

Disabled pupils failed by lack of school staff, warns expert

More specialist teachers required to make mainstreaming work

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A LEADING teaching expert has warned that a long-standing policy of placing disabled children in mainstream schools is failing because of a lack of specialist staff in the classrooms.

Professor Sheila Riddell, of Edinburgh University's centre for research in education, believes that while the philosophy of "mainstreaming" is right, many schools lack vital resources to support children with additional support needs. Her claims will be aired in a BBC Scotland documentary entitled "Am I Included" which will air on Wednesday night.

The programme comes after The Herald revealed that an Enable Scotland survey of pupils, parents and teachers' experiences of mainstreaming showed fewer than 10 per cent of teachers said they were confident a child or young person with a learning disability would get enough of their time and support.

More than three quarters of the 204 education workers taking part in the research said there was not enough additional support for learning staff to support children and young people with learning disabilities in mainstream classes. This figure rose to 86 per cent of frontline classroom teachers

In the documentary, Prof Riddell, said there was a problem with the level of teacher expertise in additional support needs (ASN) in Scotland, adding that while a

gradual move away from isolating children in special schools has been the right approach, teachers have been asked to do too much.

"I think that sometimes people thought that if you had inclusion it would work automatically, just having children with their peers,"

she said. "But we do need to have specialist staff as well as general teaching staff.

"We are going to have to have a reassessment of how inclusive schools are staffed and how children with ASN are supported.

"Simply identifying a child as having ASN doesn't automatically mean that child is going to get the support they need to flourish in schools."

Concern is also voiced by teaching union representative Susan Quinn, of the Educational Institute of Scotland.

She said teachers and schools want inclusion to work, but claims there are "real issues" over the resourcing of support for disabled pupils in the classroom.

"Teachers really do want to be inclusive: they want to have a comprehensive system that supports every youngster," Ms

Quinn said. "But what they are finding at the moment is that there just aren't the resources to do so whether it is bodies on the ground or whether it is appropriate training for staff."

The Enable Scotland report highlighted by The Herald showed that pupils often felt left out of classroom learning, in the playground and many were denied participation in school sports or

trips.

Education Secretary John Swinney has pledged a review of guidance on mainstreaming, which he said was an important part of the ethos of Scottish education, but he told the programme: "Mainstreaming will not work for every single child in our system."



WARNING: Professor Sheila Riddell highlighted problem.

