 **World of Inclusion Limited**

**Providing training, consultancy and advice on developing inclusive education and Disability Equality**

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To Rt. Hon. Bridget Phillipson MP 5th September 2025

Secretary of State for Education

Orchard House,

20 Great Smith Street

London SW1P 3BT

Dear Bridget Phillipson,

 **Ways that the Government can deliver quality inclusive education**

I am the CEO of World of Inclusion, a consultancy and training organisation that has since 1998 ( including its predecessor Disability Equality in Education) delivered training on implementing inclusive education to more than 150,000 educationalists across the UK and in more than 60 countries around the world ( see [**www.worldofinclusion.com**](http://www.worldofinclusion.com)).I produced many films and resources to aid this process. I myself am a teacher by training and profession, have the added advantage of being a disabled person and have generalised a ‘social model’ perspective into my practice and the pedagogy we promote. For over 40 years I have written, lectured, trained and filmed inclusive education throughout the world.

I have been a strong proponent of Inclusive Education and represented the UK Disabled People’s Movement at the Ad Hoc Committee at the United Nations that drafted the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities , in particular [**Article 24**](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-%20%20%20with-%20%20disabilities/article-24-education.html) and the subsequent [**General Comment No 4**](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-4-article-24-right-inclusive). Therefore, as a Labour Party member I addressed the Policy Review and moved a reference back at 2018 Conference to ensure we had a policy of promoting Inclusive Education. As the Manifesto said “*Labour will take a community-wide approach, improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools..”*

Despite the UK Government agreeing to a ‘Social Model’ approach and adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009 (albeit with a reservation on education and a side letter); there has been a failure to appreciate the paradigm shift that is required to develop an education system where all learners are equally valued, the support they need is provided and the barriers which prevent them thriving are systematically addressed. A number of these barriers have been unintentionally encouraged by Governments. We still are caught up in a historically developed Special Educational Needs system, whose predominant feature is to identify what a child/young person cannot do compared to their normative and non-disabled peers.

This, in essence, is a deficit model and has its roots in the stereotypes and exclusion of the past, segregation fuelled by contagion theory, eugenics or normative assessment models. The result has been increasingly broadening gaps in attainment between disabled and non-disabled children. The revised National Curriculum of the last Government made it increasingly difficult for many disabled learners to access the mainstream curriculum, as we moved to rote learning and normative testing, rather than a pupil centred curriculum encouraging course work, allowing pupils and young people to succeed and develop a more empathetic approach to each other and towards their individual progress.

The emphasis on testing has also created a more hostile environment in our schools, leading to greater competition, harassment (bullying) and alienation, absenteeism and poor behaviour. **Perhaps you should be championing a different model to see if this can improve the level of inclusion in our schools.** Creating alternative models of learning, and engagement of students.

I have seen and filmed these different inclusive practices in schools across England.

In 2015 **‘Inclusion Working’** series at [**Wroxham Primary, Hertfordshire**](https://youtu.be/NL-Y9L3U6gY)**,** [**Emersons Green Primary, South Gloucestershire,**](https://youtu.be/w4B4CGopmZw)[**Priestnall Secondary , Stockport**](https://youtu.be/ggMUiQ58-xk) and [**Eastlea Secondary , Newham in 2017**.](https://youtu.be/cAAoWGi3AKk) Cleves Primary, Newham, a school I filmed in several times, stood out as a world leader with 32 PMLD children fully included with a team of teachers and teaching assistants in 4 specifically designed suites of teaching spaces of 120 EY/Reception,Y1/2,Yr3/4 and Yr 5/6, demonstrating what is possible with leaders and staff committed to inclusion.

In 2003/4, I was acting as a consultant to the previous Labour Government, which like this one, said it was committed to a more inclusive system. This was left to individual local authorities and their schools and practice varied enormously. Ofsted (2003) identified 20% of schools that were good at including disabled children, 60% who could do with improvement, and 20% who were hostile. However, using the 20% who were good, we identified over 500 schools with good and developing practice towards including children in the then 5 main categories of SEND. The result was a filmed record of inclusive practice in 40 schools across England as can be seen in **‘Implementing the Disability Discrimination Act in Schools and Early Years’**. (DFES 2006)

