

To Whom It May Concern:

I am Professor Emerita at Loyola Marymount University in California. I have had the pleasure of visiting many schools in Northern Ireland as well as having had meetings with several Department of Education officials and parents. I also spoke with the panel of the Independent Review as it conducted its work.

While I understand the concerns about places for students with disabilities, Special Education is not a place, but it is services to be provided to any child who requires these services in the "Least Restrictive Environment", a US legal term that refers to the mainstream environment. Documentation must be provided to justify removing a student from the mainstream classroom.

In California, students with disabilities are referred to as "mainstream students who have an Individual Education Plan" not SEN students. This is a change in mindset so that educators and parents see these students as part of the mainstream class, not as part of special provision.

Special schools have been closed in many countries including the US and Portugal and now they serve as resources to mainstream schools and educators. Research has demonstrated that segregating students apart from their peers without disabilities is detrimental to all students. This research can be provided to the Committee upon request.

In conclusion, I am very concerned about the direction that Northern Ireland is going regarding the education of students with disabilities regardless if they are on a register or have a statement. Money for building special schools should be directed to preparing all educators to effectively educate ALL students in mainstream classes.

The education system in Northern Ireland is broken and needs to be transformed. All school leaders and teachers need continuing professional development (CPD) on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as well as on research based high-leverage instructional practices. There are many ways to provide this including on-line CPD.

In addition, it would be beneficial for the Committee and Department of Education and Education Authority officials to see inclusive schools that have been effective in educating all students in mainstream classes including those with complex needs. I am happy to provide information about these schools.

Please don't hesitate to contact me about my statement or if you have any questions.
Thank you.

Respectfully,

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