INCLUSION:
Statements of intent

Since 2002, two Cambridge professors, Maurice Galton and John MacBeath have been researching the impact of government policy on children with special needs. In this their fourth report they identify some of the positive steps taken to provide better support for children and young people now ‘included’ in mainstream classrooms. They also identify aspects of government policy which have further disadvantaged children and families, while increasing workload and stress for teachers. This report highlights:

• Competitive policies which have encouraged the ‘cherry picking’ of more able children while excluding the neediest for fear of ‘reputational damage’

• Schools with well developed inclusion policies, admitting ‘rejects’ from academies then finding their once ‘outstanding’ Ofsted ratings downgraded

• In line with Ofsted’s own findings, SEN provision, shown to be inconsistent and often counter productive, underlining the urgency of rethinking current approaches to ‘performativity’ and accountability

• The loss of facilities and local authority support and a revolving door of services, rarely working in collaboration, often competitive and counter productive

• The heady rush to quantify attainment and ‘value added’ at the expense of music, art, drama and other forms of life enhancing and therapeutic interventions

• A disturbing increase in unqualified teaching. While Teaching Assistants appear to be more experienced and better trained, an increasing number of schools now deploy TAs as classroom teachers

The following from the Office of the Schools Adjudicator Annual Report, published January 2015, subsequent to the end of our research, contains the following:

Para 48
Too many schools, both maintained and academy schools, that are their own admission authority, are failing to comply with the duties placed on them about admissions. Parents and everyone else are denied the opportunity to see the school’s arrangements and, if they think it necessary, to object on time if the arrangements appear not to comply with admissions law and the Code. Schools that have the status of being their own admission authority have many responsibilities placed on them and with that status comes the duty to take the responsibilities seriously and with respect to admissions to comply with admissions law and the Code.
Inclusion: Statements of intent

A Report to the National Union of Teachers on the current state of special educational needs and disability provision

Maurice Galton and John MacBeath

February, 2015
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We would like to express our thanks to the schools who gave us an honest and balanced view of the policies and practices that enhance or limit their capacity to promote genuine inclusion.

Thanks too to the National Union of Teachers, and Rosamund McNeil in particular, who took the lead in securing funding for the study without preconception or intervention as to the findings.
INCLUSION: STATEMENTS OF INTENT
Executive summary

The Inclusion Enigma: Past and present
Placing students with special educational needs within mainstream schools became established practice during the previous Labour Government’s administration. Nearly a decade later this research has looked at how student opportunities have changed at a point in time when statements of need have been replaced by Educational, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The following highlights provide summaries of the main findings.

The deception of choice and reputational damage
The wholehearted embrace of parental, and pupil, choice, while unarguably a matter of first principle, has, with changing political ideology, proved hugely divisive in respect of favoured and disfavoured schools. The increasing pressure on senior leaders to maintain their competitive status by not taking in pupils who will harm their academic credibility was referred to in one school as ‘reputational damage’.

‘A more suitable option’
Low achieving children and children with special needs were often referred by schools heads to ‘more suitable options’. While this was often a rationalisation of the school’s attitudes to, and ability to cope with such pupils, it did suggest that some children would in fact be better off elsewhere.

‘Strategic rationing’
‘Capacity’ to include children with special needs proved to be an issue in every primary, secondary and special school. Some primary and secondary schools set the limit of two SEN pupils per class, arguing that beyond this number, the school did not have the capacity, expertise and resources needed.

Nothing fails like success
Marked disparities among schools within the same neighbourhoods is exemplified by one primary school with 85 pupil premium students out of 220, compared with 7 in a neighbouring school of almost equal size and similar catchment. However successful these schools, there was a price to pay in Ofsted ratings and league table standings.
Working ten times harder
Ofsted pressures were, it was claimed by one primary headteacher, ‘forcing some schools not to take pupils at risk who were not statemented as ‘they were a financial drain on resources’ and, more importantly, lowered the SAT scores. Schools that did admit at risk pupils paid the price, as one school head commented:

‘We also had an HMI who was inspecting the inspection team and as he left he said to me “Just remember to tell your staff they’re having to work ten times harder”.’

The vagaries of inspection
There was considerable variation in the approach adopted by different inspection teams; ‘a lead inspector with some understanding of different types of SEN could make all the difference’ said one headteacher of a primary school which had faced the possibility of closure but less than a year later, with a different inspection team, had been rated a ‘good’ school. These reservations parallel those in the findings of the Policy Exchange report on the inconsistencies of Ofsted.

