



MAY 2001

**The Equity Group
working for inclusion
and excellence
in Scottish education**

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ISSUE 3

Education, Culture and Sport Committee - First national enquiry into special educational needs. Recommendations backing inclusion

The Recommendations of the Enquiry Report include:

- There should be an agreed definition of inclusive education which is

Maximising the participation of all children in mainstream schools and removing environmental, structural and attitudinal barriers to their participation

- Mainstream schools should ensure that all policies and practices are inclusive
- Additional resources should be made available for the more widespread provision of information, advice and training for parents (which is independent from schools, authorities and the Scottish Executive) and for the establishment of informal parent support networks
- Education Authorities should be able to demonstrate how the current Scottish Executive funding for inclusion and access has been used
- ALL children should have Personal Learning Plans
- Planning meetings should take place well before transition points and on the basis of up to date assessments
- Target setting should reflect the nature of the school population, to avoid discouraging schools from developing inclusion practices
- Initial teacher education should ensure that student teachers understand and are committed to inclusive education and that they should adopt inclusive teaching approaches
- The conditions of service, training provision and career structure for special needs assistants requires urgent attention. Special needs assistants are crucial to the success of inclusion but require effective deployment and support
- In future placing decisions, where a special school is recommended, exclusion from the mainstream must be justified in relation to the child's best interests
- The Scottish Executive should consider establishing an inclusive education resource centre which would co-ordinate resources, information and training for staff, parents and young people with special needs and undertake research
- The Scottish Executive should undertake systematic ethnic minority monitoring and ensure that this informs strategy
- Fundamental and policy based research on inclusion is also essential. Key priorities for research are the experiences of children with special educational needs and their parents, and the factors determining effective inclusion

The Scottish Parliament will be debating this report on Thursday 17th May. If you support these recommendations please write to or visit your MSPs and ensure that your views on this important debate are also heard.

The full report, together with all the written and oral evidence to the committee, is available on the Scottish Parliament website at www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/cttee/educ-01/edro1-03-01.htm or from HMSO.

Equity's response to the Scottish Parliament's first national enquiry into special educational needs

The Equity Group have welcomed the 3rd Report of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee on their Inquiry into Special Educational Needs as both wide ranging and offering a positive way forward for inclusion. Many of the recommendations are listed on our front page.

During the Enquiry, the Committee heard many people, visited many places and listened to lots of evidence, including a presentation by members of the Equity Group. The good news is that the Committee was clearly listening to what was being said and this is evident in the 19 recommendations of the Report.

Inclusion, Inclusion and Inclusion

The report states that the way forward is inclusion. 12 of the 19 recommendations are directed at ensuring inclusion can work better. Among the many welcome recommendations supporting inclusion are the following:

- a clearer agreed definition of inclusive education
- inclusive policies and practices to be adopted by all mainstream school
- Education Authorities to be held accountable for their spending of inclusion and access funding
- target setting which rewards inclusion and
- the establishment of an inclusive education resource centre

The Report states that sometimes a special school will be recommended, but stipulates that this must be justifiable in terms of the child's best interests and that special schools will have to seek some measures of inclusion for all pupils. This is a long overdue recognition that every child has special and ordinary needs, but while the special school may meet the special needs - it cannot fulfil the ordinary needs - for these inclusion is essential.

More Research and Training to be Critical

Everyone involved in both providing and accessing inclusive education will be pleased with the emphasis the Committee put on training and research. The report's recommendations recognise that initial teacher training has an important part to play in ensuring that student teachers are both committed to inclusive education. They state that teachers will be trained to teach inclusively. Even more significantly they declare that training and support is essential to the role of special needs assistants and the role of parents.

The fact that inclusive education is still new and needs to be developed properly is fully acknowledged by the recommended additional resources for information. Most significantly the report recommends the establishment of an inclusive education resource centre which could undertake research and promote good practice.

Parents role acknowledged

The critical role played by parents is acknowledged. It not only finally accepts that parents are still crying out for better and more comprehensive information, but it also recommends the empowering of parents by providing training and access to more informal parents support networks.

Parents will also be delighted that the report acknowledges that the current Record of Needs process is too formal, too slow and too inflexible, with parents not getting the right reports at the right time to allow effective participation. More timely planning meetings, particularly at transition points, will also be a winner which has been long called for. Perhaps most important is that parents are to be 'fully involved' in placing decisions and that choices offered by the Education Authorities should actually be recorded.

