

**Written evidence from Mr Neil Alexander-Passe**

- I. Author – specialising in Dyslexia/SpLD and Mental Health issues (10 books, 10 peer review papers)
  - Alexander-Passe, N. (2015a) Dyslexia and Mental Health: Helping people identify destructive behaviours and find positive ways to cope. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, UK.
  - Alexander-Passe, N. (2017a) The Successful Dyslexic: identify the keys for success to achieve your potential. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers
- II. Researcher - Currently completing a PhD investigating 'Dyslexia, Traumatic schooling and Post-school success' at the University of Sunderland.
- III. SENCO - Currently a Secondary SENCO in a mainstream Academy in north London, previously a SENCO in a primary school in north London.
- IV. SENCO - Member of the national executive of the SENCO national online forum

**Terms of Reference**

**Assessment of and support for children and young people with SEND**

- 1. I am fascinated that many SENCOs are not like myself, being former SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) teachers, as to be a SENCO, it requires an individual to be the in-house SEND expert for a school.
- 2. In 2014-15 I undertook and completed the CPT3A Level 7 course in assessment of Psychological Testing, as I understood to be effective in my role as a SENCO I needed the ability to use standardised measures to assess SLCN.
- 3. In 2015-16 I undertook and completed the National Awards for SENCOs, and in this study I was surprised that the training for SENCOs did not include the ability to assess students for Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). This is also something I have argued at the Department of Education as my role on the 'SENCO forum' national executive.
- 4. In March 2016 I was asked to present to an APPG, hosted by Lord Addington, and run by Dyslexia Action (please see Appendix 1). At this APPG I presented a study of 11 SENCOs in Haringey, North London.
- 5. Only 2 out of 11 SENCOs interviewed had the Level 7 ability to assess SLCN in their schools, and the rest relied upon questionnaires and the reduced services of educational psychologists. Upon further questioning, those students/pupils referred to an educational psychologist tended to be

those with autism and behaviour manifestations, being of perceived greater need. Schools in this local authority have recently had their annual educational psychologist provision reduced from 9 days to three hours. As part of the national SENCO forum I have found my Haringey findings reflected in other London local authorities and from other SENCO forum members.

6. It is argued by this author that assessment for SEND in schools is passed to SENCOs, and many are poorly trained for this role, as the NASENCO in the main only covering statutory legislation. It is not surprising that each year National Statistic (2017a, b) report the misdiagnosis of SEND in primary schools, and reduced SEND data.

#### *SEND Awareness in schools*

7. Scott (2016) suggests a 'mixed picture' of SEND provision in UK schools, noting that more SEND training is needed for teachers to identify those with educational learning barriers. Scott questions whether schools have '*sufficient SEND expertise and experience to provide adequate support to students*' (Scott, 2016, p.7), suggesting a lack of SEND trained staff in schools.
8. It is argued that students are frequently taught by teachers who lack SEND training and experience to provide 'quality first' differentiated lessons (Carter Review, 2016; Scott, 2016), as only from 2017 will SEND training be a mandatory element of initial teacher training (Department of Education, 2016a).

#### *Misdiagnosis*

9. National Statistics (2017a) indicates that pupils with 'Specific Learning Difficulties' (SpLD), the UK educational term to include dyslexia as its biggest group, significantly increases from 9.7% in primary school to 21.1% in secondary school for 'school support', with a similar rise in pupils gaining 'SEN Statements/EHCPs' (3.4% in primary school to 8.7% in secondary schools).
10. However, pupils with 'Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), a term commonly used to describe undiagnosed SpLD/dyslexics, decreases from primary school (29%) to secondary (10.8%) for 'school support'.
11. This may suggest that diagnosis of SpLD is left mainly to secondary schools, and many pupils are misdiagnosed as having 'SLCN', with their needs being misunderstood and the wrong interventions being provided. This could be explained by the unwillingness/inability to assess SpLD and other SEND in young children, as this has a possible knock-on effect to budgets.
12. This author argues that if schools assess and recognised a need, they would be more obliged to deliver specialist intervention/provision;

however, if they tell parents their child 'just needs more time' they can avoid such costs.