The practice of ‘decanting’
Decanting children with special needs to other schools prior to an Ofsted visit appeared to be widespread and was mentioned routinely in most of the schools visited.

Pressures of accountability and performativity
“The fluctuation in data takes you on a roller coaster ride”, said one head, pointing to the serendipitous nature of inspections which could take place in a school during a peak or trough in attainment measures.

Cherry picking
There was anecdotal evidence from many headteachers that neighbouring academies were ‘cherry picking wealthier pupils’ and ‘excluding the neediest’. Those children whom other schools would not accept were generally from vulnerable families, often single parents, having difficulty in supporting their children’s learning and bereft of ideas in coping with anti-social behaviour. In London boroughs serving very similar socio-economic catchments, a strategic collegial approach in one was compared by senior leaders with the fragmented and competitive approach in another.
The social mix
There is a substantial body of research on the significance of the ‘social mix’ and on parental choice based on who your child goes to school with. While a broad social and ethnic ‘mix’ can provide an enriching context, and the inclusion of children with special needs can be both awareness raising and socially beneficial, parents who withdrew their children in favour of a less culturally heterogeneous school, also drained off some of the social or cultural capital of the school community, with a consequent adverse effect on comparative attainment levels.

Progressive attrition
In the one remaining local authority secondary school, surrounded by academies, it had come to be seen as a last resort by many parents, with a progressive attrition on test scores. Commenting on a ‘3’ rating from Ofsted on the trilogy of Leadership and Management, Teaching and Learning and Results, this secondary headteacher pointed to the self referencing character of these three categories:

‘If results are judged to be poor then obviously poor teaching and learning must logically follow, and if teaching and learning are poor it must obviously be a reflection of poor management and leadership.’

Shopping around
Under recent governments local authorities have moved from 80% to 90% and, in some cases, virtually 100% delegated budgets to schools. As with Health and other service providers, the rationale behind this approach is that it allows the purchaser, in this case the schools, to ‘shop around’ for the ‘best buy’ in terms of the quality of the service offered and the cost involved. This, according to those advocating such an approach, will lead to ‘efficiency savings’, so that ultimately there will be more money available to buy additional support.

Sort it out yourself
The rapid growth of academies has had the effect of reducing the sums available to local authorities, in some cases fairly drastically. In respect of special needs provision some LEAs have reduced the availability of central resources to a minimum (literacy support and a limited psychological service) and left it to schools to sort out their own problems. Where a limited service is provided schools have to buy into the system out of their allocated funding.

‘There is no support from the local authority at all. I get the impression they like to keep away as everything is just too problematic. They are, frankly risk averse. See and hear no evil.’ (Headteacher, primary school)
Fragmentation of services
Fragmentation of services and unforgiving targets at individual school level, it was said, had militated against any collaborative work among schools. Professional development was now more likely to be ‘in house’ rather than with local schools or what had once been provided by the local authority, their once busy offices now referred to in one rural area as a ‘ghost town’. While there have always been variations in local authority provision the evidence suggests that these disparities may have now become more extreme.

Caught in the revolving door
Inspectors found inadequate evaluation by a wide range of public agencies in relation to the quality of the additional support provided for children and young people. Too often, these agencies focused simply on whether a service was or was not being provided, rather than whether it was effective. Evidence from interviews in schools found consistently that external agencies and ‘providers’ who are often turned to for crucial support often had as much a negative as positive influence, a revolving door of services, rarely working in collaboration, sometimes even competitive.

‘We had the Ed Psyc, the special needs service team, the physiotherapist, occupational therapist, the early years support team, the home services team, myself, my TA, the parents and the child and various interested facilitators from the charitable sector. I have lots of other meetings, family support meetings, early years review meetings and sometimes health professionals turn up and sometimes they don’t.’ (Primary school SENCO)

Finding a path
While most Pathfinder groups who have trialed the EHCP process during the last two years felt that their existing multi-agency approach, developed from the Every Child Matters agenda, was working well, the assessment process was problematic as professionals drafting the assessment package were not always the person with immediate links with the family or the child in question, with the result that individual assessments were undertaken by one service without any knowledge of the results obtained by the others. Similar problems occurred at annual review meetings where attendance could be patchy because a lack of capacity made joint working difficult.
A question of focus
Parents felt that professionals tended to focus on the negative rather than positive elements of the child’s capability, leading to parental feelings of inadequacy. They wanted to widen the debate to take a more holistic view as to the quality of life available to all the family of which the individual being assessed was just one member. Professionals, it was said, tended to resist this shift of emphasis because it could lead to demands for additional services by families. Consequently, families reported that they were ‘not listened to’ and that their wishes were ‘often ignored’.

