

Special schools feel like 'bookends' to UK's national education policy, says research

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[New research](#) from the University of Nottingham has found that national education policies can make special schools feel like a 'bookend.'

Dr. Lauran Doak, in the School of Education, spoke to headteachers across five schools specializing in the [education](#) of children with [special educational needs](#) and disabilities (SEND).

Her research explored the dissatisfaction that these [teachers](#) felt in relation to national education [policy](#) in England and the effect this has on special schools nationwide.

They expressed concern around the curriculum, financial administration and pandemic and post-pandemic guidance. Issues often stemmed from policy that centers the experiences of non-disabled learners in mainstream schools—assuming, for example, that they can take part in online catch-up tutoring or are expected to enter traditional paid employment.

Headteachers involved in the research also expressed concerns related to school funding and a lack of meaningful advice from central government. They also explained their anxieties about Ofsted inspections, and described a "roulette wheel" that may not allocate an inspector who understands the disconnect between national education policy and special [school](#) delivery.

Dr. Doak, Assistant Professor in the School of Education, said of this research, "The UK government has repeatedly expressed support for the continued existence of special schools, so it is imperative that national educational policy is fit for purpose in these settings.

"This [research](#) highlights how frequently special schools are forgotten when policy is written; in fact, two headteachers were moved to tears as they recounted the impossibility of implementing policy which was clearly not written for disabled learners. I hope that this report can start a conversation about how we move towards more inclusive educational policymaking."

Headteachers indicated that they would prefer tighter scrutiny of the wording in national educational policy to reflect the educational needs of special schools, and better communication between policymakers and practitioners.

More information: Lauran Doak, Understanding the challenges of enacting national education policy for special school Headteachers in England, *University of Nottingham* (2023). [DOI: 10.17639/b6qs-1547](https://doi.org/10.17639/b6qs-1547)

Provided by University of Nottingham

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