*Declining figures*

14. The number of pupils with identified special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) has declined substantially over the last six years (1,704,980 pupils in 2010 to 1,244,255 in 2017), from 21.1% of all pupils in 2010 to 14.4% in 2017, and this drop is surprising as in the three years prior to 2010 it rose (19.3% in 2007, 20.1% in 2008, 20.7% in 2009). This figure is much lower than the 20% level initially suggested in the Warnock report (1978).
15. Overall, 11.6% of all pupils are now currently on 'school support' (interventions/provision funded by the school) and 2.8% with an 'SEND Statement/EHCP' (interventions/provision partly funded by the state and the rest by the school), making a total of 14.4%. 'School support' frequencies have also declined in each of the last five years, falling from 18.3% of pupils in 2010 to 11.6% in 2016 and 2017.
16. National Statistics (2017a) indicates that boys are twice as likely to be diagnosed as having an SEN at primary school (16% compared to 8.2% for girls); overall (in both primary and secondary schools) it is 11.4% for pupils on 'school support' and 2.8% for those with a 'SEN Statement/EHCP' resulting in a total of 14.2%.
17. Secondary school data also reflects this gender imbalance (13.3% for boys and 8.1% for girls on 'school support'). Data suggests that SEND peaks at 10 years old, probably to help schools gain better SATS results ('school support' being 14.7% of all pupils), but as soon as pupils join secondary schools the figures reduce again ('school support' being 13.1% of all pupils at 11 years old, to 10.6% of all pupils at 15 years old, with 'Statements/EHC plans being constant at 1.8-1.9%), combined figures (12.5% at 15 years old) are again significantly lower than the 20% projected by Warnock (1978).
18. Why?
  - a. Firstly the OFSTED (2010) report noted the misdiagnosis of SEND in schools (see earlier point about frequencies of SLCN and SpLD students),
  - b. It is argued in the SEND Code of Practice (2015) that 'Quality First' teaching is the first level of SEND provision, would mean less students would need additional SEND provision. *However this is based on teachers have the skills and time to differentiate effectively, Scott suggests many lack such skills.*
  - c. The SEND Code of Practice (2015) specifies a school's SEND Register is based upon 'provision' and not 'need', and that this gives schools the opportunity to only register SEND in schools based on their ability to offer provision (interventions). If this is the case, then it may not be in a school's best interest to assess

students for SEND, as they may be unwilling/unable to financially afford the provision they require.

- d. Funding of SEND is based on socio-economic data rather than actual diagnosed/undiagnosed need

### **The level and distribution of funding for SEND provision**

19. The recent changes to the SEND Code of Practice (2015) have meant that, firstly, children are only added to a school's SEND register if the school can afford to provide them with provision/intervention. Therefore many children may still have a SEND but their school may be financially unable to provide for their needs, meaning they remain anonymous and schools unaccountable as no ongoing needs have been identified. Secondly, the SEND budget in UK mainstream schools is not ring-fenced, and is called 'nominal' as it is used at the discretion of Headteachers, resulting in the opportunity for such funds being misappropriated (e.g. used for non-SEND staffing or other general costs).
20. Schools are liable for the first £6,000 spent per child with a SEND, and gaining a Statement of SEND/EHCP means additional funding over this amount, commonly used to pay for a teaching assistant and support at lunchtime (for example, an additional £8,500 is provided to pay for an unqualified staff member).
21. It is argued that EHCP funding rates have been frozen for many years and do not reflect the actual costs of provision. If the actual costs of a full-time Level 3 higher level teaching assistant is £27,000 (local authority fixed salary rates, plus on costs) and the maximum a local authority is willing to contribute is £12,000. With the additional £6,000 required by the school as a contribution, this makes £18,000 a year, therefore a £9,000 shortfall.
22. Therefore the EHCP top-up funding given to schools is insufficient to cover the actual costs involved, and schools need to make up any shortfall (approx. £6,000–£15,000), and in addition this does not cover the cost of any specialist tuition needed, leaving some schools with huge SEN deficits (e.g. £114,000 a year in some cases according to media reports), and this could be argued to discourage inclusivity in schools.
23. Therefore, SEND pupils could be argued to be a burden on school budgets, and schools would prefer funds to be used to the benefit of large numbers of pupils (for example, school trips), rather than focused on a single pupil (Murray, 2013).
24. It is argued that the SEND nominal budget is meant to cover:
  - a. The salary of the SENCO
  - b. The first £6,000 required by each student with an EHCP (in my own school we have 30 such students)

c. 'School Support' (non-EHCP student) interventions

25. It is argued that if the average SENCO salary is £60,000 (salary, plus on costs), and funding the minimum required by 30 EHCP students is £192,000. There is no/minimal money left in the 'nominal' budget to support students without EHCPs. This is without taking into account the £9,000 shortfall for each teaching assistant employed. The figures do not add up.

26. It is argued by this author that:

- a. SEND 'nominal' budgets should be ring-fenced
- b. EHCP awards should reflect actual current 'nationally agreed' salaries
- c. The SENCO salary should not be expected to come out of the SEND nominal budget

### **Proposal**

27. SEND should be funded in the same way as Pupil Premium, therefore based on actual numbers (rather than on socio economic data), and that EHCP should be based on actual national costs for learning support assistants.

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