

SEN Policy Research Forum:  
Policy Paper

Professional training in the changing  
context of SEN and disability policy  
and practice

November 2014

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## Chapter 1 Introduction to Policy Paper

This Paper is based on a whole day seminar about:

### ***Professional training in the changing context of special educational needs disability policy and practice***

This seminar took place on **1 July 2014 at Birkbeck College, London**, Bloomsbury. London WC1E 7JL

The programme involved 3 speakers who presented on these topics:

1. **Neil Smith**, SEN/D and Inclusion Manager, Camden LA, who talked about the role of the local authority in terms of a case study of a schools led partnership and its contribution to professional training and development.

2. **Dr Hazel Lawson**, Graduate School of Education, Exeter University, who talked about: the implications of changes in Initial Teacher Education and continuing professional training, informed by research about initial and continuing professional development.

3. **Dr Glenys Jones**: School of Education, Autism Centre for Education and Research, University of Birmingham, who talked about generic-specialised competences; what levels of competences are required at universal level and what areas need specialist competences with specific reference to the autistic spectrum.

These presentations were followed by small group discussions and a final plenary discussion. The aims of the seminar were to revisit and address these questions:

1. What professional competences are needed in the current context:
  - the changing SEN framework – new Code of Practice, Local Offer, EHC plans etc
  - the changing governance of schools ( academies / free schools),
  - the reduction in LA services,
  - the changes to the initial training/education of teachers?
2. With reference to the tiered model of generic-specialised competences (universal, targeted and specialised):
  - \* What levels of competences are required at universal level,
  - \* What areas need specialist competences,
  - \* What are the boundaries between universal, targeted and specialised competences and
  - \* For schools to develop their school capacities for SEN/D, what models of professional learning/ development are needed?
3. What other forms of training provision are relevant:
  - \* At regional level of organisation,

\* Local authority collaboration and inter-school collaborations (e.g. academy chains)?

There were 38 participants at the seminar representing educational researchers and academics and representatives from local Government, voluntary sector, policy makers and consultants.

### **SEN Policy Research Forum**

The SEN Policy Research Forum, which organised this seminar, incorporates the aims and work of the previous SEN Policy Options group in a new format and with some expanded aims. The Forum's website is at:

<http://www.sen-policyforum.org.uk/index.php>

The aim of the Forum is to contribute intelligent analysis, knowledge and experience to promote the development of policy and practice for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The Forum will be concerned with children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities from preschool to post 16. It will cover the whole of the UK and aim to:

1. provide timely policy review and critique,
2. promote intelligent policy debate,
3. help set longer term agendas – acting like a think-tank,.
4. deliberate over and examine policy options in the field.
5. inform research and development work in the field.
6. contribute to development of more informed media coverage of SEND policy issues.

The uncertainties over what counts as 'special educational needs' and 'disabilities' in relation to a wider concept of 'additional needs' are recognised. These will be among the many issues examined through the Forum.

The Forum, which continues the work of the SEN Policy Options group has been continuing this work for over 20 years. It started as an ESRC seminar series with some initial funding from the Cadbury Trust. The Forum appreciates the generous funding from NASEN and the Pears Foundation to enable it to function, though it operates independently of these organisations.

### **Lead group and coordination of the Forum:**

Professor Julie Dockrell - Institute of Education, University of London

Dr Peter Gray - Policy Consultant (co-coordinator)

Brain Lamb - Policy consultant

Professor Geoff Lindsay - University of Warwick

Professor Brahm Norwich - University of Exeter (co-cordinator)

Dr Liz Pellicano, Institute of Education

Linda Redford - Policy Consultant

Penny Richardson - Policy Consultant  
Chris Robertson, University of Birmingham  
Professor Klaus Wedell - Institute of Education, University of London

**Membership:**

If you would like to join the Forum, go to the website and follow link to registering as a member. You will be invited to future seminars and be able to participate in discussion through the Jiscmail system.

For further information please contact the co-coordinators of the Forum, Brahm Norwich, Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter, Heavitree Road, Exeter EX1 2LU (b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk) or Peter Gray (pgray@sscyp) .

**Past Policy Options Papers (see website for downloadable copies)**

**1. Bucking the market:** Peter Housden, Chief Education Officer, Nottinghamshire LEA

**2. Towards effective schools for all:** Mel Ainscow, Cambridge University Institute of Education

**3. Teacher education for special educational needs:** Professor Peter Mittler, Manchester University

**4. Resourcing for SEN:** Jennifer Evans and Ingrid Lunt, Institute of Education, London University

**5. Special schools and their alternatives:** Max Hunt, Director of Education, Stockport LEA

**6. Meeting SEN: options for partnership between health, education and social services:** Tony Dessent, Senior Assistant Director, Nottinghamshire LEA

**7. SEN in the 1990s: users' perspectives:** Micheline Mason, Robina Mallet, Colin Low and Philippa Russell

**8. Independence and dependence? Responsibilities for SEN in the Unitary and County Authorities:** Roy Atkinson, Michael Peters, Derek Jones, Simon Gardner and Philippa Russell

**9. Inclusion or exclusion: Educational Policy and Practice for Children and Young People with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties:** John Bangs, Peter Gray and Greg Richardson

**9. Baseline Assessment and SEN:** Geoff Lindsay, Max Hunt, Sheila Wolfendale, Peter Tymms

**10. Future policy for SEN: Response to the Green Paper:** Brahm Norwich, Ann Lewis, John Moore, Harry Daniels

**11. Rethinking support for more inclusive education:** Peter Gray, Clive Danks, Rik Boxer, Barbara Burke, Geoff Frank, Ruth Newbury and Joan Baxter

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**12. Developments in additional resource allocation to promote greater inclusion:** John Moore, Cor Meijer, Klaus Wedell, Paul Croll and Diane Moses.

**13. Early years and SEN:** Professor Sheila Wolfendale and Philippa Russell

- 14. Specialist Teaching for SEN and inclusion:** Annie Grant, Ann Lewis and Brahm Norwich
- 15. The equity dilemma: allocating resources for special educational needs:** Richard Humphries, Sonia Sharpe, David Ruebain, Philippa Russell and Mike Ellis
- 16. Standards and effectiveness in special educational needs: questioning conceptual orthodoxy:** Richard Byers, Seamus Hegarty and Carol Fitz Gibbon
- 17. Disability, disadvantage, inclusion and social inclusion:** Professor Alan Dyson and Sandra Morrison
- 18. Rethinking the 14-19 curriculum: SEN perspectives and implications:** Dr Lesley Dee, Christopher Robertson, Professor Geoff Lindsay, Ann Gross, and Keith Bovair
- 19. Examining key issues underlying the Audit Commission Reports on SEN:** Chris Beek, Penny Richardson and Peter Gray
- 20. Future schooling that includes children with SEN / disability:** Klaus Wedell, Ingrid Lunt and Brahm Norwich
- VI. Policy Options Papers from sixth seminar series**
- 21. Taking Stock: integrated Children's Services, Improvement and Inclusion:** Margaret Doran, Tony Dessent and Professor Chris Husbands
- 22. Special schools in the new era: how do we go beyond generalities?** Chris Wells, Philippa Russell, Peter Gray and Brahm Norwich
- 23. Individual budgets and direct payments: issues, challenges and future implications for the strategic management of SEN** Christine Lenehan, Glenys Jones Elaine Hack and Sheila Riddell
- 24. Personalisation and SEN** Judy Sebba, Armando DiFinizio, Alison Peacock and Martin Johnson.
- 25. Choice-equity dilemma in special educational provision** John Clarke, Ann Lewis, Peter Gray
- 26. SEN Green Paper 2011: progress and prospects** Brian Lamb, Kate Frood and Debbie Orton
- 27. A school for the future - 2025: Practical Futures Thinking** Alison Black
- 28. The Coalition Government's policy on SEND: aspirations and challenges?** P. Gray, B. Norwich, P Stobbs and S Hodgson.
- 29. How will accountability work in the new SEND legislative system?** Parents from Camden local authority, Penny Richardson, Jean Gross and Brian Lamb
- 30. Research in special needs and inclusive education: the interface with policy and practice,** Brahm Norwich, Peter Blatchford, Rob Webster, Simon Ellis, Janet Tod, Geoff Lindsay and Julie Dockrell.
- 31. Professional training in the changing context of special educational needs disability policy and practice.** Neil Smith, Dr Hazel Lawson, Dr Glenys Jones.

**Copies of most of these papers can now be downloaded from the website of the SEN Policy Research Forum as well as the NASEN website look for SEN Policy Options public pages for downloading these past copies.**

<http://www.nasen.org.uk/policy-option-papers/>

<http://www.sen-policyforum.org.uk/>

## **Chapter 2:**

### **The changing scene – Local Authority support for SEND and inclusion matters: a Case study of a schools led partnership.**

**Neil Smith**

#### **Introduction**

The relationship between the Local Authority and schools/settings and other providers is changing dramatically and rapidly. This paper explores the implications of the development of an emerging new relationship - school-led partnerships - for Children and Young People (CYP) with SEND and their families. It draws on recent research about the changing role of the Local Authority, takes into account what the new SEND Code of practice requires of local authorities in terms of support and training on SEND matters and then looks at how one LA is moving towards a radically different way of engaging with schools and settings. The paper concludes with some possible key characteristics of a healthy partnership system that will guarantee optimum support and challenge on SEND and inclusion matters and some key questions for partnership boards – where the decision making capacity resides - to consider.

