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EDUCATION

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Sending children with severe special needs to ordinary schools condemns many to a poor education and disrupts lessons, a report warns today.

Schools too often lack expertise and resources to cater for pupils with behavioural or learning problems, it claims.

In the worst cases, heads are forced to expel the youngsters, raising the chances they will drift into crime.

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Classroom pressure: More children are being identified as having special needs (Posed by model)

The report reveals how growing numbers of pupils are being classed as having special educational needs, with schools seeking extra cash to help cope with them.

One in five primary children is classed as having a behavioural problem, disability or learning difficulty requiring extra staff support.

"Teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to support children with special educational needs in mainstream primary schools," says the report.

The warning comes in a submission to a major independent review of primary education based at Cambridge University.

It questions the effectiveness of a Government drive to integrate pupils with special needs in mainstream schools in the name of 'inclusion'.

Guidelines in 2004 stated 'the proportion of children educated in special schools should fall over time'.

Ministers have since insisted there is no agenda to close special schools.

The report claims the 'uncertain progress towards fully inclusive primary schools' is clear from the rising number of schools requesting help to cater for children with problems.

Government figures show in 2007, 19.2 per cent of primary pupils were classed as having a special educational need - up from 17.5 per cent in 2003. These range from needs requiring a formal statement to milder conditions.

Problems with speech and language are among the fastest growing, although diagnoses have risen across the board, including behavioural difficulties.

Some experts have criticised a "growth industry" of special needs as the definition of the term has widened to include conditions such as dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Critics have said assessment criteria are too vague and disruption in the class and poor teaching is increasingly attributed to special needs.

Today's report by Bath University academics suggests a Government emphasis on "whole class" teaching may be fuelling the increase in special needs by inflaming behavioural problems.

It also says exam league tables could be hampering efforts to integrate those with learning difficulties.

Wide variations in the funding available for children with special needs are apparent around the country, prompting calls from teachers last night to end a "postcode lottery" in education.

Tory children's spokesman Michael Gove said: "The Government's policy of inclusion at all costs has let down some of the children most in need of help. This ideological approach to special education, together with the drop in special school places, is leaving the most vulnerable children more exposed."

Chris Keates, general secretary of the NASUWT teachers' union, welcomed "acknowledgement of the immense pressure on teachers" in supporting pupils with special educational needs.

A spokesman for the Department for Children, Schools and Families said more than £100million had been earmarked for children with special educational needs and disabilities under the Children's Plan.

READER VIEWS (1)

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Whatever the number of children having extraordinary developmental needs, the number whose needs are properly even assessed let alone catered for, is a very small percentage of those entitled to a law-abiding assessment.

The reason for this is that in the banana republic of Britain, children have no free standing legal rights either to have medical / educational needs properly assessed and met; or to pursue those [in LEAs, schools and PCTs] diverting funds away from such children into pet projects, as tortious negligence or misconduct of public office.

British children, especially those having extraordinary developmental needs, need implementation of ratified UNCRC, ratification of Protocol 12 ECHR, and reinstatement of Article 13 (removed by Harman et al) in the HR Act, as protection from a dysfunctional state characterised by UNESCO and UNCRC reports as hostile to our children.

- Jack, London UK

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