

## **Mission impossible: inclusive teaching in a standards driven system**

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the findings of two studies that critically analysed teachers' perspectives which related to the operation of the standards and inclusion agenda in primary schools in England. This paper compares the data from a study (Study One) carried out in 2010-2011 (Brown, 2013) with another (Study Two) completed in 2019. Through the application of Q methodology the paper examines whether teachers' perspectives of the standards and inclusion has changed over time. Analysis of the data strongly suggest that teachers have experienced significant difficulties including children with SEND whilst at the same time trying to operationalise the objectives of the standards agenda. The research concludes that there needs to be a focus on developing effective strategies to include children with SEND within the hostile environment of the standards agenda. Within such an environment it is suggested that focus needs to move away from concentrating on 'children's with SEND having difficulties' to the creation of inclusive educational settings which welcome all learners. In addition, it is argued that Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs) should also be revised so as to consider the needs of all learners. Findings from the analysis of the studies suggest that if we want all learners to succeed then it is essential that we celebrate success in all its forms not just within the narrow confines of the standards agenda.

Keywords- standards agenda, inclusion agenda, teachers, primary, education.

## **Introduction**

The study's aimed to investigate teachers' perspectives on the inclusion and standards agendas in mainstream primary schools in England. This paper compares data from a study (Study One) carried out in 2010-2011 (Brown, 2013) with another (Study Two) completed almost a decade later in 2019. Before we move to consider the research itself, it is important

to consider the differing make up of these [standards and inclusion agendas](#), historically and practically.

### **The standards agenda**

Since the late 1970's, a standards agenda, which has focused upon neoliberal notions of accountability, assessment and performativity, has dominated education policy and rhetoric in England (Hodkinson, 2019). This agenda has observed, not only the creation of a National Curriculum but also Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs), league tables and inspections by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). Furthermore, the introduction of the Education Act (1980) and more significantly, the Education Reform Act (1988) created an educational environment which promoted a market-led and developed a more competitive ethos in schools (Galloway and Edwards, 1991). Moreover, these acts provided for parental choice which ensured teachers and schools have been, and are, held accountable for their actions. These acts, therefore, and other subsequent legislation, has centralized control and taken power away from Local Authorities (LAs) and schools. They ensure that within educational settings a 'public managerial state' has transformed the English educational system into a marketable commodity which seeks to increase standards by focusing on school-to-school competition (Winter, 2006).

Whatever their political persuasion all governments, since the 1980s, have continued to focus on standards, accountability and academic success. For example, New Labour introduced strategies, which mandated that half of all curriculum time should be spent on literacy and numeracy (DfES, 1998, 1999, in, Harnett and Vinney, 2008). Whilst this mandate was later relaxed, the standards agenda has nonetheless continued to dominate educational policy initiatives. Although, through policies such as Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004a) and the introduction of contextual value-added performance measures (Leckie and Goldstein, 2017), policy, for a brief time, did take elements of children's circumstances into account in measuring theirs and a school's progress. On achieving power in 2010 the Coalition Government though rescinded such measures as part of their purported recommitment to standards-based school reform. Introducing, instead, policies such as the Education Act (2011) which aimed to help teachers raise standards; negate underperformance and strengthen the ways teachers were held accountable for their actions.

One measure that has remained constant since the 1990s is Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs). However, it is observable that SATs have evolved based upon differing Government's educational priorities. From their inception, though, SATs have been considered as a 'high stakes' assessment. Not least, as SAT results are published in national league tables and employed in OfSTED inspections to monitor teaching standards (Ozga, 2009, in, Ward and Quennerstedt, 2019). The current regime has been in place since 2016 and presently Key Stage two SATs includes assessments of Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar (SPaG), Reading, and Mathematics (Bradbury, Braun and Quick, 2021). Research, has though, for many years, highlighted concerns in relation to the SATs regime. Not least, that it forces teachers to 'teach to the test' and 'prep' their children to focus exclusively on academic achievement (Fieldings *et al.*, 1999; Wyse and Torrance, 2009). Other concerns centre on the fact that the SATs process is time-consuming (West *et al.* 1994); is inaccessible for some children; that some children with SEND experience difficulties with this form of assessment (Brown, 2013); and the negative impact of 'failing' SATs for children, teachers and schools (Williams-Brown and Jopling, 2020).