#### **The changing context**

The impact of budget cuts on the LA's capacity to support and change schools is set out in the recent Policy Exchange paper: 'The next stage of improvement for primary schools in England Local authorities' (Briggs and Simmons, 2014):

'Local Authority services are diminishing rapidly as a result of tighter budgets generally in central administration services (through the Education Services Grant) and secondary schools becoming Academies (and taking their share of funding with them). This particularly affects primary schools because the traditional cross-subsidising of primary budgets by secondary schools is becoming less feasible as secondaries academise and take their full allocation under their own control' (page 10)

The report notes new challenges for primary schools from 2016:

'The Government has ... set into motion a wide-ranging suite of ambitious classroom reforms ..... that will place real demands on both the strategic and operational capacity of schools:

- A new National Curriculum, with greater content and subject knowledge required at all stages, which will require redesign of much planned teaching content across all ages within primary schools, as well as the incorporation of specialist subjects such as Computer Science.
- New assessment systems, with the abolition of levels and the expectation that schools design or incorporate other methods of tracking pupil progress and performance'(Briggs and Simmons, 2014: page 8).



Schools with significant numbers of lower attaining pupils and those requiring SEN support (and with Education Health and Care plans) will face additional challenges in developing a curriculum and assessment procedures that will motivate and engage pupils and secure high standards and good or better levels of progress.

Another challenge noted is the leadership capacity of the current workforce to deliver change and improvement over the coming decade:

'There is a continued demographics-led retirement of head teachers and a lack of replacements. 21% of primary heads are approaching retirement age, and the School Teachers Pay Body has identified a lack of replacements as a systemic issue in primary schools. In January 2014 26% of primary headship vacancies need to be re-advertised – up from 15% last year; this is the highest rate since 2000' (Briggs and Simmons, 2014; page 9).

The national context also includes:

- The Children and Families Act – with implications for schools set out in the SEND code of practice 0 -25 years.
- Clear expectations in the revised OFSTED school inspection handbook (Ofsted, 2014) which sets out criteria for judging schools in key aspects of performance, for example:
  - *Leadership and management*: will be judged to be inadequate if not enough is done to ensure good teaching for all groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.
  - *Teaching* is likely to be inadequate when as a result of weak teaching over time, pupils or particular groups of pupils, including disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs, disadvantaged pupils and the most able, are making inadequate progress.

The radical changes in the functions of LAs are also set out in a recent DfE research paper (DFE, 2014). Findings from this research into the LA school improvement and intervention functions included:

'There has been a decisive shift towards school-led partnerships leading local school improvement. The role, size, and shape of local partnerships differ to reflect the specific local context and include school-owned and school-led not-for-profit companies, local strategic partnerships, teaching school alliances, federations, diocesan networks and national educational organisations. 'The locus of strategic decision-making in relation to school improvement services has shifted to these networks of schools.

School Leaders are confident that they can access the high-quality support they need (95% of them agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to

access the high quality support and challenge that they needed). This was found across all phases in contrast to 2012 when the study found that primary head teachers were less confident than leaders in other phases.

School leaders see both the attractions and necessity of being connected to at least one formal network. For the vast majority of school leaders, 'relationships are being transformed into more formal, self-conscious and professional connections'. The attractions included: broadening horizons through the capacity to access and share practice across regional and national groups of like-minded schools; to lead locally through shaping deeper forms of school-to school support; and for primary and special school leaders particularly, the practical necessity of forming school connections such as multi-academy trusts, because of the diminution of local authority services'. (DFE, 2014; page 5)

However, there was less confidence from Head teachers in the potential of local partnerships and federations to provide effective systems for supporting vulnerable children, including those with SEND. The findings included:

'Approaches to supporting vulnerable children are evolving more gradually than school improvement and place-planning. In the 2012 study, local education systems were in the process of redefining the way support for vulnerable children would be arranged locally but there were concerns about how local authorities could provide the right services and about how schools would manage the commissioning of provision for vulnerable children. While there are innovative examples of school-led approaches, there has not yet been a decisive shift to a partnership approach

There was variation in the confidence felt about implementing the forthcoming special education needs (SEN) reforms.

School leaders are less certain about the future evolution of support for vulnerable children than school improvement and place planning. The uncertainty partly reflects the timescale for national reforms, but also the perception of school leaders concerning increasing and more complex pupil needs, greater scrutiny and diminishing local services' (DFE, 2014; page 7).

Examples were found in the study of local SEN hubs and special schools leading partnerships and offering commissioned services. But. school leaders acknowledged that there was a lot further progress to make in this function.

### **The SEND Code of Practice 0-25 years: the Local Offer and LA role in support/training and monitoring**

The new SEND Code (DFE and DoH, 2014b) requires the local authority to set out in its Local Offer:

‘information about securing expertise among teachers, lecturers or other professionals to support children and young people with SEN or disabilities ... expertise at different levels:

- awareness .. for all staff who will come into contact with CYP with that type of SEN
- enhanced .. how to adapt teaching and learning to meet a particular type of SEN ..
- specialist .. in depth training for those advising and supporting those with enhanced – level skills and knowledge’ (DFE, 2014b; section 4.32).

In the same section of the SEND Code the Local Authority is required to set out how the effectiveness of the education provided for CYP with SEND will be assessed and evaluated.

### **The Case Study**

In this case study local authority there is a process of ‘co-constructing’ a school-led improvement partnership that is being informed by a clear operational framework, that:

- ensures that the partnership is designed and owned by its partners;
- focuses on excellence in learning, teaching and achievement for all learners;
- prioritises the development of talent and leadership and workforce capacity;
- focused on generating, capturing and systematically transferring and mobilising excellence;
- retains core functions of the Council’s role in order to know, challenge and support schools early enough to nip failure and underperformance in the bud and protect pupils’ education;
- invests in development and research in order to ensure continual improvement.

Particular challenges over and above the implementation of the SEND reforms of the case study local authority include:

- over twenty primary SEND Coordinators are new to the LA and/or new to the SENDCO role in the past 18 months,
- significant staff turn-over in some schools: lack of experience of SEND and inclusion matters amongst senior leaders in some secondary schools,
- loss of officer capacity and expertise as a result of local authority budget cuts
- SEND budget pressures, for example, as a result of funding post 16/19 provision

Some distinctive features of the local authority currently include:

- a well-established Training and Development Centre (TDC) – with regular Forum meetings for SENDCOs – and a developing SEND “Training Channel” which draws on expertise from a wide range of providers
- lead officers in the school improvement service for SEND and inclusion, behaviour and for vulnerable groups
- a City Learning Centre (CLC) – running inclusion projects employing digital technology
- highly effective teaching schools (including a complex needs special school)
- LA teams and services with specialist/specialised expertise, e.g. on Autism; Mental and Emotional Health; complex needs; sensory impairments,
- a strong well-established team of SEND planning and placement officers
- close collaboration between Health teams (e.g. Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy) and the TDC and school improvement officers

Local Authority teams and services, including School Improvement officers, Educational Psychologists, specialist SEND and Inclusion teams and Health services, are working within the new operational framework to maintain high quality support and challenge on SEND and inclusion issues, especially in terms of:

- developing “within school/provider” talent, leadership and capacity;
- capturing and transferring excellence and;
- investing in development and research.

Some examples include:

1. Specialist support for mainstream schools from a local authority special teaching school which works in close collaboration with the School Improvement Service, for example, by:
  - providing a SENDCO Consultant to undertake agreed school support - on the inclusion of pupils with more complex needs with a focus on developing capacity,
  - developing and sharing a WIKI project – personalised website for pupils with an EHC Plan,
  - providing day and short courses for example on reading interventions; the effective deployment of Teaching Assistants,
  - developing accredited training for Teaching Assistants,
  - disseminating the outcomes of the DfE progression + assessment project, for example , through Learning Walks,
  - providing Middle and Senior Leadership long courses for SENDCOs and middle leaders aspiring to senior leadership roles.
2. Schools with the Achievement for All (AfA) kite mark sharing successful practice, for example, at AfA Ambassador Schools Open Days

3. An OFSTED “outstanding” primary school running a short course on Leadership and Management of SEND and hosting a Down Syndrome study day based on their experience of inclusion.
4. A self-evaluation (and/or peer moderated) process focussing on the schools’ Local Offer/SEND provision - setting out what “good” looks like and inviting judgements on impact and sustainability.
5. Two phase-based SENDCO research and development groups – with the involvement of specialist SEND services (e.g. EPS) and special schools - to develop Local Authority approaches to implementing the SEN Reforms, for example, through:
  - a. devising and sharing a Local Offer for schools – a parent focussed conversation setting out what each school will provide,
  - b. sharing SEND policies/Information Reports,
  - c. creating video streams of successful inclusion practice,
  - d. advising on “model” consultations with parents/carers and pupils,
  - e. creating LA models of personalised planning for pupils requiring SEND support,
  - f. shaping the format and process of the LA EHC plan,
  - g. devising procedures for the identification of pupils who require SEND support,
  - h. co-developing (with LA officers) and piloting in the autumn term 2014 a self-evaluation framework for the schools’ local offer and a peer validation process,
  - i. providing support for new to role colleagues in LA schools.
6. Specialist Health Teams providing three level support to schools:
  - universal needs level: e.g. training staff on a communication friendly environment and differentiation; improving engagement and participation of all children in a range of school occupations
  - targeted level: targeted school-based Occupational Therapy intervention; assisting staff to run SLCN groups; providing advice and monitoring
  - specialist level: direct work with children with high level needs.
7. The Sensory Service developing school and staff capacity, for example, on the inclusion pupils with cochlear implants, through:
  - Support for transition from primary schools - working with SENDCOs;
  - high levels of parent + pupil involvement;
  - training a school-based “Sensory Champion”;
  - after school sessions with pupils’ subject teachers, their Form Tutor and SENDCO;
  - guidance provided on best practice in the classroom;
  - TAs trained to provide more targeted support;

- monitoring visits – including observations and discussions with pupils and systematic report back to the school SENDCO and senior LA officers (with follow up if necessary).
8. School improvement cross phase projects on, for example, Lesson Study; “White British FSM closing the gap” and “Building Learning Power/Resilience” This way of working places schools, settings and LA teams and services alongside each other and of equal value and significance in providing guidance, advice, support and challenge on SEND and inclusion matters. The model currently has multiple benefits. These are:
- It generates and transfers capabilities;
  - It supports the management and leadership role of SENDCOs set out in the new SEND Code of Practice;
  - It supports SENDCOs and schools on the SEND specific knowledge and skills;
  - It develops and applies teachers’ expertise, enthusiasm, motivation and creativity – enabling effective sharing with peers;
  - It draws on real-life grounded realistic and effective practice recognised as such by peers;
  - It reinforces the notion of a “community of schools”;
  - It helps to evolve a different (and arguably more difficult) role for LA SEN leaders: for example, identifying and disseminating successful practice; targeting support where need is identified; support that is quality assured.