We’re all in the mainstream now
The decline of special schools and special units within schools had brought new challenges to teachers, to families and to young people for whom the mainstream setting had had an adverse effect on their self confidence and well being. Advantages of being within the main stream of school life have to be weighed against access to expert support and assessment of the most suitable placement, going beyond physical presence in the classroom or being fully integrated within the social life of school. Some children, it was said, simply do not get access to expert help and support.

A responsive pragmatic approach
Schools with high numbers of children with special needs programmes and a variety of interventions is evidence of a responsive pragmatic approach to issues as they arise, tailoring and revising interventions targeted on small groups, individuals, and specific categories of need – autism, dyslexia, behaviour and emotional difficulties, uncontrolled anger and violence, behaviour with roots in language and literacy issues. One school cited 30 forms of intervention, most going beyond the classroom, school and neighbourhood. ‘Targeting, and monitoring of, at risk individuals and groups requires team work and focused and concentrated intervention’, it was said.

The rise and rise of TAs
Eight years on from our last study, Teaching Assistants appear to be more knowledgeable, more experienced and better trained. It was also common to find Teaching Assistants who had attended short courses on particular aspects of special needs provision; dyslexia, autism, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) being the most common. In a number of schools the SENCO and subject teaching staff admitted their debt to the Teaching Assistants whose
inside knowledge and expertise they sought on a regular basis. Their close individual relationships with some of the most ‘difficult-to-manage’ children alerted them both to problems and talents which lay beneath the surface.

**The thin end**
The enhanced expertise and higher qualification of TAs has provided an incentive for some schools to deploy TAs in a teaching capacity. Two Teaching Assistants in one primary school, about to be assessed as HLTAs, said that what they were most looking forward to was being able to teach whole classes. In other schools it was claimed ‘this would never happen!’

**The dangers of velcroing**
There were concerns with regard to children getting too attached to the TA and not getting sufficient teacher attention. The danger of creating over-reliance and dependency on particular TAs was described as ‘velcroing’

There has been a drift toward TAs becoming, in effect, the primary educators of lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. Teachers like this arrangement because they can then teach the rest of the class.

**Being a SENCO**
‘We have a very proactive SENCO’, said one head, drawing a distinction between the reactive and remedial role played by some SENCOs. The most active of SENCOs carried out a range of duties which included liaison with concerned parents, attendance at meetings with other agencies, regular assessment, monitoring and observation of designated students, organising training provision for TAs, provision of records for Ofsted and in the case of primary SENCOs, secondary school transfers. SENCOs could find themselves at meetings called by the Authority at least once in any week. Child protection issues could, at times, raise concerns within schools, leading to drawn out and contested issues with social work and other agencies. All wanted greater recognition from policy makers and particularly from Ofsted as to what the job involved.

**‘High maintenance families’**
‘High maintenance families’ could consume a hugely disproportionate amount of teachers’ time. These parents were, it was said, often victims of circumstance and policy changes rather than poor parenting. How much energy and good will is invested, asked one assistant head in a single mother unable to cope, herself
evicted due to complaints about her out-of-control child, with nowhere to stay and her child suspended, simply compounding the difficulties this lone parent is trying to cope with. Some schools went to inordinate lengths to include children who might not turn up for health or social work appointments or whose parents were so disorganised that appointments were often forgotten.

**Words and meanings**
Examining language used by teachers and in textbooks has proved to be a powerful professional development activity in some schools where children have underdeveloped language skills, lack of vocabulary or ‘elaborated code’, or for whom English is a second or third language. An example of the kind of ambiguity that may arise in interpretation is the use of subordinate clauses and qualifiers which, for some children simply prove confusing and inhibiting.

**A rationale for homework?**
Homework remains a contentious issue, creating pressures on parents and on teachers, the pragmatic response of teachers being to turn a blind eye or avoid the inevitable confrontation and aggravation by the question “why haven’t you done your homework?” What is the rationale for homework?, it was asked. What kinds of homework actually help and what may actually hinder by increasing disaffection and through the lack of purposeful assignments? In one housing scheme with up to 16 people living in cramped accommodation, disrupted sleeping patterns and constant tensions homework, it was said, was the very least of their problems.