At the time of going to print, we are waiting to find out whether the Parliament has had the courage to uphold the recommendations of its Committee. The Parliamentary debate is scheduled for 17 May 2001.



This newsletter is available in Braille, on audio tape and in large print. Please contact The Equity Group for further details.

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY
EQUITY GROUP CONFERENCE
THURSDAY 29 NOVEMBER 2001

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the Equity Group's third newsletter. We apologise for the delay in sending out this newsletter, but a lot has happened in the 12 months since you last read issue number two ~

- the Parliament passed the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000, which included a presumption of inclusion
- the group continued to recruit, campaign and meet, despite lack of financial support
- we held our second, highly successful international conference in January 2001

Most of this is covered in later pages of this newsletter, so I will concentrate on what has happened since I got involved in the Group's second Annual General Meeting on 17 March.

The AGM was well attended and the enthusiasm was contagious. There seemed to be no shortage of ideas or work to do. A twenty-one person strong Policy Committee was elected that day and another planning meeting was set for 22 April. Come April, we elected the main interim office bearers (interim as everyone couldn't be there and some may want to stand in the future). They are:

Chairperson	Lesley Stalker, Kirkcaldy, Fife
Vice Chairperson	Dorothy McDonald, Rothesay, Isle of Bute
Media spokesperson	Jo Cochrane, Stranraer, Dumfries and Galloway
Membership Secretary	Gail Chapple, Cairneyhill, Fife
Group Secretary	Jaynie Mitchell, Saltcoats, North Ayrshire
Treasurer	Jaqui Reid, Glasgow, East Renfrewshire

With the support of the Dunfermline Forum on Disability we are now moving into a new office. A huge thank you is due to Bill Gray and his committee for allowing us to operate from these premises. We also have new contact details and a website (see front page for details).

For a band of people who began to meet in October 1999, we feel we are laying down some very strong foundations. Welcoming all our children in all our schools demands change. Change will probably be slower than we want, which is frustrating when your child is growing older everyday. We need a strong network of support and we want every group member to have a buddy in their own area. As Jack Pearpoint (Inclusion Press International) would say 'don't dive alone!' Setting up this buddy network is one of our immediate goals.

Our pace will be faster than everyone else's. We are all busy people, changing the world in our own part of Scotland. It is essential that we work together and lead by example if possible. The stronger our foundations are, the more powerful we become.

The Equity acorn is firmly planted, roots are spreading strong and sure and a huge oak tree of diversity is growing, changing the education skyline for everyone.

Lesley Stalker, Chairperson, May 2001

EQUITY ~ PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

To date the group has been supported by 2 grants. We now urgently need funding to carry on with the huge amount of work we need to do to make Scottish education fully inclusive.

In our submission to the SEN Enquiry we listed some 50 recommendations which we thought would assist the process of inclusion. We have plenty of ideas about what might help and as a group we are keen to work on the following in the next 12 months:

- Run a summer school for groups of parents, teachers, pupils and educational professionals from different authorities in Scotland
- Work with schools on home-grown inclusion policies for each school - this would involve facilitating groups of students, teachers, parents and other interested individuals on designing an inclusion policy for their own school
- Continue to research and distribute Equity News
- Ensure the establishment of a team of inclusion facilitators who would work with schools to help them adapt their current practices and procedures
- Promote research into good inclusive practice
- Write a book about inclusion in Scotland

If you can help to write funding bids, or know of likely sources of funding for any of these ideas, please call us - we would love to work with you.

Update on Standard's in Scotland's Schools Act 2000

Everyone who received our second newsletter will remember the headline 'Scottish Executive backs inclusive education'. The elation of this headline had been brought about the stated 'presumption of inclusion' which had been included in the draft bill.

Within days of the newsletter going to print, the Equity Group heard about the proposed clause 12(a). This clause had been drafted following consultation with the then newly established Advisory Forum on Special Educational Needs. (The membership of this Forum was listed on page 4 of the last newsletter).