However, at the moment and this will change as the model evolves, the central drive, momentum and organisation come significantly from the LA. But, the immediate prospect for local authorities, including the case study LA, is that of further deep funding cuts and consequent loss of staff so threatening the establishment of a school led, school-directed and partially school-funded partnership model (through subscription) of support and school improvement.

The Case Study LA is consulting school leaders and governors on how best to bring about a school led partnership based on a “needs-led” approach – establishing, for example, a team of partnership professionals/associates, expertise networks and learning hubs (research and development); and providing for all schools a “link partner”.

The model aims to be effective in terms of improving provision and outcomes for all children and young people. Decision making about the future is now firmly in the hands of school leaders and governors – with the establishment of a steering committee or partnership board. It will be important for the partnership board to consider key questions when setting up the model in order to secure and maintain the confidence and trust of families of CYP with SEND and of the CYP themselves.

**Key characteristics of a partnership:**

An important starting point should be to identify the key characteristics of a “healthy” partnership or federation, that will guarantee effective support and challenge on SEND matters and will be visible in the Authority’s Local Offer and partnership schools’ SEND information reports/policies. These characteristics might include:

- Identifying and building on current strengths and what is already working,
- based on an analysis of current and anticipated SEND training, guidance and support needs, ensuring relevance and coverage,
- an unremitting focus on developing the skills, expertise and knowledge in schools/providers as set out in the SEND Code (section 4.32).
- a school improvement focus with particular emphasis on the leadership and management of SEND provision and outcomes: in touch with national expectations (e.g. OFSTED) and quality criteria,
- use of data to analyse and review outcomes and destinations for CYP with SEND,
- shared expectation of comparability and consistency across the partnership in terms of the quality of provision that each school makes for CYP with SEND with no schools opting out; no “magnet” SEND schools unless they are so designated,
- an agreed strategy, for example through a link partner arrangement, for monitoring the overall performance of schools, including their inclusivity,
- fair, inclusive and open practices on admissions across the partnership, avoiding practices such as ‘It might be best if you looked elsewhere’ (Office of the Children’s Commissioner, 2014)
- fair, inclusive and open practice on exclusions across the partnership,
- clear, common and shared understanding of how the SEND funding system works and appreciation of the potential pressures on the high needs block element,
- outward looking: learning and sharing with other partnerships and communities,
- stability and reliability: avoiding lapses or gaps in service,
- accurately funded and evaluated for value for money,
- clear processes for ensuring accountability: working out how accountability works in a partnership model,
- resilience and adaptability: as the education environment continues to move and shift, as it might after the next election
- encouraging of innovation and risk taking: including a commitment to research: and links with higher education centres,
- effective communication strategy: schools/providers know what is available and how it is accessed,
- coherence and efficiency: avoiding wasteful and unproductive duplication and overlap,

- ability to link-up services and schools/providers to enhance training/guidance, for example, joint training on Autism by occupational therapists, teachers and educational psychologists,
- ensuring SEND training/support is evidence based, valid and quality assured,
- capacity for knowing where and why successful practice is developing across the partnership and beyond,
- including and involving the voluntary sector and community groups, for example, ensuring parent voice is heard,
- the full involvement of and support for governing bodies on their duties and accountabilities,
- clarity about the monitoring and evaluation role of the local authority (and acceptance of that role) in ensuring that CYP with SEND get a fair deal,
- a community ethos where schools look out for and look after each other.
- demonstrable a commitment to comply with the Equality Act 2010, particularly in regard to CYP with SEND.

### **Concluding questions**

To conclude this case study of a schools led partnership, the following questions might be asked of this partnership:

- a. Which services and areas of responsibility relevant to CYP with SEND, over and above those that are statutory, does the partnership want to maintain as part of a centrally employed service?
- b. Which services does the partnership want to make available from the open market?
- c. How will the partnership ensure comparability and consistency of provision and fairness across all schools/settings/providers?
- d. How will confidence be established that partnership schools have the time, flexibility and capacity (sometimes battling against competing priorities) to provide to peers a reliable, consistent and high quality support service on SEND matters?
- e. How will the partnership 'identify and capture' sources of successful SEND practice across the whole school community and beyond?
- f. How will peer support and consultancy on SEND matters be quality assured?
- g. How will the partnership ensure that the LA Local Offer and schools' SEND policies/information reports reflect these characteristics?

These are some key questions that will enable such a partnership to sustain and develop itself.

### **Appendix:**

The following summarises some of the key points made in the DFE (2014a) publication about the evolving education system, about lessons for leading change



effectively in a local education system. They were intended as lessons for those leading an individual school, a teaching school alliance, a Multi-Agency Trust, a diocesan network or a local authority.

1. Look out for each other - watch out for those who are isolated or at risk of becoming so in the partnership, network and the wider local system. Some schools lack the confidence, time or expertise to form partnerships, feel under pressure to focus on their own affairs or face practical barriers to joint working such as location. Timely adaptors are pro-active in identifying those at risk and reconnecting them with the local system.
2. Signpost support - make it easy and quick to find high quality support through clear signposting to reduce the time that schools need to spend on doing it ..... don't leave leaders having to navigate their local systems alone.
3. Maintain the dialogue - keep engaging in meaningful dialogue about the transition, its successes and the next step towards the longer term goal. Keep partners engaged.
4. Foster innovation - encourage meaningful engagement that gives others the opportunity to lead the transition and innovate
5. Inspire trust\_- consistently model effective roles and behaviour in order to build trust and transparency which are the foundations of effective partnerships. Don't risk damaging relationships and undermining trust by misjudging local leaders' appetite for change.
6. Follow through with action - make changes happen through high-quality implementation, investing time and resources in sustaining change and demonstrating impact.
7. Empower others \_ judge the right time to allow others to take the lead. Build capacity, responsibility and associated accountability among partners.
8. The report also picks up the issue that support for vulnerable children is more variable\_in how effective the changing structures of planning and commissioning are than around school improvement support. The role of the local authority in those areas remains crucial in providing oversight and ensuring co-ordination.
9. At the same time, concerns also remains about the longer term capacity of local authorities to fulfil all their statutory obligations. There needs to be a clearer long-term view about the role of the local authority in the partnership-led education system, but it would be a positive step for authorities themselves to lead any ensuing debate with a coherent and unified vision of their own.

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## Chapter 3:

### Teacher education and special educational needs – policy landscapes and impetuses

Hazel Lawson

#### Introduction

The policy landscape in England for teacher education is undergoing ‘turbulent times’ (Whitehead, 2011) with diversification of routes into teaching and an increasing emphasis on schools-led provision (DfE, 2010, 2011). Policy frameworks and contexts for special educational needs (SEN) are also changing. This paper explores the field of SEN within the context of teacher education in England. The policy landscape for each of these aspects is described and explored, then analysed with in relation to general-specialist dimensions of teaching, examining how different policy drivers pull/push in different directions. Possible implications for teacher education are then considered.

#### **Policy landscape in England for teacher education and special educational needs** *Diversification of routes into teaching*

There is a range of routes into teaching in England (see Table 1); all involve the acquisition of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), but operate at differing academic levels over different time periods and with different connections and involvements with schools.

Government policy over many years has increased the level of school involvement in ITE. This has influenced school – university partnership developments and has led over time to changes in the number of days required in placement schools, with an increase from 90 to 120 days in the 180 day year in postgraduate ITE. More recently, however, a view of teaching as ‘a craft ... best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman’ (Gove, 2010) has been revived and promulgated as underlying a major policy move to school-based provision has occurred (DfE, 2010, 2011). The School Direct route, where schools recruit and train their own teachers, often within groups or alliances of schools, was established in 2012 and 500 places were allocated in 2012-13. In 2013-14 6580 new entrants on postgraduate ITE programmes were on a School Direct programme compared with 20690 on HEI or SCITT programmes (DfE, 2013a). For 2015-16 postgraduate School Direct initial allocations have increased further to a total of 17609 representing 48% of allocated ITE quota (with 42% to HEI providers and 10% to SCITT providers) (NCTL, 2014a). This increase in School Direct provision has meant that many ITE programmes in HEIs have had their quotas significantly reduced or cut altogether (UCU, 2012; Universities UK, 2013) and some HEIs have withdrawn from ITE altogether (Elmes, 2013). Other HEI providers have increased

their numbers by engaging with schools involved in School Direct. See Table 1 which summarises this range of possible routes.

