontrolled experiment.

Barnardo's has a special interest in evidence-based practice, that is, finding out what works, and ensuring that the interventions we and others make in children's lives are as good as they possibly can be.

As Roy Parker and his colleagues have pointed out:

*'A hundred years ago, the benefits of providing separate care for deprived and disadvantaged children were thought to be self evident. It has since become increasingly apparent that unless outcomes in childcare can be adequately measured, we have no means of justifying the actions of social workers, which may have far reaching and permanent consequences for individuals.'*

Qualitative work, and user studies, for which the UK has a good record, are important in understanding the processes which enable interventions to work well, and understand what service users most value. They do not, however, help us to know what interventions work best, or why.

In order to understand cause and effect - the relationship between a particular intervention and an outcome - randomised controlled trials are important. RCTs in the UK and North America include studies of day care, home visits, accident prevention, and other early childhood interventions.

The cohort studies, such as the National Child Development Study (NCDS) enable us to see who does well after a poor start in life, and understand what factors may lead to resilience.

Barnardo's What Works reports draw on a range of research designs and evaluations which suggest that particular interventions are worthwhile.

### ***This report in brief***

Inclusive Education is a process involving changes in the way schools are organised, in the curriculum and in teaching strategies, to accommodate the range of needs and abilities among pupils. Through this process, the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend and, in so doing, reduces the need to exclude pupils.

*What Works in Inclusive Education?* addresses the following questions, among others, by reviewing research from UK, Europe, North America and Australasia, and considers the evidence for what works in inclusive education at the level of the school and the classroom. The report concludes by discussing the possible implications for the practice of inclusive education.

- What does 'inclusive education' mean?
- How far can legislation or national and local policies impact on the provision in schools?
- What benefits can we expect- social, academic or other and how do we measure them?
- What can studies of exclusion contribute to understanding inclusive education?

The complexities and contradictions in the area of inclusive education make oversimplification an inherent danger in the process of reviewing and interpreting the literature. It is important to scrutinise the research evidence available, to locate and acknowledge the tensions and to identify priorities for future research that might inform policy and practice.

The findings presented here are structured in the order of the report and summarise its main points.

### ***How do legislation and policy influence developments in inclusive education?***

- The Salamanca Statement signed by 92 Governments and 25 international organisations reflects strong and widespread commitment for inclusive education. Pupil participation is a recurring theme in the legislation and guidance, but meaningful access for all pupils is not well established. Legislation supported inclusive education is helpful but cannot ensure that pupils will be accepted or treated equitably or that appropriate provision is available.
- District / Local policies can promote inclusive education and may lead to changes in attitudes and practice but resourcing is problematic when maintaining inclusive and segregated provision in tandem. Placement of pupils may reflect local policies rather than perceived individual needs.

### ***What forms of school organisation are recommended?***

- Link schemes between special and mainstream schools promote social relationships but are difficult to maintain and do not necessarily enhance the development of inclusive education.
- The presence of pupils with difficulties in schools adopting inclusive education policies appears to provide learning experiences for pupils, parents and staff.
- The basis for organising pupils into groups is complex and the subject of much debate. Rigid setting appears to be in conflict with developing inclusive education since pupils with identified difficulties will be over- represented in the lower sets. However, flexible and varied pupil groupings, including some based on specific abilities which are responsive to on-going assessment information, may be helpful.

### ***What forms of classroom practice are recommended?***

- Pupil participation and learning can be enhanced by high expectations, drawing on pupils' previous experiences and maximising peer support. Collaborative pupil arrangements such as peer tutoring, co-operative group work, buddying and pupils providing feedback to teachers on the effectiveness of teaching have been described as promoting effective inclusive education.
- Variety of teaching methods is regarded by pupils as a critical factor in learning.
- There is a danger of differentiation being interpreted as exclusively about adapted worksheets or materials. These adaptations are sometimes viewed by pupils as not socially acceptable.
- Teachers provide a powerful role model for pupils in terms of their expectations and the respect and value they demonstrate for all pupils.
- The quality of joint planning is critical to the effective use of support in the classroom and support needs to be used flexibly to ensure it enhances rather than impedes the processes of inclusive education. Traditionally, teachers have not been trained to work with other adults in the classroom. Initial teacher education and continuing professional development will need to address this.

### ***What is the impact of inclusive education?***

- The experience of inclusive education appears to have a positive effect on teacher, pupil and parent attitudes with the focus shifting from the disability to the person.
- Experience of inclusive education is a more powerful basis for teacher development than training courses.
- Educationally-relevant or instructional labels, such as 'reading difficulty', are seen as more useful than categorical labels, such as 'Down's Syndrome' or 'moderate learning difficulties', for the future development of teachers and schools.
- Peer acceptance appears to be a feature of inclusive classrooms although there is some evidence that younger pupils are more positive than older ones. Strategies may be needed to prepare students with learning difficulties to pick up the more subtle communicative cues regarding interpersonal behaviour.
- Judging effectiveness, in terms of education benefits in schools developing inclusive education, is complex and problematic but is likely to involve a wider range of measures than examination and test results.
- Pupils with identified difficulties or disabilities appear to benefit educational from schools developing inclusive education by making significant gains in reading, language, work (study) skills and living skills
- Pupils who do not have identified difficulties or disabilities appear to attain as well or better and make the same or more progress in classrooms developing inclusive education as they do in traditional mainstream classes.

### ***What do studies of exclusion suggest about developing inclusive education?***

- Positive alternatives to exclusion should be evident in schools developing inclusive education
- Listening to the views of pupils who have been excluded or are at risk of being so, may proactively inform policy and practice on reducing exclusion and on developing more effective teaching and learning strategies

### ***What happens before and after school?***

- Social interaction in inclusive education settings can be established from an early age
- Many further education colleges have made considerable progress on developing access and learning support but for students needing higher levels of support, problems still arise
- The perspective and experiences of the students themselves should play a more central role in the development of policy and provision.

### ***Conclusions for policy and practice***

Although there are gaps in the research on what works in inclusive education, there are some clear messages for practitioners. The skills for teachers and support assistants to team-teach should be developed. Initial teacher education also still lacks real opportunities to develop positive attitudes towards teaching pupils with more severe disabilities.

More work is needed on the development of appropriate measures for evaluating the quality of support provided and on assisting governors to monitor the use of both local education authority and school resources. More opportunities to listen to the views of people with disabilities and act upon these is a further message for schools as organisations.

Initial signs are that inclusive education can be of benefit to pupils, the school and the community, however further research is still needed. The studies referred to in this report only begin to address some of the complex questions that are being asked about the efficacy and cost effectiveness of inclusive education. The usefulness of the studies reviewed has been limited in some cases by the methodological limitations of research in this field. There is a need for longitudinal, multi-method studies to establish whether the patterns emerging are maintained over time.

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