The 2001 Education Amendment Act had brought schools and colleges under the Disability Discrimination Act, but there was a lack of understanding of what this would mean. The Government commissioned **Reasonable Adjustment Project**that I led which demonstrated many ways that schools were already meeting these duties and by filming what was going on as a ‘fly on the wall’ we could share this good practice. We interviewed all the headteachers and many staff, parents, students and outside professionals and there was a strong consensus on what were the characteristics of these inclusive schools:-

* Vision and values based on an inclusive ethos.
* A ‘can do’ attitude from all staff.
* A pro-active approach to identifying barriers and finding practical solutions.
* Strong collaborative relationship with pupils and parents.
* A meaningful voice for pupils.
* A positive approach to challenging behaviour.
* Strong leadership by senior management and governors.
* Effective staff training and development.
* The use of expertise from outside the school.
* Building disability into resourcing arrangements.
* A sensitive approach to meeting the impairment specific needs of pupils.
* Regular critical review and evaluation at pupil level, at departmental level & at school level.
* The availability of role models and positive images of disability.

**I strongly am of the view that Government should encourage policies and practices in English schools based on the above.**

I have since revisited many of the schools we featured and have to report that the good practice has not survived subsequent attacks of teacher training, the curriculum, Local Authorities and the way they ran schools. It would be naïve to think everything was perfect in the early 2000s, but the statistics show a period from around 1998 to 2008 when around 60% of students with a Statement/now EHCP were catered for in mainstream schools. This subsequently went down to around 50% from 2010 and is presently slowly going up but the numbers of children overall has increased. The total PROPORTION segregated, in breach of their human rights, has continually risen.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year (A)) | %Mainstream Primary & Secondary Schools (B)) | % State funded Special Schools, PRUs, NMSS and Independent schools (C) | Total students with a EHC Plan /Statement (D) | Nos of Pupils in Segregated settings with No EHC Plan /Statement (E) | Total School Population(F) | %Total School Population SegregatedNumber C +E /Total School Population (F)(G) |
| 2025 | 54.55 | 45.45 | 483,000 | 10,432 | 9,032,426 | 2.29 |
| 2024 | 54.54 | 45.45 | 433,520 | 10,432 | 9,092,073 | 2.28 |
| 2022 | 50.14 | 49.86 | 327,028 | 9,170 | 9,000,031 | 1.91 |
| 2021 | 50.4 | 49.6 | 325,618 | 11,665 | 8,911,887 | 1.94 |
| 2020 | 49.8 | 51.2 | 294,800 | 15,619 | 8,890,245 | 1.87 |
| 2019 | 47.8 | 52.2 | 271,200 | 16,980 | 8,819,289 | 1.79 |
| 2018 | 47.7 | 52.3 | 253,680 | 18,124 | 8,735,100 | 1.72 |
| 2017 | 48.3 | 51.7 | 242,185 | 17,785 | 8,669,080 | 1.64 |
| 2016 | 49.2 | 50.8 | 236,805 | 17,430 | 8,559,540 | 1.61 |
| 2015 | 51.0 | 49.0 | 236,185 | 15,525 | 8,438,145 | 1.55 |
| 2014 | 52.1 | 47.9 | 232,190 | 14,760 | 8,331,385 | 1.50 |
| 2013 | 53.0 | 47.0 | 229,390 | 14,985 | 8,249,810 | 1.49 |
| 2012 | 53.7 | 46.3 | 226,125 | 15,295 | 8,178,200 | 1.47 |
| 2011 | 54.3 | 45.7 | 224,210 | 15,700 | 8,123,865 | 1.45 |
| 2010 | 55.2 | 44.8 | 225,945 | 16,655 | 8,098,360 | 1.45 |
| 2009 | 55.1 | 44.9 | 221,670 | 24,010 | 8,071,000 | 1.53 |
| 2008 | 56.3 | 43.7 | 227,315 | 23,560 | 8,102,190 | 1.48 |
| 2007 | 58.4 | 41.6 | 232,760 | 15,480 | 8,149,180 | 1.35 |
| 2006 | 59.1 | 40.9 | 236,750 | 15,110 | 8,215,690 | 1.36 |
| 2005 | 59.5 | 40.5 | 242,580 | 14,550 | 8,274,470 | 1.36 |
| 2004 | 60.0 | 40.0 | 247,590 | 13,560 | 8,334,880 | 1.35 |
| 2003 | 60.3 | 39.7 | 250,550 | 13,240 | 8,366,780 | 1.35 |
| 2002 | 60.2 | 39.8 | 248,982 | 12,291 | 8,369,081 | 1.33 |
| 2001 | 61.2 | 38.8 | 258,200 | 11,200 | 8,374,100 | 1.33 |
| 2000 | 60.5 | 39.5 | 252,875 | 11,827 | 8,345,815 | 1.34 |
| 1999 | 64.6 | 35.4 | 284,041 | 12,352 | 8,310,476 | 1.36 |
| 1998 | 58.4 | 41.6 | 242,041 | 11,774 | 8,260,582 | 1.36 |
| 1997 | 57.2 | 42.8 | 234,629 | 11,730 | 8,194,964 | 1.37 |
| 1996 | 55.9 | 44.1 | 226,923 | 10,670 | 8,116.543 | 1.36 |
| 1995 | 53.6 | 46.4 | 211,348 | 11,176 | 8,017,830 | 1.36 |
| 1994 | 51.9 | 48.1 | 195,410 | 10,462 | 7,882,835 | 1.32 |