Clause 12(a) stated that local authorities should provide education to a child of school age within a mainstream school unless that inclusion:

- (a) would not be suited to the ability or aptitude of the child, or
- (b) would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education for the children with whom the child would be educated, or
- (c) would result in significant public expenditure being incurred which would not ordinarily be incurred

Along side a number of other organisations who promote social justice for disabled people, the Equity Group were actively involved in campaigning against the inclusion of clause 12(a). A briefing paper was produced, press, radio and television coverage was secured and an amendment to the clause was accepted for debate by the Parliament at Stage 3 of

the Parliamentary process. (Copies of this briefing are available from the Group Secretary).

Our amendment stated that the only grounds for failing to include a child in mainstream school were

- (a) that it would be incompatible with the wishes of the child and the parents, or
- (b) it could be demonstrated conclusively by the education authority not to be in the best interests of the child.

We also advocated for independent conciliation of any disputes between the education authority and the family regarding the suitability or otherwise of education being provided in a special school. Shortly before the debate, the Executive proposed a further amendment stating that these grounds for exclusion would only arise 'exceptionally'.

On 7 June 2000 the Parliament met to consider the bill. Mary Mulligen, then chair of the Education, Culture and Sport Committee had proposed an amendment that the word 'significant' be replaced by the word 'unreasonable'. Following the debate, our amendment was defeated. 45 MSPs voted with us, 69 MSPs voted against us, with one abstention.

So, in 2001 in Scotland we presume inclusion but, in exceptional circumstances, it is still legal to exclude a child from mainstream school on the grounds of ability, aptitude, cost or interfering with any other child's education. Even so, the Act is a milestone in promoting inclusive education and we expect the Guidelines accompanying the Act to further strengthen expectations of inclusion. We are also waiting to see whether the application of the Disability Discrimination Act will impact on these criteria.

Aims of the Equity Group

- To establish the legal right of children with special educational needs to mainstream education with appropriate adjustment and support.
- To promote entitlement to inclusive education as a civil rights issue.
- To gather and spread information about good practice in inclusive education, both in Scotland and internationally.
- To help schools, parents, children and communities learn together how to achieve and sustain inclusive schools for all.

Equity is a membership organisation.

STORIES OF SCHOOL INCLUSION IN SCOTLAND

Many people say the stories make the difference. At Equity, we are interested in learning about both what makes inclusion successful and what jeopardises the process. We are including two stories in this issue of the newsletter and hope to receive more stories from you for future issues.

IDENTICAL BUT DIFFERENT ~ Jannai Miller's Diary by Karen Miller, Livingston, West Lothian

When my twin daughters were born in July 1993, I was told they would have very different lives. They are identical so this was quite hard to take in, but I believed what I was told. When they were 4 years old I was told they would have to go to different schools. Jannai would go to the local SEN School and Hannah would go to the local mainstream Primary school. Jannai would have 'all her needs met' at her school and Hannah would be educated at her school. I believed that too. I had no reason at that time to question the good people who were doing their best for Jannai.

Time has passed and the girls are now 7 years old, nearly 8. Hannah is in primary 3. What I have noticed is that Hannah has many friends and people in my community know her and would look out for her. But, on the other hand, no-one even knew that Hannah had a twin sister because Jannai was never 'there', she was always somewhere outwith her community or in the house. In the summer when all the children were out playing in the street they assumed Jannai was a 'baby' and hadn't reached the age where children are 'set free' to play.

As Hannah got older she would pester me asking if Jannai could come to her school with her. This was the most natural thing for Hannah; she couldn't understand why her sister had to go to a different school.

I believed at the time that there were many reasons why Jannai couldn't go to Hannah's school: safety, lack of therapeutic input, no 'specialised' facilities to name but a few. I believed Jannai needed to have this in order to be happy and whole. But, in fact Jannai

was missing something very important to life. I didn't realise just how much she would gain by going to her twin sister's school.

When we finally managed to get Jannai included part-time in her sister's primary school, Hannah was counting down the days of the week - 3 days, 2 days...

Friday 19th January 2001 ~ Jannai's first day at mainstream Primary School

08:57

We lined up with the rest of the children. The twins were in uniform. The morning had been a mad rush as Jannai is normally still eating breakfast at this time! Sally-Anne (Jannai's support assistant) was waiting to greet Jannai. In the lines I could hear the comments in the background from the other children: 'She's cute'. 'She looks like Hannah'. 'There's Hannah's sister'. 'They look the same'

The bell went. We were in the cloakroom where there was a hustle and bustle with all the children hanging up their coats and putting on their indoor shoes. Jannai was mesmerised with all the noises. In class Jannai was introduced. The Headteacher and the Deputy Headteacher were there. The class sensed this was a very important day. Jannai sat at a desk near her sister but not right next to her. All the time Jannai was listening to the voices of the children and the teacher. There is a certain atmosphere in a classroom full of children.

