Assessing the inclusivity of three mainstream secondary schools in England: challenges and dilemmas

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The notion of inclusion has gained momentum worldwide, with most countries around the world embracing inclusive policies and practices in their educational systems. However, there is still an ongoing debate as to what is inclusion and hence, the consequent challenge of coming up with an agreed definition, which could then be used to plan for and subsequently, evaluate, inclusion. This study adds to our understanding of inclusion by contrasting objective (i.e. School Census Statistics) and subjective (i.e. self-report questionnaire) measures of inclusivity in three mainstream secondary schools in England and by comparing the perceptions of school inclusivity of different groups of educational practitioners and pupils. Interviews with school psychologists were also conducted for triangulation purposes. The results of this study indicate that inclusion is a 'slippery' construct as the perception of inclusion of educational practitioners was found to be affected by their role at school while pupil perception on this matter depended upon their SEN category. However, despite these subjective differences in the way inclusion is perceived, there was also substantial agreement across the different categories of participants with regard to the relative ranking of inclusivity across the three schools suggesting that coming up with overarching themes on what is inclusion is achievable. The article ends with explaining the benefits of reaching an agreed definition at a national level.

Keywords: inclusive education; definitions of inclusion; England; measures of inclusion; special educational needs; views

Introduction

After the enactment of the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education

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(UNESCO, 1994), the ideology of inclusion gained momentum worldwide. Increasingly, countries from the developed and developing world started embracing inclusion in their educational policies, with the aim of improving the educational provision of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Despite the increasing popularity of inclusion, and the large number of studies published in the last two decades, inclusion is a contested construct, with scholars defining it in different ways nationally and internationally (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou, 2011; Florian, 2014; Nilholm and Göransson, 2017). This paper discusses the challenges in meaningfully defining, operationally measuring and collectively conceptualising the notion of inclusion within the UK context and suggests some ways forward.

Defining inclusion: what are the challenges?

In the UK context, the meaning of inclusion has changed significantly through the passing of time, evidence of which can be found in governmental policy and publications as well as in academic research. In 1998 the Department for Education and Employment used the world inclusion to refer to a wide range of things including: the placement with pupils with SEN in mainstream schools; the participation of all pupils in the curriculum and social life of mainstream schools; the participation of all pupils in learning which leads to the highest possible level of achievement (p. 23). In a similar vein, definitions of inclusion suggested by scholars at that time were mainly promoting 'education for all', where inclusion was seen as a right, referring initially to pupils with SEND, being subsequently extended to all vulnerable pupils (e.g. Booth, 1999; Donnelly and Watkins, 2011). Traces of this can be found in a report published by Ofsted in 2001 (p.4) where the meaning of inclusion was focusing on the equal educational opportunities for all pupils irrespective of their age, gender, ethnicity and background. After that, emphasis was given to 'equality of opportunities for all', where inclusion is viewed as providing education equity (e.g. Farell, 2000; Lindsay, 2007) and quality in social interactions (Bunch and Valeo, 2004). For others, inclusion also took on the connotation of being about school improvement and system change with an emphasis placed on school restructuring (e.g. Booth and Ainscow, 2011; Hatton 2013), mainly focusing on identifying those characteristics that make some schools more inclusive than others. Following the enactment in England of the 2014 Children and Families Act and the 2014 SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years, there has been a further shift in the meaning of

inclusion to place greater emphasis on social equality beyond school. Inclusion is now concerned with raising high aspirations and the providing right support and opportunities to facilitate the transition of young people with SEND from childhood to adulthood and independent living (p. 92).

The diverse concepts the construct of inclusion conveys, along with the different ways educational policies and scholars define it demonstrate the multifaceted nature of inclusion and the complexity in coming up with a commonly agreed definition. For example, in international discourse all of the following arrangements have at times been considered inclusive: schools for all with heterogeneous classes; mainstream schools with special classes; special classes as part of a general education system. It is suggested that this is not going to be achieved easily, as there are challenges to be addressed; these include the 'subjectivity' in the way various key stakeholders perceive inclusion and the distinct meaning of inclusion at the national level among the academic community.

Particularly, several scholars have sought to explore the views on inclusion among different professionals, including headteachers, teachers and/or teaching assistants (e.g. Glazzard, 2011; Robinson and Goodey, 2018), key stakeholders, such as children/young adolescents with or without difficulties (e.g. O'Connor et al., 2011) and/or parents (e.g. Evans and Lunt, 2002). Research outcomes have shown that an individual's view on inclusion is subjectively perceived and its shaped according to the personal experiences one has within the school environment. There is, thus, the need for future investigations to explore, in the same study, the views of different communities (i.e. professional, key stakeholders) and come up with shared patterns on what inclusion is.