[Source DFS, DFES, DfE Annual SEND Statistics. Table R. Rieser, Chapter 8 in Mike Cole (Ed) Education, Equality and Human Rights 2023, Routledge, London (updated 2024/25)].

These changes and the impetus for them were created by educational reforms and have led us backwards in terms of inclusion. As more and more parents have voted with their feet, unsatisfied with the education on offer, going to the Tribunal to assert their rights under EHCP provision, mainly choosing independent expensive education; the increasing cost is being born by the Higher Needs Budget, which is now causing you and your colleagues sleepless nights as you try and square the circle and bring forward a White Paper to deal with the financial fall out of the failing SEND system.

Several measures the Government could take would improve the current situation dramatically. **Identifying all those children covered by disability in the Equality Act 2010 and enforcing the duties that schools are meant to enforce, but generally do not.**

**Firstly**, the 1.9 million children and young people with additional needs do come under the Disability definition of the Equality Act. *You’re disabled under the*[*definition in the Equality Act 2010*](https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010)*if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities”. For example:*

* *‘normal daily activities’-e.g. lining up, obeying instructions, interacting with peers etc.*
* *‘substantial’ is more than minor or trivial,*
* *‘long-term’ means 12 months or more.*

*For the purposes of the*[*definition*](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-guidance/disability-equality-act-2010-guidance-on-matters-to-be-taken-into-account-in-determining-questions-relating-to-the-definition-of-disability-html)*, you “have to ignore the impact of medicines, appliances and aids”. E.g. Asthma, ADHD or Epilepsy drugs, teaching assistant, hearing aid or wheelchair. This applies to nearly all this group.*

**Secondly**, what would happen if equality duties were then properly enacted?

The proper enforcement, monitoring and training for schools on the [Public Sector Equality Duty](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-sector-equality-duty-guidance-for-public-authorities/public-sector-equality-duty-guidance-for-public-authorities), especially as it applies to disabled people ([Section 149 of the Equality Act](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149)), would lead to a rapid embracing of disability equality as a key aim in schools and colleges. The Disability Equality duties are based on a human rights/social model approach rather than the older deficit/medical model approach to disability.

How much better it would be if all schools enrolled the disabled children living in their catchment area and the school was resourced to meet their needs, made necessary reasonable adjustments, challenged and removed barriers, all staff are trained to provide an inclusive approach to learning and socialization and the children and students were empowered to collaborate and support each other, rather than compete? In other words, **an education system based on inclusive values.**

**Thirdly**, the Government should drop its reservations to the UNCRPD. This would then lead the incorporation of Article 24 …. “*1. The UK Government recognise the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realising this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to:*

*The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;*

*The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;*

*Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.*

*2. In realising this right, States Parties shall ensure that:*

*Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;*

***Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;***

*Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;*

*Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;*

*Effective individualised support measures are provided in environments that maximise academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.*”

**Fourthly,** the Government should adopt the definition and guidance of General Comment No 4 to guide the development of their Inclusive Education Policy:-

*“10. Inclusive education is to be understood as:*

* *A fundamental human right of all learners. Notably, education is the right of the individual learner and not, in the case of children, the right of a parent or caregiver. Parental responsibilities in this regard are subordinate to the rights of the child;*
* *A principle that values the well-being of all students, respects their inherent dignity and autonomy, and acknowledges individuals’ requirements and their ability to effectively be included in and contribute to society;*
* *A means of realising other human rights. It is the primary means by which persons with disabilities can lift themselves out of poverty, obtain the means to participate fully in their communities and be safeguarded from exploitation. It is also the primary means of achieving inclusive societies;*
* *The result of a process of continuing and proactive commitment to eliminating barriers impeding the right to education, together with changes to culture, policy and practice of regular schools to accommodate and effectively include all students.*