**Statements of intent**
The process of statementing (which often brings no financial benefit) could, it was claimed, involve an inordinate amount of effort, considerable paperwork and staff time, taxing teachers’ good will. An example was cited of a School Improvement Officer who had previously offered valuable support for the senior team but had not been replaced when he left, while the statementing officer’s heavy workload and part time employment led to infrequent appearance in the school and added to the long drawn out statementing process.

**Fighting for rights**
Inconsistencies in the identification of the needs of young people were compounded by lack of fair access to high-quality services to meet those needs. Parents saw the current system as requiring them to ‘fight for the rights’ of their
children, and they often wanted their child to be formally identified as having special educational needs.

The introduction of the EHCP is designed to address the mounting evidence of long delays in being assessed, the wide variation in approaches by different local authorities, teacher dissatisfaction, parental complaints and, as the Government watchdog found, pupils being unlawfully excluded from school and denied specialist support.

A less sure start
A recent survey of Local Authorities by the Labour opposition concluded that over 600 Sure Start centres had been closed since the coalition government took office. Although it has been argued that they benefitted the middle classes disproportionally, they nevertheless did engage in a considerable amount of intervention work, particularly in language, with children from disadvantaged families.

Best for the school? Best for the student?
The failure to create a system where a succession of ‘weighted’ vocational units of increasing difficulty could be accumulated over time and contribute towards an eventual ‘diploma’ qualification added to the difficulties of those responsible, who had to balance what was best for the school with what was best for the student.

No more listening or speaking
As a result of changes to the curriculum framework and examination format English teachers questioned the decision to move to written examinations and to exclude listening and speaking components in the language assessment. One teacher with six years experience spoke for many when she expressed her feelings.

‘Formal examinations bring pressure and, for students with little confidence, to have to demonstrate a range of skills under pressure doesn’t always bring out the best of their ability. I appreciate that examinations need to become more rigorous but there are many ways of doing this. One thing I strongly disagree with is that speaking and listening is no longer to be a part of GCSE. Almost every job application requires an interview and maybe a presentation in public. So I worry for my lower sets. There needs to be variety.’
Demoralisation and compliance
‘If I cut myself in three I might be able to cope’ says the member of staff in an inner city school. While his exceptional commitment and resilience brought him back to school with optimism that things could only get better, it was not the same for many of his colleagues, burnt out, on long term sick leave or simply demoralized by the compliance culture which left them with few incentives and little latitude for professional agency.

Key Recommendations:
1. As schools are often torn between the need to provide pupils with the necessary life skills at the same time as producing a credible record of achievement for Ofsted, serious attention should be given to the negative impact of inspection and current approaches to accountability. Ofsted’s reporting of SEN provision has been shown to be inconsistent and often counter productive, failing to take sufficient account of the experiences of many children with SEN, and the ability of schools to collaborate and innovate in the interests of those children.

2. Given the Education Department’s present emphasis on written examinations to the exclusion of other forms of assessment, Ofsted needs to engage with the profession in critical appraisal of what constitutes ‘adequate’, ‘good’ and ‘exceptional’ progress for children with learning and behavioural disabilities, together with reappraising the appropriateness of testing protocols.

3. SEN funding in different local authorities varies considerably and this can pose serious problems when families move from one part of the country to another. The Audit Commission should be asked to investigate the impact of the present funding arrangements with regard to SEN provision and to suggest ways in which some of the present anomalies might be dealt with.

4. Arts’ therapies are widely employed in clinical situations and in schools elsewhere, but not in this country. Given the reduced levels of support by most LEAs and Health Authorities for children with SEN who don’t qualify for a EHCP, funds should be found to bring back programmes such as Creative Partnerships, which were discontinued by the present government, but as evidence has shown, were extremely effective in improving behaviour and raising attainment among disaffected and excluded students, many of whom had learning or behavioural problems.

5. It is critical to the nature of provision that policy language and rhetoric does not of itself undermine teachers’ efforts to offer appropriate provision
for children with special needs. The adverse references to social and emotional aspects of learning and to ‘peripherals’ (for so many children at the core of learning difficulties) is undermining of teachers, children and families. This is an issue that merits urgent attention by policy makers to the evidence from this study, among others.