What is more, it is very common for scholars of the same country to express different views about what is inclusion and/or what are the characteristics of an inclusive school, thus often causing confusion as to which are the best policies and practices to follow. For instance, in the English context, Booth and Ainscow (2011), in their seminal work, the Index for Inclusion, through conducting a longitudinal action research study, concluded that an inclusive school is the one that aims to increase the learning and participation for all pupils. Hatton (2013), on the other hand, after applying a mixed methods approach, found that a significant component of an inclusive ethos is the implementation of effective behaviour management strategies. Despite the different ways inclusion is perceived, they seem to be complementary rather than contradictory. As such,

it can be argued that finding a commonly agreed definition of inclusion, or at least aspects of agreement is worth attempting. There is, therefore, the need for future studies to actively involve and develop collaborations between scholars of the same country.

To sum up, if we could effectively deal with the aforementioned challenges and come up with an agreed definition of inclusion at a national level, among the academic community, the professional community and key stakeholders (e.g. parents, children/young people, policy makers etc.), then it would be beneficial in clarifying the necessary policy and practical actions and in enabling accumulation of research knowledge.

The benefits of reaching a commonly agreed definition

Within the UK context lack of an agreed definition has often been seen as a key driver holding back the successful implementation of inclusion (e.g. Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2002; Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011). As Avramidis et al. (2002) explained, 'inclusion is a bewildering concept which can have a variety of interpretations and applications' (p.158). Uncertainty regarding fundamental questions, such as, "What are the principles of an inclusive educational system? Who is in need of receiving inclusive education and why? What are the characteristics of an inclusive school, and what are the criteria for evaluate its inclusivity?", has, as a consequence, led to the creation of four barriers responsible for slowing down the progress and the efficiency of inclusion. These include the following.

Lack of governmental support, effective legislation, and educational policies

More than two decades have passed since the UK, have embraced inclusion in its educational system. However, without an agreed definition to guide practice and set clear goals, it is often the case that enacted inclusive policies and legislation fail to be successfully implemented into practice, whilst often being discouraged by other statutory policies (Glazzard, 2011). For instance, in an English study, Glazzard (2011) argued that despite governmental policies supporting inclusive education in mainstream settings, concurrent pressure for high academic scores tracked by national assessment regimes, often leads to conflicting outcomes. As findings have indicated, headteachers are reluctant to accept a large number of pupils with additional needs in their mainstream settings, due to the fear of hampering school results. This shows that the prescribed

policies on inclusive education are not always aligned with concurrent and contradictory policies.

Insufficient or limited teacher training: Inadequate training programmes for preparing teachers in the application of inclusive practice has become a matter of concern at a national level. Several scholars in the field have consensually revealed the perceived inability and powerlessness of teachers to surmount the challenges of inclusive practice, with there being the consequent call for the need of a more focused training (Allan, 2015; Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Emam and Farrell, 2009; Robinson and Goodey, 2018). This limitation highlights the necessity to come up with agreed guidelines on how inclusion is interpreted in practice and the development of collaboration among experts in special education of effective training.

Lack of agreed criteria and tools to measure the efficiency of inclusion: In the absence of an agreed upon definition, different criteria have been developed and various approaches have been used by scholars to measure school inclusivity. For instance, Farrell et al. (2007) employed objective measures, i.e. the use of Pupil-Level Annual School Census (PLASC) data to measure the inclusivity of schools, based on the proportion of pupils with additional needs in each setting. Other scholars, have employed subjective measures, focusing on individuals' views to evaluate the quality of school inclusivity. Perhaps the most well-known and widely used instrument is Booth and Ainscow's (2011) *Index for Inclusion.* The *index* is a tool that schools can use for self-review to increase the learning and participation of all pupils. In a similar vein, Hatton (2013) has also designed a tool to measure school inclusivity by focusing on the effectiveness of a school's behaviour management strategies. With different focus given to operationally defining inclusion, evaluation of a school's inclusivity could arrive at opposing outcomes depending on the measurement tools being applied. In this respect, without a commonly agreed definition, the evaluation and furthermore, enhancement of inclusion would remain unattainable.

