

# Children's Embodied Social Capital and (Dis)ability

## Connecting Micro and Macro Scales of Inclusion/Exclusion

Summary of Key Findings and Policy Recommendations

Booklet for Young People



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## Background

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You might have helped us to do this research, and if so, thank you! We want to let young people know about what we have found. This booklet is written for children and young people, but you can read our other booklet written for adults if you like.

We would love to hear from you if you want to tell us something. Email or phone Louise Holt or you can leave a message on our website.

We wanted to find out about young people, especially but not only those who have been told they have Special Educational Needs (SEN). We wanted to know about their friendships, if they were bullied or left out, who their friends were etc.

We also wanted to find out if young people's friendships, or if they were bullied or left out made a difference to what they thought about school and whether they liked lessons. We also wondered if how much young people liked school made a difference to if they had friends or were bullied or left out. We also wanted to know if these things were different if people came from a family who had problems with not enough money, if they were girls or boys and if people came from ethnic minority backgrounds – people who might have been born in Britain but with one or more parents or grandparents (or even great grandparents) who originally came from another country.

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## What We Did (Methods)

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We talked to lots of people. Most of all we wanted to talk to young people. A lot of the time adults don't listen to young people about this type of thing. We looked at three different areas called Local Authorities, all in the South East of England and did research in three schools in each of these Local Authorities – one primary, one secondary and one segregated special school.

### 1. We looked at documents that gave information about schools

like numbers of students with SEN and other things - ethnicity, coming from a home where money can be a problem, if the school is in the countryside or a town or city. We used this to choose some schools to go into.

### 2. In the schools, we:

**2.1. Talked to adults** – people in the Local Authority and schools who decide what happens to young people with SEN and how to help young people – e.g. educational psychologists; teachers; lunch-time supervisors; classroom assistants; after-school club organisers.

**2.2 Spent a long time just looking at what happens in schools and other places** (e.g. after school clubs, parks, etc.) and making notes of what we saw. We also talked to people in these places.

**2.3 Talked to young people** – 104 in total, aged between 7 and 16

Young people did lots of different things, like drawing and acting, we even had an urban street dance. Lots of young people took photos and talked to us about these. Young people also talked to us alone, in pairs or in groups. Lots of young people talked to us more than once. We talked to lots of young people, some who had been told they had SEN and others who hadn't. Lots of the people who took part were on the Autistic Spectrum, had been told they had Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD), or had moderate learning difficulties (or differences – the difficulties are with the work that is set in schools and young people might find other types of work easy!). We really wanted to talk to these young people because not many people have listened to them and we think it is important that adults listen to young people.

**2.4 Talked to parents** (14 in total, we would have liked to talk to more!)

We did lots of different things but the most important part was talking to young people.

# What We Found

## 1. Friendships, bullying and being left out

- Lots of young people with SEN and without have good friends!
- All young people can be left out or bullied sometimes for lots of different reasons. Often someone will be lonely one day but then will have friends the next. Young people do fall out sometimes!
- A lot of young people with SEN quite often get left out of things and can be bullied in schools. They are more likely to be left out or bullied than people without SEN.
- Young people who get left out or are bullied often don't like school. They often don't like lessons as well as playtimes.
- Things were different for young people with SENs in different places, and these are the things we found made a difference:
  - What SEN label someone had – people with BESD were often the most left out. Some people on the Autistic Spectrum were not that bothered about friends, but others were.
  - What school people went to – people in mainstream schools were left out or bullied more than students in special schools, but some people were bullied and left out in special schools
  - How teachers behaved – e.g. where they sat young people in the classroom, did they listen to young people about where they wanted to sit? (see point 4).
  - School and Local Authority policies about special units, whether to have special schools etc.
  - What the young people were like – boys or girls, age, from a home where money is a problem, ethnicity– how these things mattered changed in different places.