*11. The Committee highlights the importance of recognising the differences between exclusion, segregation, integration and inclusion.*

* *Exclusion occurs when students are directly or indirectly prevented from or denied access to education in any form.*
* *Segregation occurs when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular impairment or to various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities.*
* *Integration is the process of placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions with the understanding that they can adjust to the standardised requirements of such institutions.*
* *Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences.*

*Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organisation, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion. Furthermore, integration does not automatically guarantee the transition from segregation to inclusion.”*

Other than the four changes outlined above let us speculate that instead of the wrong turn taken both by Labour from 2008-10, the Coalition Government of 2010-2015 and the Conservative Government of 2015 – 2024, we had continued and generalised the good inclusive practice that was increasingly developing in our schools in the 2000s. **What else could have happened and should be now guiding us in developing a more inclusive mainstream?:-**

**1**.All schools will have an open admission policy towards any local child who wishes to attend, without prejudice or discrimination, and will be expected to operate with the guidelines of the Equalities Act, making ‘reasonable adjustments’ where necessary.

**2.** Mainstream schools will be funded to support the expected range of needs in any general population, and will be further funded to support children with high level support needs through the Health and Social Care Plan. Any financial disincentives to admit pupils with Special Educational Needs will be removed. Resource bases can be useful as a transitional structure, but every child needs to be on the register of a mainstream class and they should spend at least 85% of their time learning with their mainstream peers with the right support.

**3.** Local Authorities will reinstate and develop their peripatetic support services, making specialist expert advice and support available to all schools free of charge. A formula will be developed to enable academy schools in the local area to be part of this. This will include the Educational Psychology Service, Behaviour Support Teams, the Visually Impaired and Hearing Impaired services, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, technology advisors, and advisory teachers.

**4**. Teachers and children will be supported by well-trained Teaching Assistants who have job security and a career path if desired.

**5.** Create a new position within mainstream schools and colleges called ‘The Inclusion Assistant’ who will give individual support to children and young people with High Level Support Needs, which include those who are non-verbal or who depend on technology to live, learn and communicate. The skills involved in this role will be recognised and rewarded financially. Their training will involve the Disability Movement as well as individual families and the children themselves.

**6.** Our Inspection Service shouls be fully versed in good inclusive practice, able to monitor its quality and offer advice and support to help make improvements. The achievements of all children will be celebrated equally.

**7**. Statutory Teacher Training and ongoing INSET will take into account the expectation of inclusive classrooms, include modules on Disability History and Equality, and will promote and develop inclusive pedagogy, best practice in mixed-ability teaching, formative assessment and multiple routes that allow for child and young person friendly assessment e.g. course work, folders of work and peer to peer assessment, particularly the disbanding of the competitive National League Tables and associated Testing in favour of a collaborative system based on mutual support and planned provision for all. This would remove the pressure to exclude children who do not perform well enough.

**8.** New and more effective strategies need to be developed to help both pupils and staff with issues of violence or inappropriate behaviours in school, regardless of whether they arise from impairment or distress. We should recognise also that many problems which lead to learning or behavioural difficulties at school are caused by social inequality, such as poverty and homelessness, which can only be addressed by better economic and social policies, not through education alone. However, there is much evidence from the 2008-2010 of work with students on emotional intelligence that rapid improvements in behaviour and the development of peer support, positive self-esteem which can transform schools. If linked with counsellors in every school and methods adopted by whole staff this will lead to more sustainable change. Outlawing zero tolerance and isolation policies, which are a breach of human rights.

**9.** Plan a gradual but timetabled, phasing out of Special Schools and Colleges and Alternative provision, taking into account the fact that many such placements are made for social rather than educational reasons, and will require much greater levels of domestic support to be put in place.

**10**. Ratify the UN Convention of Rights of Disabled Persons, Article 24, which guarantees the right to an inclusive education for all and work for all the school and college estate being accessible and barrier free within 10 years.

I would be very happy to meet and discuss these ideas with you, your ministers and relevant civil servants and advisers.

Your sincerely



Dr Richard Rieser OBE

CEO, World of Inclusion Ltd.