A common definition of inclusion, if achievable would allow stakeholders from various fields to exchange ideas and share information that would gradually lead to greater effectiveness in the delivery of inclusive education policy and legislation. Consensual guidelines, outlining the qualities of inclusive schools and their criteria, would permit the creation of tools to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusion, giving the

opportunity for schools to identify areas that need further improvement. In the presence of a clear definition of inclusion and how it is interpreted into practice, the development of a comprehensive and adequate training for teachers would be feasible. This study investigated whether an agreement on what inclusion is can be reached within one context, that of England. The following research questions guided this study:

(1) Do objective and subjective measures of inclusion concur?
(2) Is there an agreement in the perceived inclusive ethos between different groups of educational practitioners (i.e. teachers, TAs) and among different groups of pupils (i.e. SEMH, MLD, typical)?
(3) Are there shared perspectives on school ethos between educational practitioners and pupils?

Methodology

Participants

Three mainstream state-funded English secondary schools from a suburban metropolitan area were purposively selected to take part in the study. School Level Census Metadata (DfE, 2013) along with statistics of the local authorities provided by the Department for Education (DfE, 2013), were used to identify suitable schools. Initially, all mainstream secondary schools (n = 430) of all the local authorities with high numbers of SEMH and MLD were identified (n = 96). The rationale behind focusing on these two groups is that they make up the two largest groups of SEN in mainstream settings. Schools that had failed to secure a relatively large number of pupils in both of these SEN groups were excluded from the analysis, as they would have restricted the size of the recruitment sample.

The identification of schools that differ in inclusivity was based on *two initial criteria*, followed by matching with regards *three further criteria*. *First criterion*: The 'inclusivity' of each school was measured by the difference in the percentage of SEN pupils in each school with the average for the Local Authority (LA) to which it belonged. For a better conceptualisation of a school's inclusivity, the differences in the percentages

of SEN pupils between the school and the LA were banded, and the schools were classified, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Classification of Inclusivity among schools

Intervals (difference in percentages between the school and LA)	Characterisation
40 – 30	Extremely inclusive
30 – 20	Highly inclusive
20 – 10	Very inclusive
10 – 5	Fairly inclusive
5 – 0	Just inclusive
0 – -5	Slightly inclusive
-5 – -10	Not inclusive

Second criterion: Another indication of 'inclusivity' was the percentage of exclusions. Schools that had a lower percentage when compared with the LA's average were characterised as inclusive, while those with a higher percentage were deemed less so.

The percentages of exclusions were calculated by dividing the sum of the sessions that had authorised exclusions by the sum of possible sessions both for the schools and LAs.

$$\%\ \text{Exclusions in the school} = \frac{\text{sum of authorised excluded sessions}}{\text{sum of possible sessions}}$$

$$\%\ \text{Exclusions in the LA} = \frac{\text{sum of authorised excluded sessions}}{\text{sum of possible sessions}}$$

Schools that had been refined from the first and second criteria also needed to have similar Ofsted reports, socioeconomic background and ethnicity levels to meet the third, fourth and fifth criteria, respectively. Having applied all of these, the schools singled out were approached to take part in the study. Finally, three secondary mainstream schools with differences in inclusivity agreed to participate. As a cross-reference for the differences in the inclusivity between participating settings, a telephone interview with each school's

educational psychologist was also conducted.

All educational practitioners and pupils from year 7 to year 10, of the three participating school settings were invited to complete a self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire response rate for educational practitioners and pupils was 80% and 96.9%, respectively. Of the 104 educational practitioners who completed the questionnaire, 54 were teachers (51.9%), 16 were teaching assistants (15.4%), 10 were part of the senior management team, while 24 had other professional roles (23.1%). Of the 1,440 pupils, approximately 500 from each school that filled in the questionnaire, over half (54.3%, n=807) were boys, 39.5% (n=587) were girls, whilst 6.2% (n=92) failed to record their gender. The majority of pupils, nearly 78%, were classified by the school as typical, while 19% were identified as having SEN. 3% of pupils were not classified in any of the two categories.

Measures

Objective and subjective measures were employed to investigate the inclusivity of the three participating mainstream school settings. The objective measure was drawn from School Level Census Metadata (DfE, 2013), which monitors numerical characteristics about individual pupils and schools themselves. These include information on free school meal eligibility, ethnicity, special educational needs, attendance and exclusions. School inclusivity was determined by recording the proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and the proportion of exclusions per school (as described above). To reduce the subjectivity around the concept of inclusion, quantitative measures were employed that allow for an objective investigation into any differences between the schools.