Other aspects of the standards agenda have also been subject to critique. As example, it has been argued that teacher autonomy has been significantly curtailed and this has resulted in teacher's not being able to meet the individualised needs of children (Brown, 2015). As Pratt (2016, p.892) notes, standards-based constraints dominate schooling; "English teachers teach within a tightly controlled set of parameters, some made explicit in national curricula and national strategies, and others implicit". Another example of the issue of teacher autonomy was detailed in the 2013 National Curriculum review. This highlighted that teachers should utilise this curriculum for core knowledge but that they did have autonomy to plan exciting and engaging lessons (Department for Education, 2013). However, given that such autonomy was situated alongside the same assessment and inspection processes as before One must question whether this curriculum review had any real impact within the applied educational setting. As Jopling (2019) relates the standards agenda is riven with paradox as it purports to increase school autonomy through such measures as the introduction of local management of schools (LMS), the reduction of LA oversight but at the same time it maintains standards and traditions through the National Curriculum, assessment and inspection. Whitty and Power (2002, p.105) comment that such paradoxes have led to the development of a hybridized policy which has brought forth marketisation and traditionalising impulses in a way that is 'both complementary and contradictory'. It should be noted that much of this neoliberal education policy is peculiar

to England as other UK countries, notably Scotland, have been more resistant and have attempted to restrict market-driven approaches. Indeed, such resistance has observed the reinstating of elements of traditional pedagogy and curriculum, often to counter the extremes associated with this rather vaguely defined progressivism (Chitty, 2014).

### **The inclusion agenda**

This 'vaguely defined' standards educational environment has also witnessed the birth of the policy of educational inclusion. Inclusion may be observed as an ideological tool which considers an educational future where all children could be fully included in every aspect of the schooling experience (Booth *et al.*, 2000). Inclusion originated in the 1970s from an era of integration where focus was on the placement of children with SEND into mainstream settings (Thomas and Vaughan, 2004). However, from the 1990s, initiatives such as the United Nations Standards Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) and the Salamanca Declaration (1995) (UNESCO, 1994) determined that children with SEND should be considered in all planning and curricular activities, with appropriate support being provided (Rustemier, 2002) and that all children would be educated in mainstream schools, regardless of their needs (Nutbrown and Clough, 2006).

In England, in the late 1990s, New Labour proclaimed that inclusion was a chance to create a democratic world which enabled change for disability and equality to be located within a new cultural framework (Hodkinson, 2011). Inclusion, at the theoretical level then, aimed to change societal and educational perceptions of disability by encouraging an acceptance of diversity (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). However, the reality was that inclusion under New Labour became nothing more than a political process (Allan, 2008), a key component in governmental planning (Corbett, 2001), that was pursued through a powerful top-down implementation approach (Coles and Hancock, 2002, Hodkinson, 2019).

One of the key challenges with inclusion during this era was that there was no common accepted definition of what inclusion actually was. In its practical operationalisation therefore, inclusive education became a concept with no 'version control'. This lack of 'version control' has led researchers to argue that inclusion should be defined by its operation rather than through its conceptual multiplicities and manifestations (Nutbrown and Clough, 2006). However, whilst in educational practice, the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainsco 2000) sought to delineate inclusion as curricular and pedagogic differentiation so as to 'accommodate'

educational need of all learners (Petriwskyj, 2010). Inclusion in the harsh reality of operation became strongly associated with disability and special education (Koutsouris, Anglin-Jaffe and Stentiford, 2020). Despite attempts to define and operationalise during this period, it was the case that not all children with SEND were included in mainstream settings (Done and Andrews, 2020).