09:15 ~ Paired reading

The P6/7 children came down to the P3 class to listen to the children reading and help them. Greg was Jannai's partner. He had been looking forward to meeting Jannai and had been learning how to spell her name.

While Greg was reading to Jannai, she was looking at him, listening intently. I could see the concentration on her face. She would look at the book then at Greg and round the table. Greg would look at Jannai when he was talking to her and touch her hand now and again. For me the interaction between the two of them was beautiful. All the time Jannai held her head up which is actually very hard for her to do. Usually Jannai dribbles a lot, but not this morning.

After paired - reading came to an end, Greg told me that Jannai really enjoyed a particular book. 'The

Terrible Tigers'. There was no question about it, Greg just knew that she liked it and he didn't need any particular or specialised course to reach this conclusion. I heard him tell her that he would see her next Friday and read some more books to her. (Usually people speak to me not Jannai!!)

Jannai was not 'extending' at all - Jannai has very strong high muscle tone, which makes her body rigid, it usually means discomfort or unhappiness.

09:45 - Computer

Work with Sally-Anne. Jannai was listening and concentrating.

10:15 - Stretch out

Jannai had a stretch out on a Gym mat with a wedge. John, P7 came to sit with Jannai. John is more interested in other things and doesn't care much for school. He is very imaginative and creative. He really took to Jannai and sat with her, talking to her and learning her ways.

When I gave Jannai her drink she choked a little and I was patting her chest, John was watching and he said to Sally-Anne 'are you watching, that's what to do when she coughs'. Even the different language used took me by surprise...coughing not choking. Usually everything Jannai did was a possible medical emergency.

10:45 - Playtime

It was cold but Jannai was wrapped up and went out with the rest of the class. Obviously children surrounded her, but John was with her making sure she was ok.

11:00 - The bathroom

I took Jannai into the adapted bathroom to take care of her personal needs. The school had this all ready for Jannai arriving and the staff really enjoyed making it 'nice' (the colour co-ordinated toilet rolls and towels, the pot of pourii) and the children have taken part in making it colourful.

11:30 - Assembly

We all sat on the floor. Jannai sat between my legs so that she was supported. I didn't want her sitting in her 'special seat', which is higher up. The subject was Happy/Sad. There was a lot of clapping and singing. The certificates and awards were then handed out. Again there was a lot of clapping and congratulating. The children then sang 'Happy Birthday' to one of the children in the class. The total environment was

like nothing Jannai had ever experienced - children together, singing.

12:10 - Dinners

The children lined up for dinners. On a Friday everyone has a packed lunch if they normally have a school dinner, as it is half-day. Jannai had her ticket and the dinner ladies gave her the lunch bag that had been made up with Jannai in mind. It contained everything Jannai could eat. She needs a soft, liquidised diet.

Home time

Many of the children called 'Bye, Jannai' Kyle one of the boys in her class went over to her took her hands, went right up to her and said 'Bye, Jannai'

Friday 26th January 2001

09:08

We were late; we had forgotten to pick up Jannai's chair from her Special School. Jannai sat at the table with the rest of the children.

09:15 - Paired reading

Greg sat with Jannai again and read stories to her. Jannai was sitting up with her head up, but this time she was making lots of sounds (vocalising) she was taking part in all the chatter. Greg understood that this was Jannai 'talking' to him.

09:45 - Computer

The teacher picked Hannah to work with Jannai. Hannah was so pleased to be picked as she was sitting up straight trying really hard to be picked. After Hannah, John worked with Jannai and they made a Pirate Picture (this is the class topic).

10:15 - Stretch out

Jannai had a stretch out. This time the Janitor was passing and he felt that Jannai should be stretching out on something better so he was going to find a better mat. Children and staff passing stopped to talk.