The subjective measures deployed were the perceived inclusivity by pupils and educational practitioners, as measured via the completion of the self-report school ethos questionnaire constructed for this study. That on inclusive ethos for the pupils contains seventeen items with two sub-scales: the first measuring inclusion has eleven items, covering: a) school's valuing of all students, b) access to decision making (autonomy), c) school encouragement, d) encouragement from others, e) praise of pupils' academic attainment, f) praise of pupils' academic effort, and g) access to equal opportunities. The second sub-scale measures behaviour management (BM) with six items: a) consistency,

b) clarity, and c) fairness of school rules. Most of the items in the latter section are adjusted, taken from the school ethos questionnaire developed by Hatton (2013) to explore educational staff perceptions of the inclusive and exclusive behaviour management practices applied in the schools. The items on the inclusion sub-scale however, had to be developed as no existing scale was found for measuring the perceptions of pupils with SEN about an inclusive ethos. For the development of the scale, a meticulous review of most of the published work on inclusive ethos was scrutinised to ensure that all key themes identified in the literature were included. The main aim behind developing the inclusive ethos questionnaire was to create a tool that researchers and school leaders could use to evaluate quickly and easily the subjective perspectives of pupils with SEN on their school's inclusivity level.

In addition to the 17-item school ethos questionnaire for pupils, an adjusted version for educational practitioners was developed. Prior the distribution of the questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted to test the administration process, the clarity of items as well as to test the reliability and validity of the research tools (Robson, 2011). Assessment of the internal consistency of the pupil and educational staff school ethos questionnaires was made using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient statistics. The total Cronbach's alpha for pupil questionnaire was $\alpha = 0.833$, while the sub-scales for behaviour management and inclusion were $\alpha = 0.855$ and $\alpha = 0.678$, respectively, thus suggesting satisfactory internal consistency (i.e. greater than 0.7, Pallant, 2013). A satisfactory internal consistency Cronbach's Alpha of $\alpha = 0.881$ was also found for the educational staff questionnaire, while for the sub-scales of behaviour management and inclusion $\alpha = 0.815$ and $\alpha = 0.804$ were recorded, respectively. A high score for a sub-scale indicates that the pupil or the educational practitioner perceived the school as being inclusive.

Given the English context, labels such as social emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH) and moderate learning difficulties (MLD) are used to describe pupils in this study who experience behavioural and emotional difficulties and learning difficulties, respectively. Specifically, for the purpose of this study, pupils identified by the school as SEMH or SEMH and another SEN category were classified as SEMH (2.4%, n=36). Those classified as having MLD or MLD and another SEN category were classified as MLD (6.7%, n=99). Pupils identified as having another category of SEN, as

well as who had a combination of MLD and SEMH, were classified as having Other SEN (9.9%, n=147). 77.9% of pupils were classified as typically developing. As a triangulation process regarding pupils classified by their school as SEMH, the pupil's self-reported version of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997) was also employed. The SDQ is a brief measure to screen for behavioural and emotional problems with pupils and adolescents using the bandings: 'normal', 'borderline' and 'abnormal'. Classification made based on the SDQ total difficulties scores revealed that 70.3% of the pupils were identified as normal, 11.5% as borderline and 7.5% as abnormal (10.8% missing values). On the SDQ externalising difficulties sub-scale, 76.3% were classified as normal, 7.2% as borderline and 5.9% as abnormal. A comparison of the percentages of pupils classified by the school as SEMH and by self-report as abnormal on SDQ scales revealed a considerable degree of anomaly. Consideration of the challenges in accurately identifying SEMH is beyond the scope of this paper and will be discussed in a following one.

Findings

The findings revealed discrepancies in rankings of inclusion between schools depending on whether inclusion was measured objectively (i.e. School Census Metadata) or subjectively (i.e. individuals, schools' educational psychologists) measures.

Objective measures

According to the objective measures, as shown in Table 2, School 3 clearly appeared to be the most inclusive; it had a higher percentage of SEN pupils, and lower proportions of exclusions compared with that of the LA as a whole and with the other two schools. School 1 was *'very inclusive'* in terms of the percentage of SEN pupils, but it was relatively less so with regards to the proportions of exclusions when compared with the LA as a whole. Conversely, School 2 was *'just inclusive'*, according to the percentage of SEN pupils, but relatively more inclusive with respect to the proportions of exclusions when compared with the LA as a whole.