### **Standards and inclusion in tandem**

Inclusion then, it may be argued, was not successful (Hodkinson, 2019) and One must question why given it was such a major policy initiative did it not gain consistent traction in educational settings during the 1990s and 2000s. One reason for this is that inclusion from its very inception was subsumed within the standards and commodification agenda referenced earlier (Williams-Brown and Hodkinson, 2019). Problematically, inclusion's emphasis became one which sought to include all children with SEND within what may perceived as a hostile environ - that of the standards agenda (Williams-Brown and Hodkinson, 2019). Indeed, as stated earlier the National Curriculum, SATs, league tables and OfSTED ensured schools and teachers were accountable for their actions not in terms of equality but in terms of results defined within narrow parameters of educational success. Indeed, early in the operation of inclusive education concerns relating to the duality of these agendas were raised. For example, in the 'Removing Barriers to Achievement' document (DFS, 2004), Kenneth Clarke, the then Minister for Education stated:

We need to do much more to help children with special educational needs to achieve as well as they can, not least if we are to meet the challenging targets expected at school (Charles Clarke, Department of Education and Skills [DfES], 2004b, p.16).

Furthermore, in 2010, such concerns were again raised in The Importance of Teaching White paper (DfE, 2010) and the Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability (DfE, 2011) Green paper. These documents expressed concerns about the progress of children with SEND in comparison to their peers. In response to such criticisms, the Government implemented a sharpening of the accountability but not inclusion regime, by requiring, through the league tables, that information be made public on the progress of lower-attaining pupils (Glazzard, 2013). What became clear, during this period, was that schools who attempted to be more inclusive often faced a decline in their academic standards because the

standards agenda continued to focus solely on narrow parameters of achievement (Glazzard, 2014).

Since this period, it is the case that systems have been put in place to try to support children with SEND. These include the creation of Education, Health and Care plans (Jones and Symeonidou, 2017), added onto to the operation of the National Curriculum (Williams-Brown and Hodkinson, 2019) as well as an option for some children with SEND not be included in SATs at all. Despite such initiatives, inclusion has become intrinsically linked to higher standards in education and so all children still have to conform within narrow parameters of success (Glazzard, 2014). As Glazzard (2013, p.184) relates, “The current education system celebrates high achievement over the valuing of difference (Goodley, 2007), which inevitably forces educators to invest more time into those learners who will produce valued outputs”. Done and Andrews (2020) believe that major obstacle to the success of inclusion, therefore, lies within the domination of the neoliberal standards driven system that is in operation in schools in England. Given this evidence it seems reasonable to argue that successive Governments have not focused on inclusion as a human right but rather have continued to develop inclusive education within an existing standards agenda. Here, then, schools and government have to focus on accountability, centralized control and assessment which forces inclusion to be dominated by the identification of need, assessment and placement of children with SEND (Williams-Brown and Hodkinson, 2019). The overriding question that remains therefore is that if children with SEND are included in mainstream schools do they subsequently become disadvantaged or even excluded within an educational environment that is dominated by the standards agenda objectives? It is into the maelstrom of policy paradox and confliction that the two research studies sought to ascertain teacher’s perspectives on inclusive education.

### **The study’s methodological design**

The two studies detailed in this paper had the same objectives. Study Two was carried out almost a decade after the first. This study sought to ascertain if perspectives on the inclusion and standards had changed overtime. The main research questions were:

- (1) What are primary teachers’ positions on the inclusive education agenda?
- (2) What are primary teachers’ positions on the education standards agenda?

### (3) How do primary teachers manage these agendas simultaneously?

Study One's data collection was carried out in 2010-11 (see Brown 2013 and 2016) and investigated 26 teachers' perspectives of the inclusion agenda. These teachers were located in six mainstream primary schools in three different LAs in the West Midlands. The study's sample included two schools in affluent locations, two in low socio-economic locations and one Catholic and one Church of England primary school. Teachers in the study varied in the length of their teaching experience.

Study Two, investigated 32 teachers' perspectives of the inclusion agenda. These teachers were located in five mainstream primary schools in three different LAs in the West Midlands (See Williams-Brown and Hodkinson, 2020). The study's sample included one Church of England school in an affluent location and four academy schools in low socio-economic locations. Teachers in this study also varied in the length of their teaching experience. This form of purposive sampling was not intended to produce a comparative study but was directed at gaining a wide selection of mainstream primary schools and teachers.