The morning carried on - drink - playtime

11:15 - Whole School Assembly

Jannai was presented with the class certificate for 'being nice to have in our class'. She was given the certificate at the front of the hall with the other children who were presented with them. Jannai was introduced to the rest of the school with some other children who were new. There was a lot of singing and clapping.

3 Months Later

Jannai has now been attending Harrysmuir Primary every Friday since January. When Jannai is off sick her paired-reader and children miss her in class. The children ask for her.

Another thing I have noticed is that children prefer to all be included. There was one Friday she was at school, and she was doing something different, and the children accepted it, but wondered why. So the next week she did the same work with her support assistant scribbling for her, and the children who were at her table were really pleased that she was doing the same work as them. The children in her class want to get to know her and always have a keen interest in learning how to support Jannai.

Jannai spends all her time on a Friday with the class and most importantly she does whatever they do. Sometimes activities have to be altered in a small way to include Jannai, but that is not too difficult. The staff at Harrysmuir have been very enthusiastic and imaginative, needing very little input from me.

The message given to the class is very important, if Jannai takes part then the message is positive and it teaches everyone that all means all. There should be no reason why a child is excluded from an activity because they have a disability.

During the Easter break any children I met in the street playing asked for Hannah and Jannai. Hopefully Jannai will get her new wheelchair in June and we will be reassessing the placement.

Last year I believed that it was necessary to exclude Jannai for many reasons but now I see differently. I believed what I was told. The children in Jannai's class at Harrysmuir will see that it is part of every day life to have children around them who need different support and that is what they will grow up with. They will believe differently from me and get on with it.

This is so different from where we began.

'DID THEY SAY YES?' – Andrew's story by Fiona McIntyre, *Bridge of Weir*

As I walked into the after school club the racket and activity disoriented me. I couldn't find the two faces I was searching for. Suddenly Andrew spotted me, ran over, hugged me and said; 'Did they say yes mummy?' At first I had no idea what he was talking about. He gave me a hint. The headmaster, the meeting. 'Did they say yes?' At this point his seven year old sister Karen came up. She hugged me and then pressed to go home. She said she did not want to hear about the stupid meeting and could we get sweets now.

I had just been to a meeting at the high school Andrew wanted to attend. There was a lot of anxiety about his choice and the Education Officer with responsibility for special needs had set up a preliminary, exploratory meeting. Andrew was twelve at the time. He has Down's Syndrome and knew that many people were unsure if he should attend the same school as his friends. This meeting had clearly been at the front of his mind. I could not reassure him and just said that everyone had listened carefully and we hoped it would be all right.

Since primary 5 the head of his primary school and the educational psychologist had been suggesting that we move Andrew to a special school for moderate learning difficulties. We were not keen to consider special school, but the picture was muddled by Andrew being very ill and developing a reluctance to go to school. Was he in the wrong place or was he unwell? The last thing any parent wants is for their child to be unhappy. The educational psychologist felt he would flourish in a special school. She thought he would have less illness. He appeared to be socially isolated and this was thought to be evidence of the 'widening gap'.

Although it was against our better judgement, we were beginning to waiver. We felt outnumbered and out of our depth. The fact that we would not have to continually battle at special school was enticing. Andrew persisted in saying he wanted to stay where he was and move on to High School with his class. We were advised that he didn't know what he was saying no to and it was arranged for us to take him to the recommended school. We were shown around

and then into the class which he was expected to join. The teacher asked him 'So you're going to be joining us Andrew?' 'I think not,' answered our dogged boy. Back to the drawing board.

After a great deal of worry, sleepless nights and attending meetings where we heard descriptions of a child we didn't recognise, I am happy to report that the Authority did eventually say yes. Andrew was allowed to go to the school of his choice.

One term later he is happy, building a network of friends and learning. He has a full time auxiliary and part time learning support to differentiate the curriculum.

He is fitter because he has to walk from class to class. He can walk far more quickly than anyone realised because he wants to keep up with the class. He is more organised because his auxiliary expects him to be. He is on time for the bus because he hates to miss it. Going on the bus has been one of his dreams for years! He has joined the Drama club.

We asked that Andrew start on the same timetable as the other children and amend it as necessary. This was helpful as it allowed him to be truly part of the class as it settled in to High School and developed its own identity. In the first weeks of term he acquired some street cred by arm wrestling with lots of other boys during lunchtime. Eventually someone beat him!