6. The first Cost of Inclusion Report was used by the then House of Commons Education Committee to make recommendations on special needs provision. The publication of this follow up report, nearly a decade later, is an opportune moment for a similar enquiry by the newly appointed committee immediately after this year’s General Election. In particular, the committee should investigate the admission practices of Academies and Free Schools for children with moderate and complex learning difficulties, the impact this has on the mainstreamed sector and ways in which LEAs can be supported financially so that they once more provide effective advice to and support for all schools.
Brief background to the present study

Eight years ago, our study of inclusion was linked to a wider investigation of teachers’ workloads in both the primary and secondary sectors. We visited 21 schools (10 primary, 9 secondary and 2 special establishments) from seven different Local Education Authorities, chosen to represent a reasonable geographical spread and structure. Of these, two authorities had the highest proportion of SEN schools and two had the least. These local authorities were asked to nominate up to five schools based on several ‘inclusion’ criteria, the most important of which was the degree to which pupils on the SEN register were included in most lessons and the extent to which links had been formed with local special schools.

Those with the highest ratings were invited to participate in the study. We interviewed classroom teachers, teaching assistants, members of the senior management team (including the School Principal), the SENCO, pupils and parents. In this follow up study with more limited resources we had to limit our ambitions. In view of the Pathfinder evaluation of parents’ opinions we decided to concentrate on teachers. Ideally, we wished to go back to the same schools to learn not only the impact of the new reforms on teachers’ workload, but to assess the changes in circumstances since our previous visit and the perceived causes and consequences of these. However, we also wished to take account of the wider effects of policy.

Eight years ago there were no Academies or Free Schools and it seemed only right in the case of these former institutions to see how they operated without the right to the automatic support from the local authority. Circumstances, both institutional and personal had also changed. One school had been closed. One primary school headteacher who had been especially passionate about inclusion had moved to another school in the same authority and we felt her views and that of her staff would be of particular value. Eventually, it was decided to retain ten of our original schools and to add 10 others from the same Local Authorities to include several Academies.

The following table shows the type of schools and their geographical distribution. Schools in the East Midlands and East Anglia, from where the majority of the sample was drawn, covered Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Cambridgeshire, and Suffolk. The Northern Region covered Kendal and Newcastle. London included a maintained inner city secondary school and a primary from an outer Borough. In
general, we found it more difficult to secure a school’s agreement to participate than was the situation eight years ago. In the case of some Academies the process was very prolonged. In one instance, having first approached the SENCO who was keen to participate (having taken part 8 years earlier) we were referred to his line manager (a Deputy Principal) who then informed us that a decision would have to be taken by the management of the sponsoring body. Some 10 weeks after our original request we were still waiting for a response. Another school, having acquired academy status since our previous visit, also declined our request after eight weeks of persistent enquiries, on the grounds that they were revising their existing special needs policy and it would be better if we waited a year before repeating our request! Both schools had some of the highest ratings on our ‘inclusion index’ in the earlier study.

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It was clear some schools, particularly in the primary phase, were under intense pressure. In some cases this meant it was not possible to find suitable times to interview teachers and teaching assistants as well as the SENCO and the headteacher.

Interviews were open ended although the questions centred around a number of broad themes:

1. Have things changed for your school/ for you personally since our previous visit 8 years ago (or in the case of a school which was not part of the previous study, since the change of government)?

2. What support do you get from the Local Authority and other outside bodies?

3. How is your special needs provision financed?

4. What is the ratio of teachers to teacher assistants? How are teaching assistants deployed (in particular HLTAs)? What training opportunities are available to them? What kinds of professional development are offered to all staff members/teachers/SENCOs etc?

5. What is your experience of the Pathfinder Programme?
6. Are there external pressures that enhance or limit your capability to promote genuine inclusion? Does the current inspection system help or hinder?

7. How could the present arrangements be improved?

Typically, interviews took between 30 minutes and one hour, although in some cases School Principals and SENCOs gave us considerably more of their time. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed initially. However within a relatively short number of these transcriptions it became obvious that certain patterns in the responses were emerging and thereafter only sections of the recordings dealing with these issues were fully transcribed.
Freeing schools
The Government’s pledge to free up schools from top down strictures does come with some important caveats. Crucial in this respect is the freedom given to schools to implement their own assessment framework, although they will still be required to have some form of monitoring system in place to report progress to Ofsted and to parents. Special mention is made of those students receiving the Pupil Premium. Schools will be required to show how they are successfully closing the gap where there is a dip in these pupils’ attainment.