Table 2: Number and proportion of pupils with SEN and exclusions at each school and their respective LAs

	% SEN	% exclusion
LA 1	26.6%	0.184%
School 1	38.9%	0.398%
(1040)	(405)	(853)
LA 2	25.9%	0.115%
School 2	26.9%	0.142%
(890)	(240)	(314)
School 3	42.9%	0.032%
(1105)	(475)	(73)

A chi-squared test was conducted to examine whether there was a relationship between school setting and pupil group (SEN vs. non-SEN pupils). A statistically significant association between variables was found, χ^2 (2, n = 3035) = 57.1, $p < .001$. A further chi-squared test also indicated a statistically significant association between school setting and exclusion (i.e. exclusions vs. attendance), χ^2 (2, n = 661902) = 826, $p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons (Table 3) between the schools showed that School 2 was statistically significantly different from the others in both measures. The difference between School 1 and School 3 was statistically significant for exclusion, but not for SEN pupils admitted.

Table 3: *p* value of pairwise comparisons via a χ^2 test

	SEN	Exclusions
School 1 vs School 2	< .001	< .001
School 2 vs School 3	< .001	< .001
School 1 vs School 3	.057	< .001

Subjective measures

Table 4 shows how subjective measures revealed conflicting findings. School 2 emerged as being the most inclusive, while School 3 was reported to be the least of all, as measured by the responses of educational staff and pupils. Similar opinions about the inclusivity of

317 the three settings were supported by the educational psychologist of each school. The
318 differences are summarised in Table 5.

Table 4. Means, SDs and results of statistical analysis on Ethos, BM and Inclusivity of schools, as measured by educational staff and pupils

	School 1	School 2	School 3				
	(n = 34)	(n = 26)	(n = 44)				
Variable	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	ANOVA Group	*p*	ω^2	Tukey's HSD
ESEthos	72.52 (6.91)	75.42 (9.55)	67.24 (8.34)	*F*(2, 96)	< .001**	.13	School2>School1>School3
Sub-scales							
ESBM	31.29 (4.48)	33.28 (5.53)	27.61 (4.37)	*F*(2, 100)	< .001**	.02	School2>School1>School3
ESInclusivity	40.88 (4.1)	41.88 (5.03)	39.55 (4.7)	*F*(2, 97)	.122		
	(n = 427)	(n = 436)	(n = 400)				
PEthos	56.92 (10.0)	57.46 (9.0)	55.37 (9.1)	*F*(2,1260)	.004**	.01	School2>School1>School3
Sub-scales							
PBM	21.04 (4.5)	20.75 (4.1)	19.78 (4.2)	*F*(2, 1310)	< .001**	.02	School1>School 2> School3
PInclusivity	35.87 (6.5)	36.68 (6.0)	35.49 (5.9)	*F*(2,1264)	.015*	.01	School2>School1>School3

Note. N =, M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation; ESEthos = Educational staff perspectives on ethos; ESBM = Educational staff perspectives on behaviour management; ESInclusivity = Educational staff perspectives on inclusivity; PEthos = Pupils' perspectives on ethos; PBM = Pupils' perspectives on behaviour management; PInclusivity = Pupils' perspectives on inclusivity. *p < .05, **p < .001

Table 5: Summary of the subjective measures on schools' Inclusivity

	School 3	School 1	School 2
Educ.StaffEthos	↓	≈	↑
Educ.StaffBM	↓	≈	↑
Educ.StaffInclusivity	≠	≠	≠
PupilsEthos	↓	≈	↑
PupilsBM	↓	≈	↑
PupilsInclusivity	↓	≈	↑
Educational Psychologist	✖	✓	✓

Note. Educ.Staff = Educational staff, ↓ = scored significantly lower, ↑ = scored significantly higher, ≈ = scored in between, ≠ = no significant difference was found, ✓= relatively inclusive, ✖= relatively exclusive.

A series of one-way ANOVAs was performed to test for possible differences in the mean ratings of educational practitioners and pupils' perspectives on ethos: behaviour management and inclusivity scales, among the three school settings. Analysis revealed statistically significant differences in the *Ethos* scores between the school settings, as measured by both educational staff, ($F(2, 96) = 8.458$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = 0.13$), and pupils, ($F(2, 1260) = 5.557$, $p = .004$, $\omega^2 = .01$). As Table 4 shows School 3 scored significantly lower on *Ethos* than School 1 and School 2, while School 1 and 2 did not differ significantly from each other, as measured by both educational practitioners and pupils.