He also gained social status by getting two punishment exercises. The staff had been reluctant to punish him in the same way as the others but, with our encouragement, they did and Andrew reaped unimagined benefits in terms of peer acceptance. Now when people ask him how school is he proudly answers 'Fine. I've had two punnies.' Hopefully the

rewards of gaining acceptance through being on the wrong side of the law will not gain too much attraction! You need to matter to be punished!

Andrew's confidence has increased beyond our wildest imaginings. Just before Christmas he apparently stopped the headmaster in the corridor and told him that it was time he got the boy's toilets cleaned as they were smelly! He clearly felt safe and accepted enough to raise the issue. No time-wasting for Andrew. Straight to the top!

It is often hard work having a child with a disability in a mainstream secondary. We find that it takes more time and effort to support Andrew to complete his homework than it does for our other children. Keeping communication going between home and school is at times stressful, but very necessary and never 100% effective.

It was also traumatic letting him go with his class to the climbing wall and the dry ski-slope. On both occasions he was triumphant. I was in shock. And then we worry about his diet. He has a major congenital heart defect and we know that his weight must be controlled. The freedom to choose burgers and chips on a daily basis seems like heaven to our boy! Forget packed lunches or the healthy option!

However, in case you get the impression that it is all hard work and worry, I must tell you that finding that Andrew has laid out his uniform on a Sunday night without reminding, is ample reward and reassurance.

We do not know what the future holds for Andrew, but we are immensely glad that we listened to his pleadings. It would have been much easier to ignore him. The scary bit is that we very nearly did.

Equity - Membership update

As Lesley mentioned in the Editorial, we are hoping to organise a buddy system for all the members across Scotland. Lesley, Gail, Jaynie and Jaqui are working through the membership records at present and hoping to contact each member, help them meet their neighbours and strengthen the web of support.

We are also hoping to send out updated membership cards to every one. If you have not received a membership receipt or card from us, please contact us at either our new office (tel. 01383 733390) or by email equitygroupuk@yahoo.co.uk



POSITIVE and POSSIBLE

The Equity Group's second international conference took place in January 2001 at Heriot Watt University. 141 delegates attended from across Scotland, representing schools, Education Authorities, Universities, Trade Unions Voluntary organisations, Health Boards, parents, children and adults with disabilities.

This second conference concentrated on getting the message across that implementing the presumption of inclusion in Scottish Schools is both positive and possible. The conference succeeded with a series of speakers who gave inspirational presentations on why and how it should be done.

IT CAN AND SHOULD BE DONE ~ THE POSITIVE

The first session in the morning had a heady mix of speakers whose overall message was clear - inclusion can and should be done. Not all the speakers took the same angle, but the overall effect was incredibly powerful and the message came across loud and clear.

The first two speakers, Veronica Rankin, Assistant Secretary, EIS, and Bryan Kirkcaldy, Senior Manager, Fife Council Education Department, were approaching inclusion from the professional stand point. They gave valuable insights into what needs to change and what needs to be done to ensure that inclusion can take place in Scottish Schools. Not only professionals in the audience but parents were also scribbling frantically.

The key points which were made included:

- The key to inclusion is staff development at all levels with quality training and support
- The clash between target setting and inclusion needs to be resolved by adding targets of

inclusiveness and thereby rewarding and encouraging inclusion

- Schools need to be redesigned for everyone. The concept of focusing on educational need as something everyone has. Remove the special altogether
- Schools should devise best practise specifications for inclusion
- There is still a national task to be undertaken which includes review of the legislation and some resource allocation

The parent's perspective

These were hard and practical approaches on how to ensure the implementation of inclusion and no doubt extremely useful, but Gerry Mulgrew and Enrico Barone reminded us that sometimes just getting on and doing it can be as effective.

Gerry's son Lachlan is included in his mainstream local primary in Midlothian. Whilst Gerry did not minimise the discussions and negotiations which had taken place prior to this happening, the enduring image was of a boy whose class mates fought over taking him into school, a boy who was truly included despite his support needs and the equipment which was part of his life.

Enrico, who has sadly returned to Italy where inclusion is by right rather than by fight, also reminded us that sometimes waiting for the setting to be right and the specification to be perfect is the wrong way. In Italy it is not always perfect - in fact it can be chaotic - but being included in something imperfect is always going to be better than being excluded.