The focus of these two studies was interpretivist in relation to participants' positions, acknowledging that positions and one's actions can alter over time and can be dependent on situational circumstances. Q-methodology was deployed in both studies as a means of gathering quantifiable data from highly subjective viewpoints (Brown, 1997). Q-methodology investigates the complexity in different participant's positions, on a given subject, where differences of opinion are expected (Combes, *et al.*, 2004). This methodology is a way of thinking about research that focuses on providing subjectivity to participants. This approach to research enables an exploration of shared meaning through consideration of the social context in which participants find themselves (Kitzinger, 1999). Q-methodology involves participants sorting a set of statements onto a distribution grid, shaped as a reversed pyramid. Participants sort these cards based on whether they agree or disagree with each statement. The distribution was conceived as a range from -4 (strongly disagree) to +4 (strongly agree). As such, participants in the studies were comparing and contrasting attitudinal statements – there was no right or wrong response in the card sort that was presented to participants (Brown, 1991/1992).

In both studies the methodology and the way the data was collected was the same, except that in the original study, post Q-sort interviews were also carried out. However, this was not possible in the current study due to access issues and time restraints. Participants in both studies were asked to sort 48 statements twice, firstly considering their position on the standards agenda and then on the inclusion agenda. The Q sort statements included,

‘I think that all children are considered within this initiative’;

‘Inclusion within the context of this initiative focuses upon the placement of children into mainstream schools’; and,

‘I feel a moral obligation to fulfil the objectives of this initiative.

There were also statements in the card sort set that described the standards objectives. Such Statements related to the National Curriculum, Statutory Assessment Tests, league tables and OFSTED. For instances, two statements read: ‘Statutory Assessment Tests are worthwhile for every child’ and ‘It is necessary for the school to be accountable to external inspection and the assessment process’. In the current study, ‘Special Educational Needs’ was changed to ‘Special Educational Needs and Disabilities’ in line with current parlance in schools. There were also other statements that had to be changed from the first research because of changing terminology. For instance, not all schools still implemented p-scales (some had moved to s-scales) and ‘the Statement’ had changed to Education, Health and Care Plan. However, instead of changing these statements participants were informed that the statement was the same as the original study and that they needed to consider them in light of their current practice.

The distribution data was analysed qualitatively and also quantitatively using the PQ method, which is a computerised method of inputting data and producing factors (known as ‘groups’ in this paper) (Eden, Donaldson and Walker, 2005). Q-methodology uses conditions of instruction to instruct participants in what to think about when sorting the set of statements (Rhoades and Brown, 2019). These studies included two conditions of instruction that separately focused on the inclusion and standards agendas. In this paper findings are focused on the combined analysis of participant’s card sorts. This has been achieved by analysing their inclusion and standards agenda card sorts in PQ method at the same time.

It is important to note that 'children with SEND' was not the terminology used in the original study as children with SEND were then defined as children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). However, in this paper current terminology is used throughout.

## **Findings**

Findings from both studies found many commonalities in perspective across the groups in each study, and in comparing study one and study two's findings. Ordinarily Q-methodology data is presented by detailing each participant group and explaining their commonalities in perspective. However, whilst the groups have differences in perspective, there are many consistent commonalities in perspectives across the groups and across the two studies. Therefore, these findings investigate all the developed groups from both studies at the same time to fully be able to compare these commonalities in perspectives.

Many Q-methodology studies use a factor (group) descriptor to describe and emphasise the main commonalities in perspectives for that group. Descriptors were developed for generated groups in both studies. These descriptors start to show commonalities in perspectives across the groups and studies and therefore, it was important to start the presentation of these findings by providing detail on all the groups.

### ***Groups from study one***

Two groups were produced from study one's analysis of the data and this accounted for all 26 participants' perspectives, however one participant's inclusion card sort had to be removed from analysis because the participant placed the same statements more than once on the distribution grid. The below descriptors capture some key similarities. These include a focus on children with SEND, disagreement with standards objectives and concern for children with SEND and their experiences of standards agenda objectives.

Group one: The education of children with SEND suffers because of the emphasis on standards.

Group two: Children with SEND do not have to achieve the same standards, academic achievement is not paramount for all.