Behaviour management subscale scores were also found to be statistically significantly different between the school settings, as measured by both educational staff ($F(2, 100) = 12.896$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .02$), and pupils ($F(2, 1310) = 10.249$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .02$). As can been seen on Table 4, School 3 scored significantly lower on the behaviour management subscale than School 1, and School 2, while no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between Schools 1 and 2 was found, as measured by both educational practitioners and pupils.

However, when a series of one-way ANOVAs was performed to examine for possible differences in the mean ratings of educational practitioners and pupils' perceptions in the *inclusivity subscale* scores across school settings, contrasting perceptions were found. That is, while the scores of education practitioners on the

inclusivity subscales did not differ significantly across settings, ($F(2, 97) = 2.14$, $p = 0.122$), those obtained from pupils indicated a statistically significant difference, ($F(2, 1264) = 4.20$, $p = .015$, $\omega^2 = .01$). As can been seen in Table 4, School 3 was statistically significantly less inclusive than School 2, while School 1 did not differ significantly from either School 2 or School 3. Overall, the findings indicate that School 3 was consistently scoring lower on the behaviour management subscale, as compared to Schools 1 and 2, which were found to be similar for all measures. School 3 was also scored lower by pupils on the inclusivity sub-scale.

Differences on inclusive ethos between groups of educational practitioners

To examine any differences between groups of educational staff, a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used due to the small sample size of the four groups of professionals, the results of which are shown in Table 6. The findings reveal significant differences between these groups of educational staff scores, both for the behaviour management subscale, (χ^2 (3, $N = 103$) = 9.14, $p = .028$), and the inclusivity subscale, (χ^2 (3, $N = 100$) = 8.17, $p = .043$). To investigate further where differences between them were located, pairwise comparisons were performed. Post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in the behaviour management subscale scores between other staff ($M = 44.24$) and teaching assistants ($M = 71.53$, $p = .029$), as well as teachers ($M = 48.92$), and teaching assistants ($M = 71.53$, $p = .046$), but not with the senior management team or any other combination. With regards to the inclusivity subscale, post hoc analysis elicited statistically significant differences in the scores between teachers ($M = 41.56$) and other staff ($M = 27.26$), as well as between senior management ($M = 21.35$) and other staff ($M = 13.45$). Overall, as shown in Table 6, teachers awarded the lowest scores to the school ethos scale, followed by senior management team and teaching assistants scored it the highest.

Table 6: Perceptions of different groups of educational staff on Ethos, BM and Inclusivity

	Teacher		Teaching Assistant		Senior Management		Other[a]		Kruscal-Wallis test χ^2	*p*
Professional role	N	Mean rank	N	Mean rank	N	Mean rank	N	Mean rank		
Ethos	53	49.46	16	61.72	10	56.75	20	38.68	6.362	.095
BM	54	48.92	16	71.53	10	55.25	23	44.24	9.135	.028*
Inclusivity	53	54.47	16	51.38	10	60.45	21	35.07	8.173	.043*

Note. a. Other professional role at school, *$p < .05$

Differences on inclusive ethos between groups of pupils

A series of one-way ANOVA was performed to examine possible differences in the perceptions held between groups of pupils on inclusive ethos (i.e. behaviour management and inclusivity subscale). Basically, there were no differences in either the overall measure or the sub-scales between Typical and SEN, or between MLD and SEMH. However, when the self-report measure of mental health difficulties, the SDQ, was used, differences were observed, and these were due to the pupils who reported externalising symptoms above the 'abnormal' threshold. Analysis revealed statistical significant differences on ethos ($F(2, 1113) = 9.915$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .02$), the behaviour management subscale ($F(2, 1153) = 10.366$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .02$), and the inclusivity subscale ($F(2, 1116) = 7.144$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .01$) among the scoring categories of the SDQ total difficulties scale (i.e. normal, borderline, abnormal). Specifically, pupil scores in all measures consistently decreased from normal, to borderline, to abnormal. It seems that the higher the difficulties a pupil admitted to having, the more likely they were to give negative responses about school ethos, according to the behaviour management and inclusivity subscales.

A series of independent sample t-tests was also performed to examine possible differences in perspectives on inclusive ethos between those pupils who classified themselves as abnormal on the SDQ externalising difficulties scale, and those identified as having MLD, according to school registers. Analysis revealed significant differences on the scores for ethos ($t(231) = 4.950$, $p < .001$), behaviour management ($t(232) = 3.731$,

$p < .001$), and inclusivity subscale ($t(245) = 5.5$, $p < .001$). As Table 7 shows, pupils identified as having MLD scored consistently higher on all measures as compared to those who classified themselves as abnormal on the SDQ externalising difficulties scale.