<b>Routes into teaching in England<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Provider</b>	<b>Length of programme</b>
<i>Undergraduate</i> QTS through undergraduate degree eg BA QTS, BEd	Higher Education Institution (HEI)	3-4 years
<i>Postgraduate</i> QTS, usually with a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE).  HEIs must be involved to provide the academic credit in a PGCE.	Higher Education Institution (HEI)	1 year
	School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) - SCITTs have government approval to run their own training. They often link with an HEI to provide a PGCE qualification.	1 year
	Teach First - trains graduates with leadership potential to become teachers in low income communities. The trainee is employed by the school as an unqualified teacher. Teach First links with an HEI to provide a PGCE qualification.	1 year (plus commitment to a further year as a Newly Qualified Teacher in the same school)
	School Direct (fee paying) – training ‘on the job’, trainee recruited by and based in a school. Often operated by a group or alliance of schools, in partnership with an HEI or SCITT.	1 year
	School Direct (salaried) - an employment-based route into teaching open to high-quality graduates with three or more years’ career experience. The trainee is employed as an unqualified teacher by a school.	1 year

*All ITE programmes must include as a minimum 120 days in 2 placement schools*

**Table 1: Routes into teaching in England**

In England there has been no discrete whole programme ITE for learning to teach students with special educational needs (SEN) since 1992 (Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005) and a separate or different qualification is not required to teach these

learners. Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2013b) mostly focus on *all* pupils – for example, to 'adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils' (p11) and only one specifically mentions SEN: to 'have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs ... and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them' (p12). ITE programmes contain very variable foci on SEN: some trainees may be based in special schools through School Direct programmes, especially as part of alliances; some HEI or SCITT programmes feature SEN as a specialist pathway; some may include optional and/or additional modules and/or special school placements (Peter, 2013); others have minimal content in the area of SEN. There have been continuing concerns about the adequacy of teacher education in the area of SEN (OFSTED, 2008; House of Commons, 2010; DCSF, 2010; Hartley, 2010) and additional training materials related to teaching these learners were developed (for example, TDA, 2007, 2009a); however, this bank of resources is now archived and may or may not be used by teacher education providers.

### ***Diversification of schools***

There has also been a diversification of school types in England with the introduction of academies, free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges (DfE, 2014a) and the removal of the requirement for teachers in these schools to gain QTS (DfE, 2012). The number of converter academies (those schools which have voluntarily converted to academy status) for secondary age pupils increased from 827 in 2012 to 1299 in 2014 and there was a more than twelve-fold increase in the number of free schools for secondary age pupils from 6 to 76 schools (DfE, 2014b). Almost 30 per cent of all school pupils in England in 2014 are enrolled in academies and free schools (DfE, 2014b).

A further development has been the introduction of Teaching Schools. These are 'outstanding schools that work with others to provide high-quality training and development to new and experienced school staff' (NCTL, 2014b), also part of the government's commitment to a schools-led system. One of the main responsibilities of Teaching Schools is 'to lead the development of school-led initial teacher training through School Direct or by gaining accreditation as an initial teacher training provider' and to 'offer a range of professional development opportunities for teachers and school support staff ... build[ing] on initial teacher training and induction' (NCTL, 2014b). They are therefore a key component in the teacher education landscape.

Black and Norwich's (2014) analysis of Department for Education data shows that for the two years of 2012 and 2013 the more autonomous secondary schools (converter academies and free schools) had a consistently lower percentage of pupils with SEN (at school action plus or with statements of SEN) than maintained schools and sponsored academies (those with 'weaknesses' which are forced to become academies governed by outside trusts) had the highest percentage of pupils

with SEN. Interesting patterns are also evident regarding the distribution of pupils with different types of SEN in different types of secondary school. Black and Norwich's (2014) analysis indicates that the SEN categories of 'moderate learning difficulties' and 'behavioural emotional and social difficulties'<sup>2</sup> were more prevalent in maintained schools and sponsored academies and that the category of 'specific learning difficulties' was more prevalent in converter academies and free schools. The diversification of school types, then, might be affecting the distribution of pupils with SEN.

### ***Diversification and fragmentation of continuing professional development***

Continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers is frequently emphasised as important for teachers' careers and for teacher retention (DfE, 2010; House of Commons, 2012; DfE, 2013c). The world of CPD, however, also seems to be increasingly fragmented with a wide range of provision and providers, for example: schools themselves; academy chains; for-profit and not-for-profit providers and HEIs. In particular, schools are encouraged and expected to work together and support each other through initiatives such as 'school-to-school support' and part of the remit of Teaching Schools is to 'lead peer-to-peer professional and leadership development' (NCTL, 2014b). The emphasis on Masters level CPD varies. On the one hand, governments have emphasised and sought to emulate countries where teaching is an M level profession (e.g. Finland, DfE, 2010) and have, at times, promoted M level qualifications through policy iterations and funding, for example, Postgraduate Professional Development funding over 2005-2011 and a Masters in Teaching and Learning (TDA, 2009b) which was piloted in specific regions of England for one year before being abandoned by the new Coalition Government in 2011. In addition, most ITE programmes incorporate M level credits within PGCEs. However, in the current policy climate, there seems to be a move away from this level of CPD.

A continuing concern about teacher education for teaching pupils with SEN, as mentioned earlier, and the influence of government reports (Lamb Report, DCSF, 2009a; Salt Report, DCSF, 2010) led to the development of a range of CPD materials for teachers in addition to ITE materials (now available through [www.nasen.org.uk/onlinesendcpd/](http://www.nasen.org.uk/onlinesendcpd/)) and government teacher scholarship funding has been specifically targeted for SEN (NCTL, 2014c). However, it is unknown to what extent these materials are used for CPD that relates to pupils with SEN / disabilities.

### **SEN frameworks**

#### ***OFSTED inspection frameworks***

Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspection frameworks exist for schools (OFSTED, 2014a) and for ITE providers (OFSTED, 2014b) and thus form part of the policy landscape for teachers and teacher education. The school inspection framework includes one specific reference to SEN:

‘When reporting, inspectors must also consider the extent to which the education provided by the school meets the needs of the range of pupils at the school, and in particular the needs of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs’. (OFSTED, 2014a:5)

This ‘in particular’ emphasis on the quality of provision for pupils with SEN, their achievement and progress continues consistently throughout the inspection handbooks for schools and ITE (OFSTED, 2014c; 2014b).

### ***Special Educational Needs Coordinators***

The role of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in schools and in the teacher education landscape now seems to be well established. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 state that there must be a SENCO in maintained schools, academies and free schools and that the SENCO must be a teacher. If new-to-role, the SENCO must gain the National Award for SEN Coordination, a Masters level qualification, within three years. The SENCO Learning Outcomes, revised in 2014 (NCTL, 2014d) now have a greater emphasis on leadership and increased status associated with the SENCO role has been noted (Griffiths and Dubsky, 2012; Tissot, 2013).

### ***Revised SEND Code of Practice***

The revised *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice* which took effect from September 2014 (DfE and DoH, 2014) makes some amendments to the graduated response to pupils’ SEN with the amalgamation of the previous School Action and School Action Plus stages into one stage of SEN Support. This change has also been interpreted, rather than an amalgamation of stages, as removing the stage of School Action, partly, perhaps, in response to OFSTED’s (2010: 5) proposition that the term ‘special educational needs’ was being used too widely and that ‘as many as half of all pupils identified for School Action would not be identified as having special educational needs if schools focused on improving teaching and learning for all, with individual goals for improvement’. This would seem to suggest that the proportion of children designated as having SEN, which was 17.9% in January 2014 (DfE, 2014c) will decrease. The *SEND Code of Practice* also strongly emphasises the responsibility of the class teacher and the importance of high quality teaching (paras 6.36 and 6.37). In addition, there is a change to one of the SEN areas of need as defined in the revised *SEND Code of Practice*. The previously labelled category of ‘behavioural, emotional and social difficulties’, which accounted for 20% of children at School Action + or with a statement in January 2014 (DfE, 2014c), is now entitled ‘social, emotional and mental health difficulties’. It seems likely that this apparently narrower focus will reduce the number of children included within the category and thus, perhaps, the number and proportion of pupils designated as having SEN.

### ***Increasing complexity of pupil need***

A final aspect of the landscape for teachers in the area of SEN relates to the increasing complexity of pupil needs. There has been a considerable increase in numbers of pupils with severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties of approximately 30% since 2004 (DCSF, 2009b; DfE, 2014c) with projections indicating further growth (Emerson, 2009). More premature babies are surviving and medical science is prolonging lives that would previously have been lost in infancy (Marlow *et al*, 2005). The numbers of children with severe disabilities is thus growing concomitantly (Johnson *et al*, 2011). Many children with severe disabilities are educated in special schools (DfE, 2014c). However, the increase in numbers and the continued, if slightly diluted, impetus for inclusion in terms of presumption of education within mainstream schools contained within the revised SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2014) suggests that pupils' needs will also increase in severity and complexity within mainstream schools.

### **Implications of this policy landscape for SEN in teacher education**

Three types of implications are discussed: increased variability in experience; the potential dilution or, alternatively, concentration of focus on SEN; and the possible policy impulses in relation to general-specialist teaching positions.

#### ***Increased variability in experience***

Several studies have found that trainees regard the school placement as the most important aspect of their ITE for learning about SEN (Nash and Norwich, 2008; Lawson, Norwich and Nash, 2013). One of the issues highlighted by OFSTED (2008: 4) was, however, a 'high reliance on school placements' to provide training in teaching pupils with SEN and an additional concern was the 'considerable differences' noted 'in the quality of provision'. Lawson *et al*'s (2013) study also found that experiences were very variable between schools, and even within schools, in terms of the number of children with SEND in the trainees' class/es and the amount and quality of supervision/mentoring of trainees' teaching. Their study highlighted the importance of the values and ethos in the school, organisational practice and attitudes of individual staff members. McIntyre (2009: 602) argues that 'whatever is achieved in the university, the teaching practices and attitudes that student-teachers usually learn to adopt are those currently dominant in the schools'. There are therefore possible limitations inherent in relying on schools for this aspect of ITE. However, the increasingly schools-led ITE policy agenda, in promoting a greater amount of time in school generally and within one school in particular, would seem to exacerbate the potential for this variability in provision.