### ***Groups from study two***

Three groups were developed from study two's data which accounted for 23 of the 32 participant's perspectives. The remainder of the sample did not hold enough commonality with any of the produced group's commonalities in perspective to be included in the generated groups. The below descriptors again detail the same similarities as the groups in study one.

Group one: Children with SEND can be included in mainstream schools, but SATs are not worthwhile for every child

Group two: Children with SEND cannot be fully included in mainstream schools because of the standards agenda

Group three: The standards agenda is not inclusive and therefore children with SEND cannot be fully included.

Demographic information on these groups detail that for both studies these groups were developed by teachers who had a range of years teaching experience and were teaching across primary year groups in differing school locations. The table below details presents teachers demographic information for each group.

Group	Number of participants	Years taught	Years' experience	How many participants were part of this group for their inclusion and standards card sorts
Study one, Group one	17 teachers with 26 card sorts	Reception to year 6	1-34 years' experience	9 teachers
Study one, Group two	15 teachers with 22 card sorts	Reception to year 6	2-34 years' experience	7 teachers
Study two, Group one	9 teachers with 14 card sorts	Nursery to year 6	1-33 years' experience. Two teachers stated	5 teachers

			they were SENDCO's	
Study two, Group two	8 teachers with 12 card sorts	Nursery to year 4 (one teacher stated they taught all years)	2-33 years' experience	4 teachers
Study two, Group three	11 teachers with 13 card sorts	Nursery to year 5 (one teacher stated all years)	1-20 years' experience. Two teachers stated they were the schools SENDCO	3 teachers

Three key themes emerged when analysing the data across groups and both studies. These are as following:

- The focus on children with SEND
- Standards objectives are not working
- Should children with SEND have to be included in standards objectives like SATs

These findings are detailed below and include tables that provide comparative data on commonalities of perspectives in each group and across both studies.

### **The focus on children with SEND**

In both studies there was a dominant focus on children with SEND. The table below details card sort statements and the collective placement of these statements for each of the groups in study one and two. PQ method generates a factor array that is the same distribution as the studies distribution grid and this represents the participant's commonalities in perspective. Therefore, the numbers in the below table represent strength of agreement or disagreement for that statement. For instance, -5 is strongly disagree, -4 to -2 is disagree, -1 is slightly disagree, 0 is indifferent and 1 is slightly agree, 2-4 is agree and 5 is strongly agree.

Statements	S1	S1	S2	S2	S2
	G1	G2	G1	G2	G3

Inclusion within the context of this initiative focuses upon the placement of children into mainstream schools (statement 9)	2	3	1	1	2
I think that <u>all</u> children are considered within this initiative (statement 5)	-3	2	2	-3	-1
I feel that within this initiative the school system adapts to accommodate children with special educational needs (statement 16)	0	0	1	2	2
I believe that the statementing process (EHCPS in second study) helps children with special educational needs within this initiative (statement 8)	2	2	1	2	-1
Children with mild special educational needs find it easier to be included within this initiative than those with more severe special educational needs (Statement 18)	3	3	2	3	1
I believe that there is a continuing reduction in children who are excluded from obtaining the objectives of this initiative (statement 2)	-2	1	1	0	0

The above statements focus on teachers practically trying to include children with SEND into mainstream settings. This is interesting, as there is no fixed definition of inclusion in policy, and this had led to multiple uses in both theory and educational practice. Nutbrown and Clough (2006) considered inclusion to be operational, as opposed to conceptual, because of the multiplicity of its manifestations. Since the Index for Inclusion (2000), inclusion is meant to have been broadened away from a focus on children with SEND to relate also to gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, culture, and social class. Inclusion should therefore be focused on equality by highlighting the need to value all pupils and to view difference as a resource to support learning. However, for teachers in both studies detailing experiences of children with SEND were important and this is evident in several statements on these children being placed in the agreeable and disagreeable columns of the distribution grid. Only two groups agreed that all children were considered in one or both agendas.

