

When Coordination Is Never Designed In: Multi-Agency Failure in Education Pathways and the Case for Structural Reform

Azibaolanari Okungbowa

Independent Researcher. Aberdeen, Scotland, the United Kingdom

Abstract

Education systems are expected to coordinate support for children with Additional Support Needs (ASN), yet coordination failures persist across multi-agency pathways. In Scotland, the Children and Young People Act 2014 introduced the Named Person role as a designated coordination point. However, evidence from this study indicates that coordination consistently fails to reach families as a coherent experience despite strong legislative intent, with many families and professionals navigating fragmented systems without consistent access to information or shared processes. This paper draws on a mixed methods study with 50 participants across five stakeholder groups in Scotland, comprising over 85 interviews and focus group contributions from those 50 participants and 50 descriptive survey responses. The findings identify seven themes clustered around three structural information challenges: information seeking, information access, and information use in decision-making. These challenges point to coordination failure as a function of system design rather than professional capability. The Coherence Navigation Framework (CNF) is introduced as an emerging, original contribution to understanding coordination failure in multi-agency support systems for children with complex needs. It identifies three conditions for effective coordination: shared navigation, visible navigation, and supported navigation. The paper argues that coordination failure in education pathways is a structural design problem, not a professional one, with implications for policy, accountability, and the organisation of multi-agency support systems.

Keywords: Additional Support Needs; coordination failure; education policy; Coherence Navigation Framework; multi-agency systems