The diversification of schools and pattern of placement of pupils with SEN (Black and Norwich, 2014) also indicates that a trainee teacher's experience may be very variable, and may be very narrow, depending on the type of placement school. With increasing ITE quota going to School Direct and Teach First (NCTL, 2014a) where trainee teachers typically spend more time in one school, a smaller amount of time in a second school placement and less time in higher education study, there



seems to be a danger that a broad and critical understanding of SEN and provision for pupils with SEN may be weakened. As one of the participants in Lawson et al's (2013) study notes:

*Whereas before it didn't matter what school you were in because the Uni[versity] was giving it to you so you all had the same, but now where your placement is depends on what quality you get. When I did my PGCE most of it came from the Uni[versity] so we were all having the same quality. But now of course it's all coming from the schools.*  
(school subject tutor, Lawson et al, 2013: 150)

### ***Dilution or concentration of SEN focus***

The diversification of training routes and the broadness of Teachers' Standards in relation to SEN seem to dilute the position of SEN within ITE. On the other hand, the option of specialising in SEN to some extent within ITE seems to have increased with an increase in SEN pathways and with 'extended placements' in special schools (Peter, 2013). This appears to indicate a concentration of the position of SEN in ITE for some trainees. Both of these may be regarded as problematic: dilution because there may then be insufficient emphasis on, and experience of, learning to teach pupils with SEN; and concentration because of the potential association with the teaching of pupils with SEN as the responsibility of some, rather than all, teachers. This mirrors the often noted tension between SEN content being integrated or immersed throughout an ITE programme with the risk of it being sidelined, and additional or alternative specialist sessions and optional modules on SEN being available but not for all and not integrated through the ITE programmes.

In schools, the emphasis on class teachers' responsibility for children with SEN, expectations around high quality teaching and the move to a single category of school-level action, SEN Support, may lead to a reduction in the numbers and proportion of pupils identified or designated as having SEN. As noted in the SEND Code of Practice, 'making higher quality teaching normally available to the whole class is likely to mean that fewer pupils will require such support' (DfE and DoH, 2014: 94-95). Similar to the case of diversification of training routes above, this would seem to promote a dilution of focus on SEN. Again, however, this policy change may also, alternatively, intensify and concentrate the SEN focus on a smaller proportion of pupils with more significant needs. This narrower interpretation of SEN may also initiate a propensity to move away from an interactional model of SEN which has been prominent within the English education system since the Warnock Report (1978), conceptualising SEN as the result of an interaction between the child and the environment (Wedell, 1981), to a more within-child perspective. Such an approach may conceivably promote increasingly separate provision and narrow the focus of the role of the SENCO.

### ***General-specialist positions***

The tension and interaction between these SEN lens of dilution and concentration echoes the debate and tensions around the general and/or specialist nature of teaching pupils with SEN (Lewis and Norwich, 2005). Figure 1 illustrates this position in a binary way.

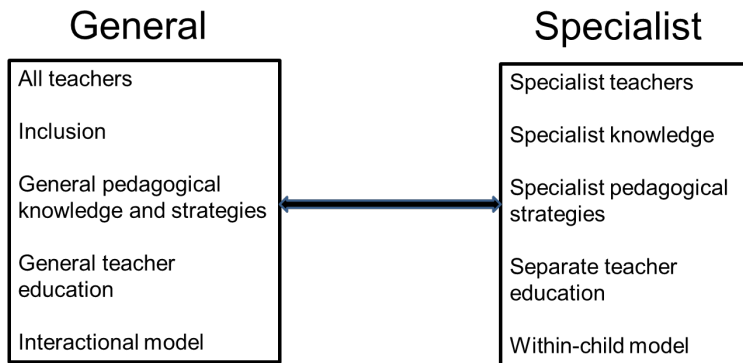


Figure 1 General-specialist positions

A general position proposes that all teachers are involved in teaching pupils with SEN within a value stance of inclusion. General pedagogical knowledge and strategies are considered appropriate and relevant for pupils with SEN (no specialist pedagogies exist) and general teacher education for learning to teach all pupils is provided. An interactional model of SEN may be adopted, where personal characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the child and environmental factors, barriers and support, are regarded as interacting. On the other hand, a specialist position suggests that specialist SEN knowledge exists and is important for teachers to know and that specialist pedagogical strategies are required for teaching pupils with SEN. Specialist teachers are therefore required and specialist separate teacher education is thus also needed. A within-child model of SEN is adopted where deficits, difficulties and strengths are located within the child.

The different aspects of the policy landscape described and discussed above can be seen to be exerting a push and pull influences across these general-specialist alternative positions as illustrated in Figure 2.

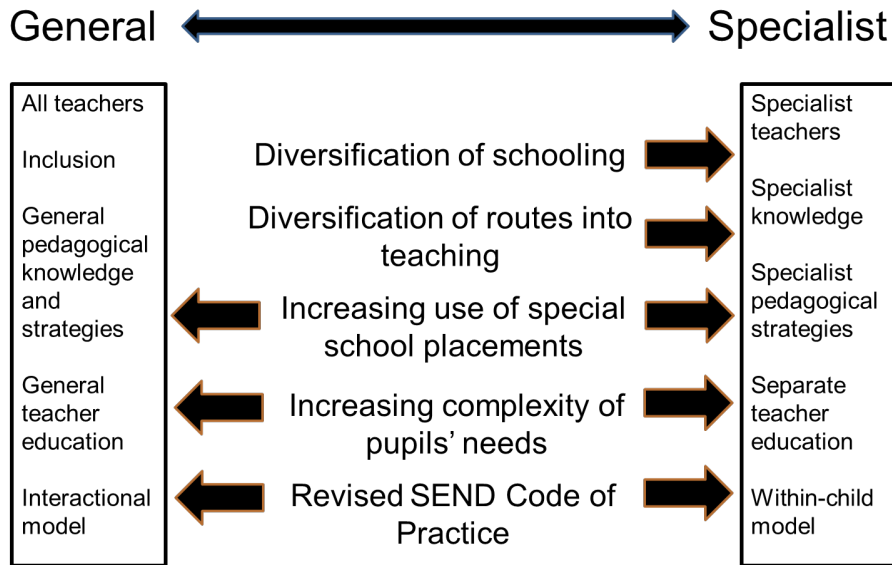


Figure 2 Influences of aspects of education policy landscape on general-specialist positions

The diversification of schools and routes into teaching both seem to propel thinking and provision to a more specialist position as different types of schools seem to increasingly contain different types of pupils (Black and Norwich, 2014) and special schools become involved, as part of Teaching School alliances and through School Direct, as providers of ITE. The increasing complexity of pupils' needs and the increasing use of special school placements may also, on the one hand, propel to a more specialist position, as trainee teachers see these schools and placements as separate, special and additional. On the other hand, research also suggests that trainee teachers experiencing placements in special schools learn pedagogic strategies that are transferable to mainstream contexts (Golder, Jones and Eaton Quinn, 2009; Peter, 2013; Walton and Rusznyak, 2013), that they experience a wider range of children and incorporate their learning within their general teaching approach, thus pulling to a more generalist position.

The revised SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2014) similarly seems to exert forces in both directions. The removal of 'behaviour difficulties' from the areas of need and the likelihood of reduced numbers of children being designated as having SEN may suggest that, as applicable to only a small minority of pupils, SEN is a specialist area. On the other hand, the emphasis on class teachers' responsibility for all and high quality teaching for all emphasises and provides impetus for the general position.

### The future for teacher education

Collaboration between schools in the area of teacher education, as well as partnerships between universities and schools, would seem to be an increasing possibility, especially considering the role of Teaching Schools. Ho and Arthur-

Kelly's (2013) study of a professional development programme in special schools in Hong Kong highlights the potential of school cluster working. The CPD was facilitated by a collaboration with 'expert' school teachers and teacher training lecturers; special school teachers worked in within-school pairs and across-school groups undertaking, for example, co-planning and peer observations, alongside practical and academic course content.

In addition to providing special school placements (Lindsay et al, 2011), there are also examples of broader relationships between ITE providers and special schools in England. The Institute of Education, London, and Swiss Cottage School, for example, have collaborated on a DfE funded pilot project involving additional experience in SEN as part of PGCE provision (Grant, 2013). Interestingly, the focus of this interrelationship is not on additional specialist teaching but general principles of strengthened personalised learning, evidence-based inquiry and anchored reflective practitioners (Mulholland and Patel, 2014). These would seem to be relevant for all ITE and not specific to a special school and this emphasis is interesting to note in terms of general-specialist positioning and the role of special schools in ITE.

Some European countries (for example, France) are strengthening the university context and academic emphasis in ITE (EASDNE, 2011). In Ireland the length of postgraduate ITE courses has been increased to two years from September 2014 (The Teaching Council, 2014) with 50% of the time spent on 'Foundation Studies and Professional Studies' in universities or colleges and 40% (120 days) in schools. In England there is a minimum of 120 days in school in a *one year* programme and the ITE policy agenda increasingly concentrates on the role of schools rather than universities.

In this diverse market, schools seem to have greater autonomy and a more predictable future than HEIs with regard to ITE. For HEIs, the uncertainty of quota allocation is unsettling and makes future planning almost impossible. Many HEIs have engaged with School Direct such that the proportion of School Direct in relation to HEI 'core' provision for some HEIs is more than 60% of their places allocated for 2015-16 (NCTL, 2014a). Some of this School Direct provision, however, almost places the HEI in a quality assurance rather than provider role. There is some evidence (Universities UK, 2014) that HEIs may experience increasing difficulty in finding quality school placements for trainee teachers as partnership schools engage further in School Direct. On the other hand, the capacity for schools to act as lead providers and to resource key elements of ITE has also been questioned (Hodgson, 2014).

**Notes:**

1. There are also routes for ex-service personnel (Troops to teachers <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/troops-to-teachers>) and academics with doctorates

(Researchers in schools <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/teacher-training-options/school-based-training/researchers-in-schools>).

2. The category of 'behavioural emotional and social difficulties' (BESD) is no longer a category of SEN within the revised SEND Code of Practice 0-25 (DfE and DoH, 2014) and has been replaced by the category of 'social, emotional and mental health difficulties'.