All five groups slightly agreed or agreed that inclusion in this context focuses on placement of children into mainstream schools. However, should be observed as integration not inclusion. For it to be inclusion the school environment needs to change to accommodate the needs of learners (Brown and Hodkinson, 2019). Inclusion should be built on absolute presence and if the focus is just on placement then children with SEND are more likely to be experiencing integration than inclusion. As Chia (1995, see Hodkinson, 2011, p. 183) stated “Either a thing is here or it is not, we instinctively think, but in fact in all kinds of ways absent things leave traces of their presence and a thing can be present while being partially absent”. There did however appear to be a move towards inclusive practice for the groups in the second study. In study one the two groups were indifferent about whether the school should adapt to accommodate children with SEND, but in study two they slightly agreed or agreed with this statement. This indicates a move towards also focusing on school adaptation, but these groups also slightly agreed or agreed that inclusion focuses on placement.

Since 1993, the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities determined that children with SEND should be considered in all planning and curricular activities, with appropriate additional support (Rustemier, 2002). In study one the statementing process supporting children with SEND receiving additional support and by study two this has changed to Education, Care and Health Plans (ECHP). Four groups slightly agreed or agreed that these systems, to access additional support, helped children with SEND, but this was not agreed by all and therefore it leads us to question whether these systems are working for all children with SEND.

There is also evidence in the placement of these SEND focused statements that children with SEND struggle with existing mainstream systems. All five groups slightly agreed or agreed that children with mild SEND find it easier to be included than those with severe SEND. This is understandable given that the introduction of inclusion did not radically change the education system and was slotted into the existing standards driven system (Brown and Hodkinson, 2019). It therefore supposedly replaced ‘integration’, but it didn’t change the system to make sure all objectives were inclusive and considered the needs of all learners. This may be why only two groups agreed that there is a continuing reduction of children who are excluded.

***Standards objectives are not working***

Statements	S1	S1	S2	S2	S2
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	G1	G2	G1	G2	G3
In the government's opinion to be a 'good teacher' is to achieve in the league tables (statement 36)	5	5	4	2	3
In my opinion to be a 'good teacher' the most important aspect of my job is achieving in the league tables (statement 35)	-5	-5	-3	-3	0
I should focus more attention on the children who could achieve the 'national average' (statement 42)	4	2	1	4	3
I believe that if all my class do not achieve the 'national average' they are failing in their education (statement 46)	-2	-4	-5	-2	-3

All five groups strongly agreed or agreed that in the Government's opinion to be a 'good teacher' is to achieve in league tables and four of the groups strongly disagreed or disagreed that this was their opinion. SATs results have been published on national league tables since 1992, which compare schools' success and introduced high stakes accountability to the primary phase by placing schools in direct competition with one another. Since then, schools remain ranked on league tables according to the proportion of children who achieve the expected level (Higgs *et al.*, 1998, in, Williams-Brown and Jopling, 2020). These forms of public accountability have been critiqued as deprofessionalising and deskilling teachers. These Government objectives challenged teacher autonomy and 'commercialised' the profession, tying professional status to teachers meeting standardised criteria that contributes to their schools' accountable achievements (Keddie, 2017; Webb, *et al.*, 2004).

Disagreement in the significance placed on SATs was evident across the groups. All five groups strongly agreed or agreed that more emphasis is placed on SATs than any other objective. In contrast to the importance placed on SATs all groups strongly disagreed or disagreed that if their class do not achieve the 'national average' they are failing in their education. This is again understandable when looking closely at this form of assessment. SATs are based on the normal distribution of results in relation to the national average. This means that some children will inevitably be unable to achieve this average and be considered as failing the assessment. This form of assessment then cannot by its very nature promote excellence for all children, "there are, of course, winners and losers ... [promoting] belief in the myth, or at

least acquiescence to the rhetoric, of excellence for all - everyone's a winner" (Gamarnikow and Green, 2003, p.209). Yet, teachers and schools are then measured and held accountable based on how many children achieve the 'national average'.