Whatever day-to-day assessment system schools opt for, the need for pupils to be formally tested against a benchmarked framework during the course of the year is clear. Schools will need to be able to demonstrate:

- how well their pupils have learned
- what progress pupils are making year-on-year
- that all pupils are on track to meet expectations
- how tailored support programmes are being used for individual pupils who are falling behind.

Each of these injunctions has to be read with policiespeak in mind. Learning, progress, expectations and ‘falling behind’ are all set within a framework of assumptions and constraining definition. The Coalition Government’s intentions in this respect were made very clear from the outset. According to Stephanie Northen, writing in The Guardian (Monday 16, 2012) the new Ofsted inspection framework

‘requires them [schools] to check on behaviour and safety, but not how a school cares for its pupils. It does not refer to health or emotions. It mentions relationships only as potential hazards and friends only as “critical” ones. Gone is the need to make sure that pupils have a “strong voice in decisions relating to their learning and wellbeing”. Indeed, the word “wellbeing”, which ran like a river through the previous Ofsted framework, has disappeared.’
Miss Northen reported that the then education secretary, Michael Gove, had said the new framework would allow inspectors to concentrate on what matters and to forget the ‘peripherals’, and concluded:

‘This achievement spin-off would surely appeal to any education minister – even Nick Gibb, who has dismissed social and emotional learning as “ghastly” and likely to distract from “the core subjects of academic education”.’

For schools, however, it is these very ‘ghastly peripherals’ that are often at the core of children’s learning difficulties. One primary headteacher explained her situation thus;

‘This is a very challenging area – a whole range of child protection issues – you never know what’s coming up so to have such a continual focus on attainment is difficult for us. The teachers see their main task, by which they are judged, as the pupils’ attainment and that’s why we’ve had to build up these teams of support around them. The children when they come are below the average and although they make progress we do struggle to meet the national standards. It’s as if the high jump bar is the same for all but if our children are starting down there [pointing to the floor] they have to do a much bigger jump. Some pupils come from homes that are full of troubles – violent situations – they are in no fit state to begin learning. That’s why we have such a lot of support staff so that teachers can teach.’

In a neighbouring High School the SENCO said that his priority had always been to ‘think about the pupils’ needs when they leave’ but that now the school was reconsidering its present policy:

‘We’ve outsourced many of these [pupils] for vocational courses for key stage four but it doesn’t provide qualifications. Some of these are relatively able so we’ve a gap in our data. We see it as something positive. One student should have been in a special school. We sent him on a course and he’s got a certificate in Horse Care, something really useful which has led to a job. But it’s a risk. We’ve come out well in previous inspections because we’ve identified problems and looked for solutions. But the Head’s a bit worried now [at the tightening of the criteria].’

In all the schools visited we encountered similar dilemmas as headteachers tried to reassure staff that account would be taken of the circumstances in which they sought to raise the attainment levels of children who entered school needing to make ‘a much bigger jump’ in order to succeed.

The deception of choice
The wholehearted embrace of parental, and pupil, choice, while unarguably a matter of first principle, has, with changing political ideology, proved hugely
divisive in respect of favoured and disfavoured schools, and the increasing pressure on senior leaders to maintain their competitive status by not taking in pupils who will harm their academic credibility.

‘We’ve had students coming to us because his other high school told him to look elsewhere. If we hadn’t taken him nobody would....We feel we have a moral obligation as the only community school in this area.’

‘We take everyone’, said the head of one primary school, unrepentant but acknowledging what was proving to be a strategic mistake. Where neighbouring schools employed what was described as ‘strategic rationing’, and were sometimes quick to exclude or transfer challenging clientele, this principled approach to children with special needs has incurred ‘reputational damage’.

The disparities between schools in similar socio-economic circumstances, in some cases within a mile of one another, is illustrated by one primary school with 85 pupil premium students out of 220, compared with seven in a neighbouring school of almost equal size and similar intake. These disparities are also reflected in staff composition. In one small all-through primary school with only 120 pupils there were nine teachers and 20 teaching assistants, eight of whom were HLTAs. 12 pupils had statements and nearly half the remainder were ‘action’ or ‘action plus’. In contrast, a larger London junior primary had 420 pupils, 22 teachers and 16 TAs of whom only one had HLTA status. The school had seven statemented pupils (all boys) and 54 pupils who were on the register, of whom 22 were designated as ‘action plus’. The headteacher of this latter school had been asked by her authority to accommodate a special Pupil Behaviour Unit which could serve as a centre where teachers from other schools could view and model successful practice: this was because this particular school had been singled out by inspectors for the effectiveness of its behaviour management.