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## **Chapter 4:**

### **Autism: Enhancing whole school practice and the skills and understanding of the workforce**

Dr Glenys Jones

Increasing numbers of children on the autism spectrum are being identified and all schools have diagnosed and undiagnosed pupils with autism and Asperger syndrome within them. In the 1980s, the prevalence for autism was estimated to be about 4 or 5 per 10,000 children. Since then the definitions have been widened, awareness of autism has increased, and more effective systems for identification and assessment have been developed – so that now it is estimated that at least 1 in 100 children have autism (Baird et al., 2006). This has vastly increased the demand on staff in schools, in particular. So there is a need to consider how best to support these staff in understanding and addressing the needs arising in a school context. Understanding and meeting the needs of parents and carers and gaining the views of the children and young people themselves on the provision planned and made are also crucial.

#### **Pattern of educational provision for children and young people with autism**

Since the 1960s, when the particular educational needs of children with autism were first acknowledged by parents such as Lorna Wing and the first schools specific to autism were opened by the National Autistic Society, there has been an expansion in the number and types of specialist provision across the UK. There are now many schools and bases run by local authorities and independent providers, some of which offer residential provision too. Many generic special schools now recognise that between a third and a half of children on roll have autism. So children with autism in the UK attend schools that are specific to autism or special schools which provide for children with different types of SEND – most often with learning disabilities, but also for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Jones, 2002). The vast majority of children on the autism spectrum attend mainstream schools. So there is a need to enhance the practice across all sectors and across the workforce. As autism affects the way in which children and young people relate to others, issues frequently arise in the interactions they have with adults and peers throughout the day. Within schools, there are many adults in addition to teachers and teaching assistants who may interact with the child with autism (e.g. lunch time staff; office staff; drivers; caretaker; other parents and carers). There is thus a need to provide basic information about autism and, where possible, about individual children, to these staff.

#### **Whole school development in relation to autism practice**

Over the last 50 years, ideas on how best to understand and work with children and young people with autism have developed and many interventions have been designed specifically for this population. There is still debate and controversy about which interventions and strategies are most effective and the research evidence is often not robust (Jones and Jordan, 2008; Jordan and Jones, 1999; Lord et al., 2005; Parsons, et al., 2009). But there is a recognition that there are some key principles which make good sense and which can enhance practice. These are underpinned by our changing understanding and knowledge about autism and the priorities for action and teaching change, as insights from adults and young people on the autism spectrum about their autism and school experiences contribute to the debates on what is likely to be helpful and effective (e.g. accounts by Gerland, 2013; Jackson, 2002; Sainsbury, 2000). For example, in the past, it was thought that it was important for staff to encourage eye contact when working with a child. Now, from the accounts of autistic adults, it is known that making eye contact can be painful, and rather than being helpful, can be a real distraction. Children and adults can feel overwhelmed and so are not able to take in what is being said.

There is also now much more attention given to the sensory issues and challenges experienced by many with autism (Bogdashina, 2003) and adjustments to the sensory and physical environment can make a great deal of difference to a child's ability to engage in a task. Much more emphasis too is placed on the positive aspects of autism and Asperger syndrome and working to the child's strengths rather than focusing on weaknesses, deficits and areas of need. As Temple Grandin (2012), a very able woman with autism, maintains: 'Autism is different - not less'.

In the past too, staff were advised that they should try to limit or even stop completely the time spent by the child on what were considered to be purposeless or valueless activities such as spinning, rocking, or talking about their special interests. It is now recognised that these special interests are often crucial as motivators or incentives for a child to become involved in an activity and also have a calming function and enable the child to attain a positive flow state akin to how people feel when they are engaged in their favourite hobby or activity such as gardening, sailing, cooking (McDonnell and Milton, 2014). Furthermore, attention is being paid to the contribution and effects of the demands and personal style of staff and parents (Kossvaki et al., 2012; 2013). Are adults a force for good or do they add to the difficulties experienced and inhibit learning? Adapting the demands, the communicative style, physical proximity and empathy of staff and parents can have a marked effect on the capacity of a child or young person to engage in a task and on their emotional well-being.

Autism and our knowledge and understanding do not stay still. So there is a continual need to update and refresh our knowledge. In the past, training was often largely directed at and received by the specialist teacher for autism or the SENCo and it is well known that it can be very hard for a single person on the staff to then

disseminate information back to their colleagues, particularly if autism is only one of the areas of work that the school has to prioritise.

In the 50 plus years since it was acknowledged that many children with autism need to be formally taught skills that other children pick up incidentally and that adjustments need to be made to how these children are taught and to the physical and sensory environment, an increasing number of books, DVDs and websites have been produced to guide families and professionals in their lives and work. Making decisions on which of these might be helpful to a particular child can be difficult as there are so many to consider. There is thus a need to help staff, parents and children and young people with autism to navigate through these to inform their decisions.

### **The diversity of the autism spectrum**

It is now recognised that although children and young people on the autism spectrum share features in common in a number of areas (i.e. social and emotional understanding; understanding and use of communication and language; flexibility of thought and actions; sensory perception) which lead to the diagnosis, they can be very different from each other in terms of the degree to which they are affected in each of the diagnostic areas, depending on their intellectual ability, their social preference, their personality, and communicative competence. Their needs and how to address these will also differ significantly and so it is vital that the needs of each individual are established using formal and informal assessments, observation and in discussion with parents and carers and the young person him or herself. Then priorities need to be ascertained and discussions take place on how the needs can be addressed through teaching and other strategies. Gunilla Gerland, an able woman with autism makes the point that often when the individual is enlightened and informed about why they struggle in certain aspects of their lives then they can often develop useful strategies themselves to manage situations. She argues:

.....'you are not best helped if the people around you.....act as experts telling you that they know exactly what your condition is. What you need is guidance from them to come to your own truth, and to develop your personal approach to your condition.' (Gerland, 2000).

### **Interventions**

The term intervention is often used to describe specific, named approaches of programmes used such as TEACCH (Lord and Schopler, 1994), PECS (Bondy and Frost, 2002), Lovaas or other ABA programmes (Lovaas, 1981), SCERTS (Prizant et al., 2006); the Option or Son-rise approach (Kaufman, 1994), but it can also be defined more widely in the sense that it can refer to anything that others do with a child or young person (e.g. how they intervene and with which outcomes in mind). Damian Milton (2014), an adult with Asperger syndrome, has written a very interesting paper entitled, *So what exactly are autism interventions intervening with?* and makes the very important point that the individual on the autism

spectrum is rarely consulted on interventions they receive. As mentioned earlier, there is little robust research evidence on which named intervention should be used and even less on the characteristics of the child with whom an approach is most suitable or appropriate (Lord et al., 2005). Furthermore, most research has been conducted on young children, very little being conducted on adolescents and many studies are short term, given the constraints of the costs of research, so that evidence for longer term effects is lacking (Jones and Jordan, 2008).

There have been meta-reviews of research evidence that aim to elicit the elements in common of successful approaches (e.g. Rogers and Vismara, 2008; Dawson and Osterling, 1997). But what underpins the practice seen in schools and other settings in the UK today? It is most often a mixture of the experience and personal skills and preferences of the staff group which are updated and refreshed through attendance at training courses within their school for the whole staff or training which is external to the school which may be attended by only one or two staff. Practice in schools, even within a local authority area, can therefore be very variable and families and children can get a very different offer depending on where they live. With the advent and rapid increase in the use of the Internet, perhaps this diversity is lessening and new knowledge and ideas are disseminated more effectively and widely across the UK than previously. It is certainly the case that the Internet offers a fantastic opportunity to provide up to date materials for training the workforce and resources and strategies to use with the children and young people.

### **The Autism Education Trust**

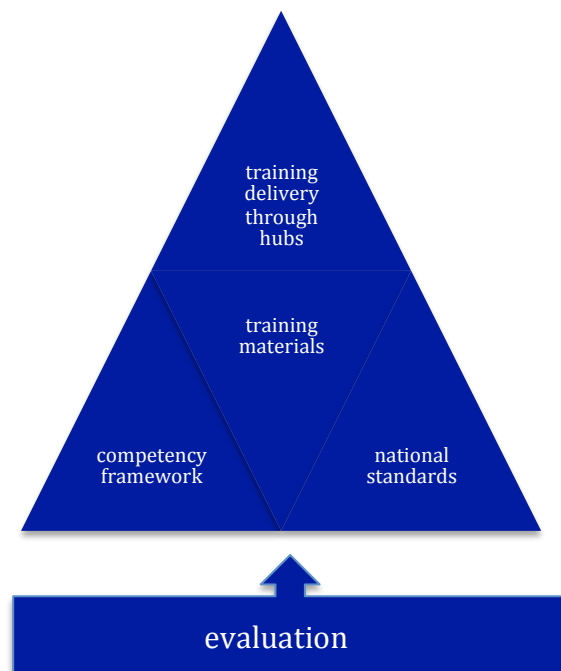
In recognition that there are very many organisations and schools working to produce evidence and ideas on what is useful in terms of policy and practice in the field of autism and the growing need for advice and materials from parents/carers and professionals working with children and young people on the autism spectrum, the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) set up the Autism Education Trust in 2007 to collate information on the education of children and young people and to produce training materials and resources to skill up the workforce.

As a first step, a scoping exercise was conducted in 2008 to identify the challenges in educational provision as reported by parents, carers, staff and children and young people and a report was published (Jones et al., 2008). A further report on Good Practice in Autism was commissioned by the AET to identify the elements that are thought to lead to good practice in schools and published (Charman et al., 2011) and a study on the outcomes that different stakeholders considered important was also undertaken by Wittemeyer et al (2012). These reports identified the need for more training and for materials and resources to help schools enhance their provision. Many reports recommend more training, but this begs a series of questions on content, training providers, mode of delivery and evaluation of impact on practice. There are many training providers and courses in the field of autism

but as with any training, there is always a need to ensure the content meets the needs of the audience and that it has a positive effect on the understanding and knowledge of the recipients and leads to informed changes in practice. Providers of training in autism require a deep knowledge of the autism spectrum and an appreciation of the particular issues which arise in the workplace of those being trained. The most powerful input on training courses is often from presentations and/or DVDs of individuals on the autism spectrum and from parents/carers and siblings. Their lived experiences and insights make a real impact and lead to 'light bulb' moments which serve as a catalyst to change practice.