***Inclusive practice in a standards driven system. Should children with SEND be included in objectives like SATs?***

Statements	S1	S1	S2	S2	S2
	G1	G2	G1	G2	G3
I believe that children with special educational needs can be fully included within every aspect of the schooling experience (statement 14)	-4	-2	2	-2	-3
It is of paramount importance that children achieve academically (statement 47)	-2	-4	-1	-3	-1
Statutory assessment tests are worthwhile for every child (statement 7)	-4	-3	-4	-4	-5

Four of the groups disagreed that children with SEND can be fully included in every aspect of the schooling experience. The focus on children with SEND and on standards agenda objectives throughout these findings evidence the conflict between being inclusive in a standards driven system. It might be argued that it benefits the Government not effectively define inclusion, as without this definition inclusion remains "...subject to conceptual confusion and terminological ambiguity" (Hodkinson and Devarakonda, 2011, p.54). It therefore remains an ideological concept that we aim towards but cannot fully implement in the regimes enshrined in current practice (Williams-Brown and Hodkinson, 2020). Inevitably, therefore, inclusion might only be aimed for within the constraints of existing standards objectives.

Dominance on standards objectives were evident in all group's placement of statements. There was a resistance evident in all of groups towards SATs. All groups strongly disagreed or disagreed that SATs are worthwhile for every child. Moreover, all groups strongly disagreed or disagreed that it is of paramount importance that all children achieve

academically. Inclusion, as defined by Hodkinson (2019), inclusion requires school adaptation if all children are to be included. However, SATs have not been designed to consider the needs of all learners or show their educational successes (Williams-Brown and Jopling, 2020). SATs results are employed to rank schools in league tables. Schools lower down the league tables are observed as failing and, in turn, children are seen by government and the media as failing to achieve the desired 'national average' (George and Clay, 2008; BBC, 2019). Inclusion could be made more straightforward, but this would then mean that the standards objectives, amongst other things, would need to be reconsidered as to whether they help or hinder inclusive ideals. Findings from the study strongly suggest that without such change inclusion becomes focused only on whether children with SEND can or cannot, and should or should not, be included in standards-based objectives like enshrined within SATs.

### **Concluding comments**

This paper has detailed the findings from two studies that were carried out almost a decade apart which focused on teacher's commonalities in perspective within the inclusion and standards objective. The findings evidence difficulties in practice have continued throughout the period of the study. What is made clear is that teachers, in both studies, consistently focused on children with SEND, disagreeing with the employment of the standards agenda objectives, especially SATs. The findings also make plain that the standards agenda focused these teachers minds onto whether children with SEND can or should be included in the SATs. This suggests that the original objectives of inclusion are being perverted by the standards agenda as curricula, amongst other things, cannot be adapted to accommodate individual need. The findings evidence that the following changes need to be considered if we are to move forward effectively with the standards agenda. These being:

- that the standards objectives need to be re-considered in light of the objectives of the inclusion agenda, rather than the other way around. It is clear though from the study's findings that inclusion continues to operate within a regime of accountability (Allan, 2003). Therefore, an unprecedented and substantial change would be needed to the standards agenda if inclusion is to become more effective. However, the standards agenda has not radically changed in the past to accommodate other educational agendas and objectives so there is little chance that Government will re-consider its

approach to its present standards based approach to education (Williams-Brown and Hodkinson, 2019; Williams-Brown and Jopling, 2020).

- there needs to be more focus placed on the inclusion of children with SEND which addresses the disparity of their educational experiences, thus enabling inclusion to focus on all children. Children with SEND and inclusion remain synonymously connected in these findings (Sikes, Lawson and Parker, 2007). However, and worryingly, teachers' positions on inclusion detail that they have move away from focusing inclusion on children with SEND (Williams-Brown and Hodkinson, 2019). However, when also considering standards agenda objectives this move to all children is not evident. Our view would be that the ideal for inclusion would be an assessment regime that enables the celebration successes, in all its forms, and one which ensures all children can achieve success.

It is important to note that the current study was completed before the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then children have experienced time out of school, changes to addressing children's EHCPs, temporary changes to SATs, uncertainty and social isolation, which has led to concerns of reduced educational achievement (Eyles, Gibbons and Montebruno, 2020 and Clarke and Done, 2021). There has also been a greater call to change standards objectives, especially SATs, to provide a fairer system that is fit for these 'challenging times' (Moss and colleagues, 2020). The impact of the pandemic will only serve to further disadvantage children with SEND without change to ensure their needs are accommodated. These uncertain times emphasise further the importance in acting on the concerns raised in this paper as a matter of urgency.

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