## 2. People left out and bullied often had issues in other parts of their lives

- All the young people we talked to wanted to do well at school. Some young people found it hard to behave well in school, and felt upset about this.
- For young people BESD feels like a condition, it is not a choice to behave in ways that teachers and other adults don't like!
- Our young people all had adults who tried hard to understand them, but many also had teachers who found it difficult to understand that they were not just being naughty. This was true of young people with BESD and on the Autistic Spectrum.
- More people with BESD and moderate learning differences come from homes where money is a problem than people who don't have SEN. But not everyone who is told they have these SENs come from homes where money is a problem!
- Young people from families where money is a problem are more likely to be told they have SEN but less likely to get a statement of SEN. This is a problem because the school doesn't get as much money to help them.

- Young people who have SEN and come from families where money is a problem are often left out and bullied. But some of these young people had lots of friends!

## 3. What helps young people to have good friends?

- People who had hobbies and saw friends outside school often also had good friends in school.
- Nearly all of our young people had families that they loved and who helped them, even if they also had some problems. This helped people to be happy and to think they can do things.
- Some families thought it was important for young people to have friends and do activities and helped them by paying for them, driving them to their clubs or town, friends' houses, etc., paying for transport or just letting them do things.
- Some families could not afford to pay for their children to do things.
- Some families did not want to let their children do activities, clubs or go to friends' houses or parties; they were afraid something bad would happen.

## 4. Where you are matters!

- People get the label BESD because they behave in ways that are not expected, especially in schools. We found that young people who behaved the same in different places sometimes got the label BESD and sometimes didn't. So where you live makes a difference to if you get told you have BESD.
- The same is also true of young people with moderate learning differences. Finding learning hard was expected in some places. People who find learning hard find what they are taught in lessons hard. They might be good at other things that are not seen as important to learn in schools. All the young people who talked to us were clever in many ways and had interesting things to say.
- People with BESD had a statement less often than people with other SEN. Getting a statement also was different in different places, some people with the same behaviour or learning got a statement in one school and not in another. This was different in different Local Authorities, but also in different schools in the same area. Also, the places where people didn't get statements were often where there were more families with problems with money.
- Having a statement of SEN brings money to the school so it can be a problem if people with difficulties do not get a statement in one place when they would in another. In September 2014 the way young people are told they have SEN will change and what happens if they have it, and this is in a new SEN Code of Practice. We can't see anything in the new Code of Practice to make us think this issue will get better.

## 5. Having good friends helps people like school and try hard in lessons

But how much this would help them get good qualifications and good jobs in the future is tied to where you are and these things:

- How good the school is!
- Whether young people could do GCSEs or A levels or had a good course to study that wasn't GCSEs or A levels;
- Whether young people in special schools or units spent all their time here or went to other places to study for GCSEs or A levels or a good course;
- Some young people who went to special schools or units worked much harder and tried much harder in lessons than people who hadn't been told they had SEN who were in mainstream schools and lessons!

## 6. What schools and teachers do matters

- Some of our young people had been bullied by teachers, but not in the school they went to at the time
- Sometimes teachers watch and tell off young people with BESD and/or on the Autistic Spectrum more often than the other young people, just because they expect them to be naughty
- Teachers do have a difficult job and need to teach as well as they can and this can make some teachers think that young people who find it difficult to learn, or can't behave as they expect, are a problem.
- Where people sit in class makes a difference to feeling part of the class – some young people sat right at the front or right at the back of the class and this made them feel left out. But some young people want to sit alone or with a classroom assistant.
- Being in a special unit or school can help people have friends, but can mean that all a person's friends have similar SENs to them. This can be a good thing, but can cause a problem if it means access to GCSEs, A levels or a good course is not possible.
- It can be hard to be in a unit or special school if everyone else is different to you in some way, e.g. girls in units or schools that have a lot more boys
- Being in a unit can make other people in the school think you are different.
- But this can be a good thing if it helps other people (young and older) to find out about how people are different because they have an SEN and that these people still have lots of great things about them and can help the school and other friends in lots of ways! It isn't a good thing if people think that being different is bad.
- How Special Educational Needs Assistants or classroom assistants were used in the classroom – did they sit right next to a single young person, or help the whole class, being ready to help the young person if needed?
- How much time young people spent on therapies, like speech therapy or Personal and Social Education aimed at teaching people to co-operate, and how much time they spent in other lessons.

