

The Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) is committed to the removal of all barriers to participation and learning, and to inclusive education as the basic human right of every child. In this area we believe that roles and responsibilities for directors of services and lead members will only become clear if the DCSF itself matches its overall strategic vision with certain *concrete steps for achieving it*. These will be of direct relevance to lead members and directors of children's services who will have the responsibility of carrying them out. Since the present document acknowledges that its basis lies in **Every Child Matters**, we think it appropriate to refer to its offshoot, **Aiming High for Disabled Children**, whose opening paragraph states:

The Government wants all children to have the best start in life and the ongoing support that they and their families need to fulfil their potential. Disabled children are less likely to achieve as much in a range of areas as their non-disabled peers. Improving their outcomes, allowing them to benefit from equality of opportunity, and increasing their involvement and inclusion in society will help them to achieve more as individuals. It will also reduce social inequality, and allow communities to benefit from the contribution that disabled children and their families can make, harnessing their talent and fostering tolerance and understanding of diversity.

Equality and inclusion are admirable aims, with which CSIE concurs. They speak for themselves. However, in addition to **Every Child Matters** and under a completely separate rubric, lead members and directors of services are also under a duty to implement policies on "Special Educational Needs" which are part of schools' everyday practical experiences. These contain no hint of any strategic plan for achieving equality for disabled children through their inclusion in schools, i.e. the same schools that they would have gone to if they had not been disabled. We refer here in particular to those children who are most likely to be segregated away from mainstream, namely those with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties and those permanently excluded.

It is important not to let a vision such as **Every Child Matters** remain isolated from the everyday detail of existing practice, with no acknowledgement of the current gap between them. It risks the vision

being perceived as a waste of breath, something that can safely be ignored by the people charged with its implementation, and at worst disingenuous. There needs to be strong, robust national leadership that will set out a very clear path as to how lead members and directors of services, legally bound as they are to take responsibility for vulnerable children, can progress from the existing situation to the vision of equality and inclusion.

We note that there is no mention of inclusion or inclusive education in the document offered for consultation. However, it does speak about “improving outcomes and narrowing gaps for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities”. If lead members and directors of services are to do so, we must acknowledge what, in reality, they are confronted with in their everyday work: on the one hand with the vision of equality and inclusion contained in *Every disabled child matters*, on the other hand with existing practices of segregation in their own authority – practices that intrinsically preserve inequality and produce poor outcomes on the margins of society for children who are disabled or have behavioural difficulties. Lead members and directors are given no plan for getting from here to there, for achieving the vision from such a starting place.

National strategic leadership is needed if local authorities are to incorporate the principles of inclusion and equality across the range of services: not only playschemes, youth services etc. *but also schools*, which is where children spend most of their time outside the home and which more than any other places provide the opportunity to afford children an equal right to participation in community and social relationships.