

TRANSCRIPT: Professor Barry Carpenter

“Thank you, thank you Kai for that very warm welcome. It’s somewhat strange being an SSAT employee and getting the opportunity to address conference, and I really do appreciate it. Because if this conference is about ‘excellence for all’, then that needs to include those children with Special Educational Needs, who are going to be at least twenty percent of any school’s population, if not more if you’re a special school obviously; and so it’s that that I want to address this afternoon.

And I’ve got for you a premise and a challenge. My premise is that the children in our schools have changed; and the challenge for you, is have our schools changed? Which of you, particularly those of you who have been teaching a long time, would not tell me that, particularly in the last ten years, you have seen some significant changes in the child population coming into your schools? Those have been your hunches, those have been your gut reactions, and it’s still fine in teaching to have those hunches and gut reactions.

Well, is there a true evidence base to support, then, some of those hunches? Let’s begin, by looking at some of the numbers. If you had said to me at the beginning of this year, ‘Barry, how many disabled children do we have in the UK?’ I would have said to you ‘well, the figure we have currently, based on the 2004 Household Survey Census, is 700,000 children.

And then in June this year, this Government commissioned piece actually appeared, which actually tells us that by 2009 we had 950[000] disabled children in the UK. So between ‘04 and ‘09 we have seen a rise of 250,000 children. A staggering number and we need to ask ourselves why. And you’ll see the first part of that quote actually refers to inter-generational poverty, which I’ll come back to in a moment, and certainly modern medical progress. One of the most startling features of modern medical progress has actually been the survival rates of premature babies. Now my maths is not brilliant, those of you that have better maths - I’d be happy for you to refine my figures, but just bear with me while I go through some crude figures with you. Every year in the UK 80,000 children, babies, are born prematurely. Ninety percent, now, with modern medical progress, ninety percent survive, so around 72,000; and of those 63% have a disability that gives rise to some special educational need. So let’s say that’s around 50% plus. So in a five year period, five times fifty, we get our 250,000.”