On the basis of the reports and other reviews and evidence on what makes sense in the education of children and young people with autism, the AET embarked on a programme of work to develop training materials for the education workforce and to produce resources which would help schools to evaluate their practice in relation to autism and to audit the understanding and skills of the staff. *Figure 1* summarises the different strands of work.

**Figure 1:** Key resources developed by the AET to inform and enhance the Education workforce



### **Training materials and their delivery**

Training materials were produced for staff working with children aged 5 to 16 years, at three different levels.

### ***Level One training***

It was recognised that a child or young person meets many people during the course of a school day in addition to their key teaching staff (e.g. office staff; caretaker; drivers, escorts, lunchtime supervisors) and that there was a need for basic information on autism to be given to this group. A short awareness-raising programme on autism lasting between 60 and 90 minutes was created specifically for this group who have little or no prior knowledge of autism.

### ***Level Two training***

This was created for teachers and teaching assistants working directly with children and young people with autism. It takes one day but can be done over two half days.

### ***Level Three training***

This was developed for staff in a leadership role within the school who had responsibility for supporting other staff in their work (e.g. SENCo; autism lead; headteacher; Head of Year; Head of Learning support). This takes two days but can be done over four half days.

### **Training providers (hubs)**

The AET took the decision that those delivering the training needed a good track record as trainers in the field of autism and education and that they had to have established good working relationships and networks with schools and settings in their area. Funding was initially available from the Department for Education to commission 7 regional training hubs and professionals were invited to apply to deliver the AET training. From a total of 26 applications, 7 hubs were recruited. Since then a further 4 hubs have been appointed to provide coverage over most of England. The AET provides the training materials that include the presentations within which are embedded DVD clips, activities and slides. The AET also provides packs for each delegate with a summary of the information delivered and a Certificate of Attendance. Delegates have to pay for training at Levels 2 and 3 but training at Level 1 is offered free to delegates for a period of 12 months. Details of the location and contact person for each hub are given on the AET website.

### **Autism Competency Framework: What makes a good practitioner?**

In addition to the training materials, a framework was produced which sets out the key understandings and knowledge required by staff working with children and young people on the autism spectrum. This has two levels within it – core and advanced. The Competency Framework is introduced in the Level 2 training, but can be accessed and downloaded for free from the AET website. It lists the competencies recommended under four main headings – the Individual pupil, Building Relationships, Curriculum and Learning and Enabling Environments (see *Figure 2*). Staff complete this individually to audit the skills they feel they have and

to identify any gaps. Resources can be accessed online to illustrate how a competency might be evidenced.

**Figure 2:** Key areas covered in all the AET materials



### **Autism National Standards: What makes a good school?**

In addition to the training materials and embedded in Level 3 training, there is a document known as the Standards. This was created to enable a school to evaluate its own practice and to determine the extent to which it addresses the main needs of children and young people with autism. It has a similar look and feel to the Competency Framework and has the same four headings. This can be filled in by an individual such as the SENCo or preferably by a group of staff who can then discuss their ratings and come to a consensus on what is in place and which areas need further work. This can form the basis of an action plan that the school can work on over time. Resources can be accessed online to illustrate how a Standard might be evidenced. Both the Competency Framework and the Standards can be used as evidence in Ofsted inspections on how the school is working towards enhancing its provision.

### **Other age groups**

Since the production of the training materials and the resources for the school-aged population (aged 5 to 16 years), a similar set of materials and resources have been developed for Early Years (to include nurseries, Children's Centres and child minders) and for children and young people in Post 16 provision (e.g. FE Colleges; work experience; supported employment; assessment centres). These are very similar in form and appearance to the school-aged materials. There has been a slight change to the length of the training, so that Level 2 now has two days training for staff working directly with the children and young people and Level 3 is just one day. Additional training providers (hubs) have been appointed to run this training.

### **Parents/ Carers Guide**

It was recognised that many parents and carers might use the Standards to evaluate their child's school or to help in choosing a new school. A decision was therefore taken to create a bespoke resource specifically for parents and carers. Two documents have been developed that can be accessed online by parents or printed as hard copies. There is a short leaflet entitled, *Finding a school for your child with*

*autism*, which has some general advice followed by a short checklist of questions to ask during the visit (e.g. Has the school created structured break and lunch time activities for children with autism?). The second more detailed document can be used when choosing a school; or parents and staff can use it at reviews to discuss what is in place and what might be useful to develop. This resource is called *Working together with your child's school*. In this, parents are asked to consider a series of statements under the four main headings: *Your child*; *Working together with the school*; *Adapting the learning*; and *Supporting your child at school*. Parents are asked to rate how important each item is for their child using a four point rating scale Essential, Very important, Not very important, Not necessary. These ratings can then be discussed and debated with the staff and plans made to address specific needs. Resources are attached to this document when accessed online.

### **Evaluation by CEDAR at the University of Warwick**

Delegates are asked to complete evaluation forms at the training events and these data have been collated and analysed by staff within CEDAR at the University of Warwick. The overwhelming majority of delegates who have received the training (which now total more than 40,000) have been extremely positive about the materials and their delivery. In the light of feedback on the content, some revisions are to be made to the materials and additional modules created over the next two years. In particular, materials for staff working with children who are preverbal and have a learning disability are to be developed.

### **Key messages within all the training materials and resources produced by the AET Universal**

The key messages within all the resources are as follows:

- To urge staff to see autism as a different way of being, giving a different perspective on the world – rather than as a disorder or a deficit. Wherever possible, the term autism spectrum is used rather than autism spectrum disorder.
- To appreciate that the actions of many children and young people whose attainments are average or above can be misinterpreted as lazy or defiant if staff do not know they have autism or understand how this affects their learning and performance.
- That the actions of children and young people are strongly influenced by the actions of the other children and adults around them – and behaviours which challenge others may be a direct consequence of the behaviour of others in their presence, or to sensory issues or anxieties about change or the lessons they are about to have which they find difficult or because they have misunderstood what was required.
- That knowledge of the individual child is key to success – so staff are asked to ‘read’ the child and get to know him or her, in addition to having basic knowledge of autism and how this might affect their response.



- A key priority in all work now is to consult the child or young person and involve them in decisions, if at all possible. For children who are preverbal or not easily able to be consulted, reading their body language and finding out from parents what they enjoy, what they dislike and how they communicate is fundamental.
- Key strategies which are known to make a difference is to make tasks concrete and visual; to warn the child about changes to familiar routines; to respect their social preferences in terms of which activities they can do with other children and how they would like to be included with peers, teaching them prerequisite skills where needed; planning carefully for transitions and new experiences and having a calm personal style.
- As children and young people on the autism spectrum do not communicate clearly with their parents/carers, it is important to develop a good and frequent communication system with parents and carers.
- Targets need to be set which are relevant (i.e. will make a difference to that child's life now or in the future), realistic and achievable.
- The process of learning needs to be taken into account and is equally, if not more important than the goal or aim. There are many means to an end but one has to have knowledge of the learning style of the young person and how they prefer to be taught. Within the materials are ideas on how to discover what the child thinks about their experiences at school (e.g. guidelines on how to encourage children to generate ideas about their ideal school by Williams and Hanke (2007). Staff are actively encouraged to consider '*What is X like for this child?*'

Peter Vermeulen (2014), a Belgian psychologist, who has worked in the field of autism for many years is now turning his attention to the promotion of positive well-being and happiness. He argues that very often data are collected on changes in language levels, IQ, levels of anxiety or self care skills, but very rarely do we ask is the child happier now having been at this school for 6 months or within this intervention for 6 months. It is a fact that individuals learn best when they are feeling good emotionally and physically so ascertaining their emotional state and what leads to negative and positive feelings is crucial.

### ***Specialist***

In terms of materials and ideas for staff who specialise in autism and/or have a lead role in their school for autism, then the materials encourage an evaluative and developmental role. The Standards and the Competency Framework can be used to audit the schools effectiveness and the skills and understandings of staff. Action plans on both can be drawn up by the strategic lead in collaboration and discussion with colleagues. The Competency Framework can be used for staff appraisal in a positive way acknowledging strengths and areas for development. It is expected that the lead for autism would also have knowledge or access to research evidence on how autism is currently understood and on the rationale and

practice of interventions used in autism. In addition, they should have the expertise to train or coach staff to enhance their practice and to encourage collaboration and discussion of practice within the school. Research on school effectiveness often shows that the most effective schools are those where the staff regularly discuss what they do and why.

In addition to understanding the key areas to focus on and the strategies that might be useful to support this, there is an additional area of work that can make a big difference to children and young people with autism. There are two strands to this work, one being sharing the diagnosis with the child or young person and the other is raising awareness and harnessing the support of the child's classmates and peers. This is sensitive and skilled work not to be undertaken lightly or by inexperienced staff. It is recommended that staff work alongside a person who is already experienced in this work before undertaking this alone. It is still the case that other children with autism and SEND are not as socially included with their peer group as they could be. Research by Symes and Humphrey (2012) showed the vital importance for pupils with autism at mainstream secondary school of having a 'significant other' from their peer group with whom they would work and be with at lunch and break times. Ideas and literature on sharing the diagnosis with the child are being developed and used (e.g. Murray, 2006; Fletcher, 2013) and there is some evidence that the earlier this is done, the easier it is for the child to explore and discuss (Jones, 2001). It is essential that parents are involved in this process and contribute ideas on how this might be approached. In some schools, the pupils with a known diagnosis of autism meet monthly as a group to discuss how autism or Asperger affects them and share their successes and concerns that arise at school. Feeling confident and positive about their diagnosis is essential for future well-being and for confidently discussing their diagnosis and needs with people in the future, when necessary. A further area of work for the strategic lead is to consider and institute the effective deployment of staff to support the child. The work by Blatchford and colleagues (Blatchford et al., 2009) has shown that if support assistants are not taught how best to support a child with SEND, then the child can become dependent on their help and learned helplessness can result. Class teachers also need to be encouraged to get to know the child and to take responsibility for the child so that the child is not the sole responsibility of one person.