Having experienced both Scottish and Italian systems the critical difference was that inclusion in education is now an attitudinal thing - it is not exceptional or strange but routine and ordinary and has affected great social change. Now not only are children with disabilities included in schools, but it is quite natural for people with disabilities to be included in the workplace and in other areas of life.

Ultimately the first session reminded us that inclusion will work when people want it to, but to achieve this we need both bottom up and top down approaches - changes in legislation, adequate resources, better planning and training of course. Commitment by both Authorities and Executive of course, but also

sometimes just commitment by parents and the positive approach by schools and teachers can work wonders. We were also reminded that inclusion in education is the key to inclusion in life!

HOW IT CAN BE DONE - THE POSSIBLE

So inclusion is the right way but how exactly do you do it - theories and philosophies are fine but good practise in the classroom and strategies for making it work are also needed.

Brains are Complex Things

Paul Ginnis, an independent consultant from Birmingham, gave an inspirational and mind opening lesson in how actual teaching practise can be inclusive (biology and conception will never be the same again). Essentially all teachers have to remember that:

- for anyone to learn, regardless of their impairment or disability, they have to feel safe i.e. not bullied or ignored or ridiculed
- everyone has to work things out for themselves - you can tell someone something until you are blue in the face but they may not understand unless they figure it out for themselves
- experiences that are dramatic or emotionally strong will remain with you for far longer than the ordinary and routine and
- everyone learns in different ways so all lessons have to be presented in many formats - visually or auditorally or by action and activity or a mix of all.

Paul echoed Bryan Kirkcaldy. The concept that what we should all be concentrating on is the recognition that everyone has different educational needs. Adaptations to teaching methods are required for everyone to learn effectively - not just those who may have disabilities - the whole school approach! Schools are for children of ALL abilities.

The Way Forward - The Inclusion Facilitator

Carol Tashie and Sharon McGovern completed an emotional and heartening morning. They had travelled from New Hampshire in the United States to be with us. They explained that their State had been the first to close their institutions. Carol's background was special education for children with the labels of complex and challenging needs. She has been working as an Inclusion Facilitator for over 10

years. Sharon's background was being a therapist and she had spent the last 3 years supporting students with autism in mainstream schools.

Carol began by introducing us to 2 young men. The first description listed labels and negative reputations. The second listed gifts and capacity. The descriptions were, of course, of the same person - Todd. She then gave us two scenarios:

Scenario 1 - we assume that Todd cannot understand and is not aware of his environment, so we keep him out of regular high school classes. Ten years from now, we discover that we were wrong and Todd does understand and is aware of his environment. What have we lost?

Scenario 2 - we assume that Todd can understand and is fully aware of his environment and we fully include him in all typical high school classes, with supports and high expectations. Ten years from now we discover that we were wrong and that Todd is not aware of his environment and does not understand. What have we lost?

Which is the least dangerous assumption?

Sharon and Carol told us the story of the Steer family and their daughter Marica's pioneering work teaching the teachers inclusion. She told us about Tim who became gifted at setting off the school fire alarm system in order to get into the playground and be by his friends; whose label of challenging behaviour was caused by the school removing him from his friends and placing him in the annexe.

She talked a lot about the importance of academic subjects and told us about Andrew Dixon, whose teacher had said 'if Andrew is in my class, he will learn to read'. She warned us of the folly of split placements - to be included you have to be there ALL the time.

We heard about Jeff who was doing maths his way. We saw Brandon who could read books by fanning them sideways next to his face. We heard about Jessica who had moved on from her dream of being a marine biologist. We heard about Chris who suddenly learned to stop screaming when he was in a class with other children who weren't screaming.

We saw art work from the special school in the morning and the mainstream in the afternoon. The

difference in expectation of the teachers was staggering. The first had been drawn by the special needs teacher, the second had been drawn by the child and included a story. Same child, same subject, same day – just different expectations.

We heard about Chris who had a gastrostomy tube. Where the kids phased by this? No, they just asked three questions : ‘does it hurt?’, ‘ can you taste it?’ then ‘can you eat pizza like that?’. We saw Amro in the American football team, and Stacey and Jamie and Mike.