‘I had to say no. Why should I bring trouble to my school and cause anxiety amongst parents and children?’

Those children whom other schools would not accept were generally from vulnerable families, often single parents, having difficulty in supporting their children’s learning and bereft of ideas in coping with anti-social behaviour. In such schools with a higher than average proportion of children with statements, or within the ‘action plus’ category, earning a quality mark, and working with conviction, passion and expertise in supporting children with special needs was described as a proud achievement by one primary school head, yet they had become a victim of their own ‘success’.
**Nothing fails like success**

The issues raised in these primary schools were replayed in a secondary school where the embrace of a wide spectrum of need, including ‘rejects’ from academies, meant that their once ‘outstanding’ Ofsted ratings had now fallen to borderline 3s. The local ‘intelligence’, a particular source being neighbouring primary schools, meant that this one remaining Local Authority secondary school was then seen as a last resort, in particular for many parents, given the rapid proliferation of academies locally. Commenting on a ‘3’ rating from Ofsted on the trilogy of Leadership and Management, Teaching and Learning and Results, this secondary headteacher pointed to the self referencing character of these three categories:

> ‘If results are judged to be poor then obviously poor teaching and learning must logically follow, and if teaching and learning are poor it must obviously be a reflection of poor management and leadership.’

Closing the gap has become something of a mantra but also a source of contention when a commitment to that ideal is embraced with principle by the few most committed of schools.

> ‘If we were all on a level playing field and playing together rather than scoring own goals then we could talk meaningfully about closing the gap between those at the top and bottom of the league table.’ (Headteacher, secondary school)

This is not a counsel of despair. There is evidence that some schools have, by virtue of intensive one-one-tutoring, been able to show progress for some of the lowest achieving pupils, but this does require either new funding sources or a diversion of existing resources and entered into not simply as a tactical manoeuvre but as a long term and principled commitment. However, when an academy is portrayed and accepted by parents as a preferred option, comprehensive schools in the same catchment often suffer as a consequence. In one urban area a secondary school, surrounded by four academies, has seen a progressive attrition of enrollment, particularly among more aspirational parents. The head described the cool reception from junior schools visited in the school catchment areas – “there is a very transparent body language from staff, managing if at all possible to avoid eye contact”, he said, an implicit rejection of the school without academy status.

**An ‘academic’ and capacity issue**

‘Because they can’; this was one primary headteacher’s response to the question, “Why do your local academies discourage children with special needs or, on occasion, refuse to accept them? Academies, jealous of their reputation,
he said, expressed relief that there was a local authority school willing to take on these children and indeed ‘a more suitable option’. In addition to its expertise and openness the local authority school also had the capacity which the academy lacked.

‘Capacity’ to include children with special needs proved to be an issue in every primary, secondary and special school visited. Some primary and secondary schools set the limit of two SEN pupils per class, arguing that beyond this disruption increased exponentially. It also increased the frequency and amount of time spent with parents, carers and other agencies.

Other schools were the victim of their own success. For example, if children were autistic, but ‘quite bright’, so that their SAT results were seen as ‘OK’, then more and more parents would try to get their children into the schools as word of mouth went round the community. As a primary head explained:

‘Parents in this Borough are “quite savvy” when it comes to selecting schools. They put much emphasis on SATs.’

**Special provision**

A noticeable feature of provision since our last survey has been the decline of special units within schools. A number of schools said they had dispensed with special units as everyone was now included within the mainstream of activities. These primaries and secondaries described a whole school approach to special needs, autism awareness programmes for all staff, and strategies aimed at ‘breaking the pattern of behaviour and exclusion’ by rethinking embedded assumptions as to cause and effect.

‘Inclusion is not about integration’, said one SENCO, suggesting a distinction between a more tokenistic approach to special needs and the need for children to feel and experience being included as part of the school community, being included in the mainstream of school life in which all children share that sense of togetherness.