Significant differences in the scores of all measures including ethos ($t(208) = 3.824$, $p < .05$), behaviour management ($t(220) = 3.423$, $p < .001$) and inclusivity ($t(209) = 3.431$, $p < .001$) were also observed between pupils who classified themselves as abnormal on the SDQ internalising difficulties scale, and those who did so as abnormal on the SDQ externalising difficulties scale. As Table 7 shows pupils who self-reported elevated levels of internalising difficulties scored higher in all measures than those who self-reported elevated levels of externalising difficulties (M = 18.57, SD = 4.3).

405 **Table 7: Independent group t-tests between Ethos, BM, Inclusivity and different groups of pupils**

	Ethos				Behaviour Management				Inclusivity			
	M	(SD)	*t*-test	η^2	M	(SD)	*t*-test	η^2	M	(SD)	*t*-test	η^2
SEN	57.27	(10.2)	-1.1	.001	21.04	(4.5)	-1.9	-.001	36.23	(6.7)	-.454	-.001
Typical	56.54	(9.2)			20.47	(4.2)			36.03	(6.0)		
SEMH	53.93	(8.1)	-1.7	.001	19.94	(3.4)	-1.2	.001	34.07	(5.5)	-1.7	.001
MLD	57.36	(9.7)			20.97	(4.2)			36.39	(6.7)		
Abnormal_exter	52.71	(9.7)	5.0**	.10	18.60	(4.5)	3.7**	.06	34.01	(6.6)	5.5**	.011
MLD	59.71	(9.9)			22.04	(4.1)			37.64	(7.1)		
Abnormal_int	58.52	(8.3)	3.8**	.07	20.93	(3.6)	3.4**	.05	37.59	(6.0)	3.4**	.07
Abnormal_exter	52.72	(9.3)			18.57	(4.3)			34.05	(6.2)		

406 Note. **$p < .001$

Discussion

The current study compared the inclusivity of three mainstream secondary schools in England by employing objective (school census metadata) and subjective (seeking the perceptions of pupils, educational practitioners and school psychologists, by employing self-completed questionnaires and telephone interviews for the lattermost) measures. Notably, the objective and subjective measures of inclusion failed to match, even in schools from the same city, selected to maximise contrasts on inclusion whilst minimising other differences. This is consistent with previous observations that is difficult to come up with a commonly agreed definition of inclusion.

Possible explanations for this outcome are given below, with the focus being on the limitations of both objective and subjective measures to capture the notion of inclusion in its entirety. Firstly, looking at the objective measures of inclusion, the current study raises questions concerning the consequences of schools having a high proportion of pupils with SEND and a low proportion of exclusions. For instance, a study by Farrell et al. (2007) indicated that higher numbers of pupils with SEND registered in a school, leads to a lower academic attainment of its pupils. This is unsurprising, but it does illustrate one way in which inclusive practices inevitably impact on school culture. In English secondary schools, teachers are under pressure to achieve good scores in pupils' exam results. This is likely to create tensions with inclusive practice, where they have higher than average numbers of pupils with SEND, particularly in light of the evidence that teachers report being inadequately trained in inclusive practices (Allan, 2015; Robinson and Goodey, 2018). If inclusion is about accepting pupils with SEND in a school and providing equal educational opportunities to all pupils to reach their full potential (Booth and Ainscow, 2011), then, using objective measurement, a school that fails to show high levels of academic achievement, due to accepting high numbers of pupils with SEND, may not be considered as being inclusive. This suggests that in the absence of a thoughtful whole school programme to support inclusion there may be an optimum number of pupils with SEND that a school can accept and successfully include, without jeopardising pupils' learning across the spectrum.

Additionally, it would be expected that a school with little or no exclusions would be inclusive. An example of perceiving inclusion as such can be found in the 'Index for Inclusion' (Booth and Ainscow, 2011), where the scholars suggested that exclusive

behaviour within schools should be avoided as it infringes the values of inclusion. However, a school might appear to be inclusive by having a low number of exclusions, but in practice apply exclusive policies, for example by constantly sending misbehaving pupils out of class. In the present study, teachers, pupils and the educational psychologists reported lower levels of consistency, clarity, and fairness in behaviour management in the school with lower levels of exclusions compared to a similar school in the same borough with higher levels. Containing challenging behaviour in school places great demands on teachers' knowledge of behaviour management and, in the absence of secure systems, higher levels of challenging behaviour might be expected to lead to pupil perceptions of problems with consistency, clarity and fairness.

