Debate topic 1: 'This house believes that Special Schools should be closed'

Within Britain the education of learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is a topic of debate. However, the separation of mainstream and SEN education is integral to Britain's education system since inception. With 1,037 SEN Primary schools in the UK (DFE, 2017), parents are now choosing these settings, due to their child receiving little support in mainstream primary education; as indicated by 64% of SEN children being separate from the class (Garner, 2014). However, a counter argument is the notion of inclusivity within education, which can be mutually beneficial for all learners (Cologon,2017).

Interestingly, throughout the debate it became apparent that both sides started arguing a similar justification of human rights and choice in educational institutions. Initially I believed that Special Schools should close due to the separation of learners which may cause social issues. However, through analysis and research, I can appreciate the role of SEN schools as well as the needed alterations in mainstream education.

In support of the debate statement, it is apparent that the main issue surrounding SEN schools is the lack of cohesion between learners. Within the SEN setting children are surrounded by other SEN learners, thus inhibiting socialisation with other children. Cologon (2017) states children in SEN settings are disadvantaged as they are not 'fully integrated' into a setting which reflects society. Thus it can be inferred that segregation of these learners can possibly perpetuate the stigma surrounding SEN. However, the counter argument may suggest that SEN schools provide better educational experiences to SEN children as practitioners within the setting can tailor to the children's needs effectively. This may have some resonance, due to the government's funding scheme of providing £10,000 per year to SEN schools in comparison to £6,000 to mainstream education with SEN learners (Gov UK, 2017), which can often be spent elsewhere. Despite the extra funding (McInerney, 2015) the OFSTED standards used in SEN schools are not comparable to those of mainstream schools. Moreover, suggesting that the government's values surrounding special schools maybe degenerate than the value of mainstream education.

Alternatively, mainstream education may appear to be a more favourable to educate SEN learners as 25.8% of children are in mainstream settings (DFE, 2017). Thus enabling all learners to integrate together which can be beneficial to those with or without SEN

(Norwich, 2008). However, when addressing this within the debate I was challenged to understand the difference between inclusivity and mainstream, which caused me to reflect upon the repercussions of this within the education setting. Interestingly the notion that mainstream education for SEN children is inclusive is not the reality. SEN children are often given to a Teaching Assistant (TA) for lessons. This in part is due to the lack of training teachers have with SEN practice (Secret Teacher in The Guardian, 2017). Therefore by giving a TA the responsibility of educating SEN children for 78% of their school time (Richardson,2018) issues of marginalisation can be present.

However, some parents want their children to receive the support from the TA, as it enables their children to be exposed to a mainstream environment (Webster, 2014). But this can suggest that education of SEN learners in mainstream settings is being compromised, as 14% of year 6 SEN students achieve the standards required in: reading, writing and maths compared to the 62% of pupils without SEN (Harvey, 2017). Despite the influx of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO) within mainstream settings who are trained to aid SEN pupils (Grant, 2013), children are still underachieving within schools by a lack provision (Norwich, 2008) and a disadvantage in testing. Therefore, it can be suggested that the 33.3% increase of children in SEN schools (Garner, 2014) is due to parent's dissatisfaction.

In accordance to the Government's recognition of essential parental choice (SEN code of Practice, 2017) some parents have rejected both SEN and mainstream settings. Home education for SEN children has increased to 57%, due to children feeling overwhelmed and unsupported within the school environment (Jeffery, 2017). Some children with ADHD are starting to become educated this way as parents are dissatisfied with school methods. Indicating the need for mainstream education to become inclusive not de facto discriminatory.

Moreover, it can be made apparent that a direction of inclusivity within mainstream settings should be evident, by enabling more funding made available as well as increased training to practitioners. From this parents of children who have SEN can have decide the choice of special or mainstream education for their child with equality in mind.