## 7. What Local Authorities do

- Some places had lots of things to do outside of school and others didn't.
- Some things to do outside of school were not OK for people with different SENs
- Some activities and hobbies outside of school cost less money than others.
- Some people couldn't do outside activities because it cost too much money. For people in families where money is a problem any cost can be too much.
- Some Local Authorities let transport pick young people up from a friend's house or later on after school. This let young people do hobbies and clubs or just hang out with a friend.
- In some places transport would only pick up from school at the end of the school day and this made it more difficult for young people to see friends out of school or do hobbies and clubs.

## —○ What We Think Needs To Be Done ○—

**1. All teachers and adults need to know how important friends are to young people**

Friends matter because having friends makes you happy and being bullied or left out makes you sad. But also, people who have good friends like school more and try harder in their lessons. Teachers do still need to teach! For some people friends aren't that important. So adults need to listen to young people about their friendships. Teachers should think about where they ask young people to sit and how other things they do might help or stop young people from making friends.

**2. All teachers and adults need to know that some young people are more likely to be left out or bullied.**

They need to think about what they can do to help these young people to have friends and to make sure what they do does not make this more of a problem.

**3. Government, local authorities and schools need to know that SEN 'conditions' are not facts but happen in particular places which have different ideas about what is normal learning ability and behaviour.**

This changes in Local Authorities, schools and even classrooms within schools.

**4. Government, local authorities and schools need to think about the fact that some people from families where money is a problem are more likely to be told they have some SENs but less likely to get as much money for the school. They need to think about how the changes coming in September will affect this, with the new code of Practice.**

**5. Young people make friends when they have the same interests and hobbies and get together and find they like each other.**

Giving young people these things helps them to make friends. Teachers or other adults trying to help young people make friends too much can cause a problem!

**6. Government, local authorities and schools need to know that for young people from families where money can be a problem any cost for an activity can be a problem.**

If possible activities should be free.

**7. Transport needs to be better for young people with SEN.**

Why can transport pick up later or from different places in some local authorities and not in others?

**8. Sometimes parents need help to know that** clubs and just hanging out with friends can help their child a lot.

**9. Most of our young people liked their special unit or school and thought it helped them.**

But we need to think why these are still needed and how mainstream schools can be changed to be good for everyone. There is a lot of difference between special schools and units, and we found that **special units or schools that have links with mainstream schools or classes** are best.

**10. Young people need to have access to good courses. The decision about what course to do should be based on the young person not the type of SEN they have!**

Young people should have a say.

**11. Some young people do need some therapies (like speech therapy or extra help reading), but it they also need to do meaningful lessons.**

Adults need to think about the time young people spend doing therapies or being taught to co-operate or behave better and make sure that the people teaching these things are trained to do it. More attention should be given to finding what young people are good at than changing what they find difficult.

**12. All children should be taught by qualified teachers** not classroom assistants. We have found that some people with SEN are taught more by classroom assistants than teachers, and that sometimes when a person has an assistant the teacher talks to the assistant, not the young person. Classroom assistants are very helpful, and many young people really like their assistant. But care needs to be taken that classroom assistants are not teaching young people with SENs lessons which should really be taught by a teacher.

## Find Out More

If you want to find out more, see our website:

[www.socialcapital.lboro.ac.uk.webhost1.lboro.ac.uk](http://www.socialcapital.lboro.ac.uk.webhost1.lboro.ac.uk)

You can find out more about the new SEN Code of Practice here:

[www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/resources/government-resources/young-people's-consultation](http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/resources/government-resources/young-people's-consultation)

[www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/feb/10/special-educational-needs-sen-reforms-five-things](http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/feb/10/special-educational-needs-sen-reforms-five-things)

If you think we have missed something, or got something wrong, or if you just would like to tell us something else, please email or phone Louise:

You could also leave a message on our website:

[www.socialcapital.lboro.ac.uk.webhost1.lboro.ac.uk](http://www.socialcapital.lboro.ac.uk.webhost1.lboro.ac.uk)

You could Tweet Louise [@lholt13](https://twitter.com/lholt13)

We are hoping to do more research in the future, so please keep in touch if you would like to be involved.

The picture on the front is 'friends' made in plasticine by primary school girls, and all photos are taken by young people participating in the project