Carol talked about being trained to teach to the deficit. She said we had to raise our expectations about what we thought was possible. The kids they had met over the last 10 years in New Hampshire had blown their initial expectations out of the water – they were the real teachers and we needed to believe in them.

The Scottish Executive Agrees!

After lunch Nicol Stephen, Deputy Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs, assured us that the Scottish Executive were not going to be content with the recent legislation, with it’s presumption of mainstream. They knew that the delivery of inclusive education also needed to be improved.

Investment was needed to change attitudes and raise awareness. There were going to be adjustments to the guidance issued to local authorities reinforcing the message that the quality of education on offer to all was important, and also proper resources were needed (his words not mine).

There were various funding initiatives, including £5 million per year for in-service development and training and there would be more to come including the Children and Young Person’s Change Fund. All in all it was a positive message with a strong indication that the Scottish Executive recognised the growing demand for inclusion to be realised. He stressed that he wanted to work with the Equity Group.

The rest of the day was spent in debate in workshops learning lessons and exchanging ideas. Once more participants left with their heads buzzing, hopefully with the concept that inclusion in Scottish Schools is indeed both positive and possible.

The Gift of Difference – developing peer support in schools

By Amanda Stalker (aged 15)

Amanda is 15 and attends an ordinary secondary school in Fife. Her brother attends a special school and is allowed to visit the mainstream primary one day a week. When Rose Galati, a teacher and parent from Canada visited Scotland in March this year, Amanda found out about the peer support programme which runs in many Canadian schools.

Peer support is an opportunity for young people in schools to assist children and young people with labels of disability to be included in school life. The support they give is taken seriously – they are given credits for their involvement in the programme and people who are employing personal assistants, together with other employers in the care sector, look for credits in this programme when recruiting.

The support can be anything from additional coaching to support to enjoy the diverse range of school activities. Students are involved in curriculum adaptation and development and receive regular coaching and mentoring to help them think through their role. Equity are hoping to connect Amanda’s school with young people in Rose’s school so that they can learn from one another.

To start of this process, Amanda talked to some of her classmates. This is what she had to say: ‘I asked the teenagers at my High School about the questions they would like to ask Canadian teenagers who support kids with learning difficulties in their school. The questions they wanted to ask are listed here.

My reaction to the questions they came up with

I must admit that I didn’t expect the kind of questions they came up with. All of these questions simply scream that there is a long way to go. However, you have to accept that the questions were asked by teenagers who have never been in contact with anyone who has the kind of gifts that my brother has.

He can light up a room with his smile, his laugh is infectious and he has brought diversity and love to many, many people and will continue to do this for everyone he meets. Although I can still not express in

words how disappointed I felt when I was writing down the questions, it made me realise how much work stills needs to be done to help change the opinions and attitudes of people who will be helping to shape the lives and futures of gifted children, like my brother.

What the kids wanted to know about including children labelled disabled

- Can they be included in all subjects?
- Can they do modern languages?
- Can they take part in the same timetable as others?
- Will they need separate changing facilities for PE?
- Are they affected if people stare or make remarks about them?
- How do they react to the extra attention from both pupils and staff?
- Will there be any drastic changes to the school?
- Is there a high rate of discrimination towards people with disabilities in school?
- Do they have difficulty travel wise?
- Does getting from one class to another prove difficult in a crowded school?
- Will they be at school full time?
- Can they come out with us at breaks and lunch?
- Can we help, as well as the teachers?
- Do they gravitate to people they know?
- Is there a specific routine that they need to follow?
- Will they be doing the same work as us?
- Can they take part in after school activities?
- Does being at a mainstream school influence their attitudes towards learning?
- Will it be easier for them to get a job after being at a mainstream school?
- Will they find the timetable difficult to deal with at first?
- Will there be adult with them all the time?
- Are they given special treatment?
- Can they understand instructions from teachers?
- Are the auxiliaries trained to the best standard?
- Is there any danger to other pupils by their presence in school?
- Is there any subject they are excluded from due to safety reasons?
- Do they settle into the system straight away, or does it take time?
- Will they be able to do exams, just like everyone else?
- Is it exciting having someone who is different at your school?
- Will this experience change our outlook on life?

If you could just imagine for a minute that it was someone you loved with all your heart that people were asking about - how would that make you feel?

We have sent the questions off to Rose in Canada and we hope to print some of the responses in the next newsletter.



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