### **Concluding comments**

To conclude, the materials produced by the AET and commissioned by the Department for Education have great potential to enhance understanding of autism and the particular challenges in education. They have been developed in consultation with adults and children on the autism spectrum, with parents and carers and with a range of staff working within schools or who support schools to understand and address these pupils' needs. The majority of materials and resources are free to access and download so that they are available to all who

have access to the Internet. Some local authorities have introduced the materials to as many schools as possible in the authority, often through the Autism Outreach Team, so that all schools are working to the same document which helps parents and staff who move between schools and serves to create a consensus across the authority. Further work is planned by the AET to evaluate the impact on school practice of the introduction and use of the materials discussed in this paper. The author would be very interested to hear how these materials have been used and any changes that have been made to practice.

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## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

What follows is a summary of the key points discussed in the 6 groups which met after the policy presentations. The summaries were recorded at feedback to the whole group, transcribed and edited for this paper.

### **Group 1:**

This group focused on one key issue in their discussions. It was the question of what to expect teachers to know and what is an appropriate professional model for this. Brian Lamb talked about the advanced CPD materials that were recommended in his report; something taken up and enacted in the early part of the Coalition government, as an example of trying to set a standard. But this has resulted in them staying on a website and who knows whether they are used. How are they promoted, was one question asked in this group.

The conversation moved on to the question of the diversifying of training and whether that was a good or a bad thing. This is a fairly political issue about diversity-choice and the role of regulation. This group discussed the matter in terms of contemporary professional competence in schools, but also in terms of the diversifying of initial teacher education, along the lines that Hazel Lawson was talking. One member asked about who can say what the competence expectation is. This was an issue as the decision has been left to the local authority. As regards this, the example of Camden came up as being one with a tradition of engaging with its schools, having a dialogue and a forum. In that context – and there are other authorities too, such as Hertfordshire – it makes it easier for the local authority to engage in a sort of expectation setting dialogue.

There was also discussion about Blunkett's recommendation about a middle tier between local authorities and central Government. The debate about a middle tier was whether and how it would work. Someone had explained that it can be seen as a detour round local authorities. This tier would have some school improvement coordinating powers that would be relevant even though they are not dealing with SEN.

The last point was back to the issue the local authority role issue. It was suggested that where local authorities have a tradition and a culture that pre-existed some of the marketisation, you get some of the organization and support that was heard about from Camden.

### **Group 2:**

This group started their discussion about how much people need to know and how many skills do they need. And also how much is it about attitude? Many in the group struggled with the idea of competence and its inadequacy. So everybody made a strong case around the needing to know things. The group was quite taken

by the idea that 'if we can instill within our teachers an attitudinal response towards young people that's a healthy, inquisitive, enquiry based model of teaching and learning', then all will be well and the knowledge and skills will come.

As regards teachers' attitudes, it was suggested that the interview process may be one way that the leadership of the school could identify and bring in the teachers with the attitudes and values that they wanted. But, members of this group realised that at the moment, schools do not have much choice about teachers. There has been a shortage in some schools about who they can recruit and therefore the schools really do need to take the job of how do you shift and change attitudes in teaching staff seriously. Some in the group reminded others that many of the teachers were doing an incredibly strong job; they were talking about how to move forwards and be idealistic.

At that point the topic moved onto how to build stronger professional skills. The position was that longer training was required. Comparisons with Ireland, discussed earlier during the seminar, and Austria were made. In Austria they have 4 years Masters degree plus two years teacher training. There was support for a more professional preparation of teachers.

The group also discussed mental health as part of the new Code of Practice. One question considered was whether mental health was a core skill or a specialist skill. The group's view was that it was both, but it was still a tricky area. For example, how does a teacher have a conversation with a parent about mental health difficulties? This led to questions about what kind of supported teachers needed to be competent to manage some of those conversations in schools. As regards mental health, the view of this group was that core competencies as regards mental health was an understanding and being able to access and value the voice of the child and working with parents.

### **Group 3:**

This group started by discussing concerns about the SEN label and the notion of specialist and specialism; that this was potentially de-skilling. This set the group off thinking about what sort of things to look for. They were interested in a more fully integrated approach rather than a set of competencies or a set of specialisms; that seemed to be where others were going. So they started with what might actually leverage a notion of teachers as being able to respond to diversity. They felt that the teachers' standards and the SEN Code of Practice, reinforced by Ofsted considered that all teachers are responsible for understanding the children who are in front of them and making appropriate provision within the classroom. This was thought to be a nice starting point, but do you get there as a teacher? The focus then moved to reflective professional learning, and how do we give, equip teachers with a trajectory of reflective and analytical professional learning that is going to last them



throughout their professional career?

So, the group considered ITE and moved all the way through to CPD. It was felt that it was very important to offer a particular set of opportunities for that learning. The issue of time within school was recognized. The question is whether that sort of learning and thinking was valued. So, 3 key elements were identified as relevant to these issues:

1. we need to provide teachers with the tools to think about the values for what they are using – for example, person-centred approaches;
2. we need to also equip teachers with the tools to be analytical about their practice. This emphasizes the importance of really high quality early years practitioner tools of being a really good observer, understanding the learning of the child and where they are going next.
3. finally there is a need for a consultancy model, whether that consultancy model comes from within the school or it is drawing people from outside. What matters is that when an individual or a school reach the boundaries of their abilities to cope with the diversity in front of it, you know about and are willing to work with someone to actually resolve that particular issue or address that particular sort of learning or teaching provision issue.

#### **Group 4:**

This group identified some of the themes they discussed as having already been raised by previous groups. So, they focused on the word 'competence' and the issues surrounding this. They identified different competence frameworks and wondered about what applies from each framework. They asked whether there were commonalities between these frameworks. One question they started to consider was what are the expectations for all teachers to be teachers of SEN, what does that actually mean? What is at the core of that? This group saw this as overlapping with questions addressed by some of the previous groups.

One aspect that they talked about was the notion of teachers being better equipped to understand child development, to know what is typical. For them it is less about asking 'which SEN do these children have?'; it is more about 'are they where they should be across everything? If not, why not? Then using that understanding to inform 'so what am I going to do next about it?'. This is the competence that all teachers should be demonstrating.

The group also talked about competences that apply differently depending on the context. This means that whatever is said about skills and knowledge, they will actually apply differently because schools as settings are so really different. What might be specialist in one setting might be considered as targeted in another. We raised some issues around whether or not we are confident that the Teachers' Standards actually do make sure that people are SEN able (a term that the reporter made up). What matters is that the parts about SEN that are in the Teaching

Standards are upheld for qualifying and all practicing teachers, that they have bite.

The group also talked about where does specialism begin and end? Reflecting what others had said, it is important that teachers do not then become dependent on the specialist. The question is how do we empower people to do the parts which they are entirely able to do, and which are in fact their responsibility to do very effectively? The group also emphasized the importance for all teachers to have the time, opportunity and skills to be able to know the child who they are teaching.

### **Group 5**

This group talked a little bit about schools facing a competence disease; that anything we did needed to make sense and to be manageable for schools. This group also like the previous one, talked about the word 'competence'. They too wanted practitioners to be reflective and think more about their principles and their values rather than competences. This group concluded that this reflective and value approach would enable someone to adopt a person-centred approach and be more transferable across different educational settings as the educational sector becomes increasingly diverse.

The group also talked at a universal level about people having competences and inclusive values as very important. Several in the group were very involved in the national award for SENCO accreditation, so they saw this position as relating to their perspective. There was also reference back to Index for inclusion, the Inclusion quality mark as being that next step up.

### **Group 6:**

This group had a wide-ranging discussion, so some issues discussed might not be reported. The background to all this was seen to be the aspirational nature of the SEND Code of practice and how and to what extent it could be really implemented. And, with respect to CPD there was an issue about the reach of CPD and its impact on pupils ultimately. This is in a context that is increasingly fragmented. They had some discussion about the way that some of the 'schools offer', (this was not the official way to talk), but the schools' offer is being implemented in a rather opaque way and with a lack of transparency. It may be underplayed somewhat because schools do not want necessarily to be accountable in a way that the Code of Practice wants them to be. The group felt that there is an issue about the fragmented context in which the Code is being implemented by autonomous schools.

One member of this group made the point that effective CPD needs to be designed in relation to knowing about a particular child; it is useful to know the child before you actually do the CPD. And, someone made the point that with the Autism Education Trust of schools, they wanted to pile in hundreds of teachers to get the badge without any reference to the context and the impact on the pupils. This was

seen as a concern.

Some in the group wondered if Ofsted should be able to probe about this kind of school reflectiveness, the way schools choose their CPD and the impact of it. Another person, who worked in a school that had just had an Ofsted inspection, was not all that optimistic that they did that at all.

The group also talked about the conditions necessary for targeted support and for the CPD to work. A parallel was drawn between the advisory role of the SENCO and how this could sometimes have little impact in some school contexts, and the powerlessness of parents in a similar context. There are some very autonomous institutions and the levers are not there as they were before. However, the group concluded that it would be very dangerous to write off local authorities in this context. They are probably all there is. One person reflected on the fact that the work done in the Autism Education Trust involved delivering an initiative through various means. Surprisingly enough, the one organization with the most wide ranging reach and impact were still local authorities. The trust did a survey last year where they asked schools what their go-to place was for SEN training and materials; local authorities came out top. So, this group concluded that local authorities were central to the Code, even though they have declining influence. The group concluded that 'they're all we've got'.