



Chairing the Whole School SEND Consortium is a privilege—combining, as it does, many of the things that have mattered most to me in my career.

Better outcomes for children and young people with SEND has been a recurring theme throughout my career. As a teacher, as leader in education at the Red Cross, as founder of The Communication Trust, in my current work through NotDeadFish and as the Managing Director of the London Leadership Strategy, the principles of access, inclusion and the entitlement of children and young people with SEND to have the same opportunities as their peers has driven much of my work.

And the issue has personal resonance as the parent of a child whose special needs impact on her every day.

But my sense of privilege goes beyond the subject area. *How* the Consortium is working and plans to work matters just as much.

We aim to work:

Collaboratively

Many people say this but it is hard to do. It really is. The logistics is one thing (have you ever tried to get a group of headteachers in the same place at same time; add in a sprinkling of charity CEOs and you have diary meltdown) but even more difficult is developing a meaningful shared agenda that doesn't water down objectives to the lowest common denominator in order to avoid conflict.

The Whole School SEND Consortium is made up of people who disagree. On some things. It includes parents who don't always think that schools deliver for their child. And school leaders who sometimes think that parents don't always work with their school. And charities who have lobbied by saying that schools have failed children with SEND. And schools who look at charities and say they have had too much funding that could have better gone to schools. Special school advocates and those who think inclusion is all.

But good collaboration is based on understanding these tensions and working together anyway because the ultimate goal is more important. To be part of the Whole School SEND Consortium—whether a Founding Consortium member or those that join as we move forward—you do have to agree on one thing. We all believe that we have to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. It is one of the moral purpose issues of our time.

Realistically, pragmatically and making best use of what already exists

That isn't to say we haven't an ideological intent. A driving vision. We do. All children and young people have an entitlement to a high quality education that meets their needs.

Nor are we saying that supporting children and young people with SEND doesn't need more resources; it does. But too much work in this field has started with big bang statements and claims of the magic bullet. Funding has been repeatedly invested in new toolkits, resources or approaches that promise to save the world, without much thinking as to scale, dissemination or practice change.

The Whole School Consortium are looking at what we know works and looking at approaches to taking this to scale. Working to embed effective practice and to improve weaker provision. There are 8.6 million school aged children and young people; nearly 500,000 teachers; 24,000 schools—to pretend that a single government policy or toolkit or approach will improve outcomes for all children is unrealistic. That isn't to say these aren't important—effective policy is essential—but ultimately change comes in the classroom teacher to child; child to teacher. Effecting that change is difficult. But we will approach it with the relentless optimism that underpinned the London Challenge and all good school-to-school work.

Led by schools; informed by families

LLS is a school-led organisation. Its Directors are Practicing Heads. LLS is not-for-profit and its mission is to support school leaders to improve the outcomes of the children and young people in their care. There are other projects looking at other aspects of SEND provision—and these are important—but this work focuses on what happens in schools and starts from the premise that much of what we need to know already exists in the system. Too often schools are done to—this project focuses on schools doing with schools.

But that is not to say that schools have all the answers. Working with charities, parents and young people and other stakeholders is an essential part of improving outcomes—both at school level, project level and at system level. And the Consortium will actively seek out partners and input that provide this challenge and expert advice.

Honestly

It would have been easy to write this piece as a glowing introduction to the work of the Whole School SEND Consortium. There is much good to say about the work of LLS, our partners and schools across the country. And this is indeed a rare chance to effect change through embedding what we know works.

But things are not perfect. Too many children and young people with SEND are excluded—in every sense of the word. Too much money is not used efficiently or as effectively as it can be. The gap between some children with SEND and their peers is too big.

And the pressures of accountability; the challenges of making the best case for funding; the small p of politics means that we are all under pressure to put our best version forward. This is human. And to celebrate what does work is an important principle of LLS and the Whole School SEND Consortium.

But we will also not shy away from sharing the challenges, the difficulties and the mistakes we make. For this is not about us as individuals or organisations. It is about improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND in the most effective and meaningful ways possible.

So this is a privilege. And I hope one you will share.

Anita Kerwin-Nye

17/08/16