

Obama Advisor Suggests Caution to UK Policy

The UK Government of David Cameron's plans to overhaul the special educational needs (SEN) system could lead to vulnerable children being segregated and denied opportunities, according to an adviser to Barack Obama.

Ari Ne'eman urged caution over the Coalition's plans to end the "bias towards inclusion" and said all pupils deserve the right to attend a mainstream school. Mr Ne'eman, who was appointed to the US National Council on Disability by President Obama, made his comment on a visit to the UK to meet politicians and autism campaigners.



United Kingdom Children's minister Sarah Teather proposed reforms to the SEN system earlier this year in a green paper, including safeguards to protect special schools. She wants to end the "bias" towards including SEN children in mainstream rather than special schools.

Mr Ne'eman, who is on the autistic spectrum and is the founding president of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, said: "I attended a special school for part of my education, and there was a regrettable culture of low expectations. "If I had stayed there I wouldn't have gone to college. There was nothing particularly special about me, I just had the opportunity to go to a different school and I was included there with the right support.

"I know about the debate about inclusion here. British educational policy must be decided by British people, and this is a debate for people in this country, but a lot of people try to argue inclusion doesn't work for all kinds of students. "I find that's because they've not really tried it properly, putting services and support in mainstream schools and giving teachers the right training. When that happens it leads to less bullying and social exclusion."

- From TES London, June 2011