Mainstreaming autism: from research to practice

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Who we are

• Neil Humphrey
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Overview

• The challenge of inclusion for students with ASC
• What does research evidence tell us?
• What can be done?
• Time for questions
The challenge of inclusion for students with ASC

- Inclusion is not just about going to mainstream school – it is about presence, participation, acceptance, and achievement
- *Excellence for All Children* (DfEE, 1997) resulted in a sharp rise in numbers of pupils with ASC attending mainstream schools in England
  - e.g. 16% increase from 1997-2001 (Keen & Ward, 2004)
- This has evened off more recently
  - e.g. less than 1% change from 2004-2010 (DfES, 2004; DCSF, 2010)
- Around 70% of pupils with primary need reported as ASC receiving provision at School Action Plus or with a Statement of SEN attend a mainstream school (DCSF, 2010)
  - At secondary level:
    - Pupils with primary need reported as ASC make up 6.6% of all pupils with special educational needs receiving provision at School Action Plus or with a Statement of SEN in secondary mainstream schools in England
    - 18,170 pupils with primary need reported as ASC receiving provision at School Action Plus or with a Statement of SEN in secondary mainstream schools in England
    - Of these, approximately 60% have Statements of SEN (DCSF, 2010)
The challenge of inclusion for students with ASC

- Pupils with an ASC are around 8 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than pupils without SEN (0.27% compared to 0.04%) (DCSF, 2009; 2010)
- They are most likely to be excluded due to a physical assault against another pupil or adult (DCSF, 2010)
- Teachers’ relationships with pupils with ASC are associated with the amount of problem behaviour they display and their social inclusion within the classroom (Robertson, Chamberlain & Kasari, 2003)
- Teachers experience tensions relating to frustration over the enduring effects of emotional and behavioural manifestations of ASC (Emam & Farrell, 2009)
- “Children with an ASC... provide an excellent example of... where significant cracks exist in the system, to the detriment of those who fall between them” (HOCESC, 2006, p.18)
The challenge of inclusion for students with ASC

• There is often an assumption that because of pupil with ASC is academically able, he or she should be able to cope in mainstream education (Moore, 2007)

• Difficulties in social interaction and communication can increase risk of and exposure to bullying and social isolation (NAS, 2006)

• Preference for routine, predictability and low sensory stimulation is at odds with the noisy, bustling and often chaotic mainstream school environment – meaning it can be a very stressful place for pupils with an ASC (Carrington & Graham, 2001)

• Typical cognitive profile and preferred learning style of pupils with an ASC can challenge professional assumptions about teaching and learning (Jordan, 2005)
What does research evidence tell us?

Peer relationships

- Peer interaction patterns (Humphrey & Symes, 2011)
- Bullying and social support (Humphrey & Symes, 2010)
- Social acceptance (Symes & Humphrey, 2010)
What does research evidence tell us?
Participation in the classroom

- Extent to which students with ASC are effectively included in lessons (Symes & Humphrey, 2012)
What does research evidence tell us?
Students’ views and their mental health

• Students’ experience of school and understanding of their ASC (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008)
• Mental health issues (Hebron & Humphrey, 2012)
Key elements for including young people with ASC in mainstream schools

- Environment
- Peer education and awareness
- Direct [specialist] support
- Clear policy and guidance
- ‘Safety net’
- Creative school structures and learning opportunities
Additional considerations...

- Children and young people may also show:
  - Unusual responses to sensory stimuli which can affect many aspects of everyday life
  - Impulsivity
  - Difficulties with attention control
  - Unusual levels of anxiety and arousal
Don’t forget the positives...

- People on the spectrum may also:
  - be loyal and dependable
  - have exceptional memory
  - display persistence in pursuing topics
  - adhere meticulously to routines and appreciate order
  - have particular areas of knowledge, skill, etc.
Immersion is an important strategy

• To move a school towards being ‘autism-friendly’ it needs to be saturated in understanding and awareness...

• It is hard, but a whole-school rolling response; supporting, educating and developing the understanding of everyone involved is key...but it is not easy!
Peer education is essential...

- Other children may:
  - resent extra attention given to child with ASC
  - be hurt if their social advances are ignored or rejected
  - be distracted/disrupted
  - feel child ‘gets away’ with things
  - be nervous of or frightened by the child with an ASC

- In some cases may respond by, ignoring, teasing, ‘winding him up’ or bullying
‘The education of the peer group is an essential part of moving towards a truly inclusive community’

Gareth D Morewood, 2011
Agent of change

The Agent of Change

Developing the school environment

Creating a positive ethos

Flexible provision

Direct support and intervention

Policy development and embedding practice

Training and development of staff

Peer education and awareness
So where did we start?

• An ‘autism friendly’ environment
  • physical environment
  • social environment
  • communication environment
  • emotional environment

• Provision of an inclusive structure

• Visual support for learning
Rewards ...

• Schools may have a reward system that may mean less to student with autism
• It need to set realistic, achievable targets
• Rewards may need to be more immediate and tangible
• What reward systems do you use and how effective are they?
Don’t forget to make rewards appropriate and immediate...
Learning isn’t always the same ...
• Lots of resources and information: [www.gdmorewood.com](http://www.gdmorewood.com)

• Especially the illustrated pamphlet: Dos & Don’ts for Supporting Students with ASC in Mainstream Schools

• And from the ESRC website: [www.asdinclusion.info](http://www.asdinclusion.info)
Thanks for listening & questions?

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