Regarding the subjective measures of inclusion, the findings of the current study support the notion of the 'slippery' construct of inclusion, as suggested by other scholars in the field (e.g. Florian, 2014; Nilholm and Göransson, 2017). In particular, investigation of differences in the perception of inclusion among educational practitioners has revealed that class teachers have the tendency to perceive their school's inclusivity in a more negative way than those with a more specific focus on pupils with SEND and those in a managerial role. Class teachers have the greatest responsibility for implementing inclusion, through balancing the needs of all the pupils in their class, and it is thus, unsurprising that they should experience the greatest challenge. Managers adopting inclusive policies, such as admitting pupils with SEND and minimising school exclusions, need to work hard to ensure that their staff cope well with these ensuing challenges. In the absence of sufficient teacher training (e.g. Emam and Farrell, 2009), and lack of agreement on how inclusion is translated into practice (e.g. Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011) it is inevitable that many teachers approach inclusion with scepticism.

Some differences were also found among groups of pupils, whereby their views on inclusion depended on their SEN category. Reassuringly, pupils with mild learning difficulties did not differ from their peers in their experience of inclusion on the quantitative measures, although in interviews reported elsewhere (Author, 2017) they remarked that they were less likely to be included on school councils. However, pupils who reported behavioural difficulties tended to perceive school inclusivity in a more negative way than other pupils. This finding indicates that not all pupils' needs may be equally satisfied within a school environment, thus explaining why some groups of pupils

form better perceptions on school inclusivity than others (e.g. Norwich and Kelly, 2004; Sellman, 2009). The above findings suggest that a person's view on inclusion is shaped according to their individual experiences within the school environment, evident in the effect of adults' roles within the school and for pupils by their SEN category.

Despite the individual differences in the way inclusion is perceived, the findings of the current study show that there was also a degree of agreement on what is considered an inclusive school is likely to be reached. For instance, examination of educational psychologists, pupils and educational practitioners' perceptions on school inclusivity, indicate that School 2 was consensually perceived as the 'most inclusive', while School 3 was considered the 'least inclusive'. This suggests that there are certain school characteristics and educational practices within mainstream settings that are consensually perceived by key stakeholders as inclusive and others as less so. It is important therefore to note that in contrast to the disagreement between objective and subjective measures there was agreement between educational psychologists, pupils, and educational practitioners' views on school inclusivity. This supports the notion of the possibility of measuring the construct of inclusion and coming up with an agreed definition. More empirical studies on the current topic are therefore recommended.

Conclusions

The key findings of this study are that: objective and subjective measures of inclusion failed to agree; perceptions of inclusion within schools, using the same measurement tool, vary depending on teacher and pupil status; but despite inclusion being a 'slippery' and 'subjective' construct, there was also a degree of agreement on what was considered an inclusive school. It seems that generating a consensual definition of inclusion is achievable, within these constraints, once parameters are defined. An agreed definition, at a national level, among the academic community, the professional community and key stakeholders (e.g. parents, children/young people, policy makers etc.) would be beneficial, with significant implications for practice. To begin with, by establishing a common definition, research outcomes would be more accessible and meaningful for all scholars and practitioners. Secondly, it would be possible to develop a national plan towards the enhancement of inclusive agenda where governmental policies and legislations would be aligned with Ofsted expectations, and academic community would work in close collaboration with educational practitioners to develop an effective teacher

training programme that would enable teachers overcome the challenges that implementation of inclusive practices are currently posing. To conclude, this study represents an example attempt which shows that reaching an agreement on what is inclusion is difficult but certainly worth the endeavour. The parameters set by the subjective measure of inclusion used here have attempted to draw on the key elements of inclusion used across contexts and are proffered for future use.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study is the identification of an 'ideal pair of schools', one inclusive and one less inclusive based on the five aforementioned criteria. Despite the rigorous identification of all schools that had been detected by the researcher as less inclusive, the vast majority of those approached refused to take part in the study. Hence, it could be argued that the findings would have been different, if an ideal pair of schools had been recruited. Another limitation of the current study is that, whilst every effort was made to ensure that the three participating schools were as representative as possible, due to the small sample size, generalisation of the findings to a wider population should be treated with caution. Larger samples of schools, using the same measures and groups of participants would be a next step.

Notes on contributors

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