Word Count: 747

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Debate topic 2: 'This house believes that University tuition fees should be abolished'

Since 2012 the increase of Tuition fees has become controversial in society. This in part is due to this issue being utilised as a political tool and to present privatised ideals (Brown, 2013). During the last six years tuition fees have increased to £9,250 seeing a decrease in 50,000 student applications (Bolton, 2017). However, despite the influx in cost, 60% of students' state that debt from tuition fees does not deter them from going to University, (Moore, 2011).

In the debate it was insightful to hear the justifications of my peers as I had some preconceived notions of the arguments which would be stated. However, I was surprised that mental health issues linked to finance within students was not discussed. Therefore, this inspired me to research this factor further.

Coughlan states (2017) students will have a minimum of £50,000 of debt from tuition fees. With a further £40,000 interest and living costs, most students are unlikely to repay this loan in 30 years. From this one can infer that the significant sum of money linked to higher education, can be a deterrent for some. However, those who do attend university feel the fees can have a detrimental impact on their experience with some 9% of University students seeking treatment for depression, which they did have before enrolling into Higher Educational. Interestingly many identify finance as main concern of this change (Richardson et al, 2015) and fear that finical struggles will be present in their futures, despite 84% of graduates have higher income salaries (Moore, 2011). Due to this some students are trying to experience HE at a cheaper cost as 36% of students are attending Universities in their home cities (Moore 2011), to keep their future debt low.

Interestingly, the government suggests that privatisation of HE enables good competition to occur within institutions. This is a progression from the 'performativity' schools provide to prepare learners for competition (Lunt, 2008). However, it can be suggested that the response elicited by students is the contrary which can be reflected in the response in the election. The 2016 election had the highest youth turn out in 25 years, with many voting for Labour who promised an abolishment of tuition fees to widen participation within Universities. Forstenzer (2017) argues that abolishment of tuition fees will benefit all in society as the country will become more productive and see improvements in voting and tax

revenue. Thus suggesting if tuition fees are abolished, more students may attend University preventing finance to inhibit intelligent students.

Surprisingly, from 1980 to 2016 432,000 more students are attending university per year (Coughlan 2017) some of which are from disadvantaged backgrounds, as evidenced by the 2015 UCAS report, for 21% of disadvantaged students applied for University despite the increase in fees. However, by abolishing tuition fees some fear that the value of a Bachelors degree will become diminished forcing employers to seek Master degrees from their employees (Molesworth, et al, 2009). Therefore causing the marketisation of HE to perpetuate into a business like culture. But the notion of the marketisation of higher education can be beneficial as Universities can utilise their finances in particular areas. However, if tuition fees were abolished, the government would distribute money to the establishment. Moreover, with tuition fees Universities are more efficient with quality education for students (Adcroft, et al, 2010).

Interestingly, marketisation can have personal advantages, as students can have more autonomy in the decisions and management of the University. With an increase in student voice services, students are able to have a 'pseudo-sovereignty' status enabling students to demand change (Molesworth, 2009). This is evident as 35% of students who feel that their education is not reflecting the price they pay (Coughlan, 2017.

Alternatively, the moderation of tuition fees could be a compromise to the issue (Mikelonis, 2015). Some suggest that tuition fees should be capped at a low rate which reflects the hours of contact time within a course. The students that require more resources such as BSc courses should pay more than BA students as it is means tested on time and money (Worley, 2017). However, this may cause further alienation to students as evident in Scotland where HE is free. Interestingly, Ryan (2017) believes that abolishing tuition fees is not going to solve the divide between the classes, as wealthier students can afford to pay for their expenditures, however the poorer will struggle to pay living costs. But if the government changes tact and directs funding towards early years, instead of HE, initial disadvantages of background can be tackled which may enable more students to attend university (Ryan, 2017).

From the debate and my own research my initial opinion has changed to appreciate a modification of tuition fees maybe the solution. Since then the government has stated a possible reduction in fees to £7,500 (Worley, 2017) by the next budget.

Word Count: 808

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