A boy with cerebral palsy now in the mainstream school, rejected by other schools unable to cope with him, has proved to be, in the words of the head, ‘a brilliant mathematician’. Despite a lack of family history in education he is now in the gifted and talented programme and has taken the role of play leader and assistant librarian. It was said by the SENCO that he was not seen by his classmates as ‘disabled’.
A commitment to inclusion rather than integration requires forms of provision which do not simply include children in the classroom with additional support. In one London secondary school there are 30 forms of intervention, many not classroom based. The range of special programmes and interventions is testimony to a responsive pragmatic approach to issues as they arise, tailoring and revising interventions targeted on small groups, individuals, and specific categories of need – autism, dyslexia, behaviour and emotional difficulties, uncontrolled anger and violence, behaviour with roots in language and literacy issues. Such special programmes include:

Toe By Toe is a highly systematic page-by-page and step-by-step series of activities in one book, delivered one-to-one, taking learners back to the beginning of phonics and works up from there, based on the observation that many learners with difficulties seem never to have got the hang of phonics.

LEAP work experience aimed at boosting motivation and performance in school, focusing on skills, behaviours and attitudes needed to succeed in life both in and after school.

A restorative justice approach, working with the top 20 at risk students run by volunteers from University College London

A mentoring intervention programme with students from Cambridge University.

The S.A.F.E holiday scheme is a provision for 8-16 year olds, working in partnership with The Metropolitan Police, Queens Park Rangers Football Club, Let Me Play and The London Sports Trust. The programme is aimed at giving young people access to a variety of exciting and different sports as well as arts and crafts, drama, hair and beauty, music, cooking and visits to the scheme’s farm. In support of the local community the S.A.F.E holiday schemes are open to all abilities and are free of charge.

During the recent May half term over 220 different young people attended across the four days, all taking part in activities such as trampolining, football, basketball, dodge ball, hockey, handball, cricket, boxing, athletics, cooking, arts & crafts, swimming, nail art and drama.

A special unit houses a dozen or so students at a time, working individually in carrels under the supervision of a non-teaching member of staff recruited for his skill in relating to young people, counseling and supporting them so that they would be able to return to the mainstream.
‘If I cut myself in three I might be able to cope’, said the member of staff in charge of the special unit. The unit accommodates young people ‘who can’t take instruction’, ‘who can’t settle in the classroom’, who act out their frustrations with a curriculum that appears to have little meaning for their lives. They struggle with tests and with words and reference points which they can’t understand or relate to. His task, as he describes it, is a mediation, creating time for one-to-one conversations – ‘I talk to them until their ears fall off’, persuading cajoling, advising, encouraging, but above all building a trusting relationship in which children are willing to listen to him, and he to them. ‘Everyone has a violin strings story’ he says, and while there are cases of extreme hardship and provocation he knows where to draw the fine line between ‘tea and sympathy’ and raising aspiration.

Parents who have tried everything else to get through to their children come to express their gratitude. And young people who return from a spell in a local authority unit tell him “I’m glad to be back because I learn stuff from you.”

Similar examples of dedication are mirrored in primary schools. In one seaside East Anglian town a specially resourced unit (Supporting, Helping Individual Pupils-the SHIP) aims at helping pupils, mostly with emotional problems, ‘to sail back into the mainstream’. When visited during the previous Inclusion study it was a recent innovation. Staffed by a mix of Teaching Assistants, mostly HLTAs under the supervision of a teacher, the reputation of the unit is now such that it offers places to children from neighbouring primary schools. Children spend two sessions a week, in the mornings concentrating on mathematics and literacy and in the afternoon on improving social skills and building self-esteem. For these afternoon sessions children can invite a ‘friend’ from their class to join in the various games and role plays. The main purpose of the unit is to cut down on exclusions but the school also seeks to break the pattern of low expectations and unemployment and dependency on low paid seasonal employment.

‘I’ve taught in this town since 1981. I’ve seen massive change. There’s very low aspirations. There are now second generation unemployed families. Many of them had poor experiences of education and have low expectations for their children as a result and children rarely get out of the area. Some have never been to Norwich. So each April we hold an Aspirations Week, getting people in and children out. We go to UEA and to the local colleges because parents have never been. We are trying to get Year 6 to Cambridge and we’re part of the Children’s University. Our first group graduated at UEA. They came back and said it was “Amazing. Like a new town.” Ten years ago if I asked pupils what they wanted to be it would be in McDonald’s or Kentucky Fried Chicken but I get ex-pupils who have done something with their lives to come and talk [mentions a biologist who has appeared on the BBC].’
Whatever happened to local authorities?

In the final chapter we describe in greater detail changes which the coalition government have introduced in relation to special educational needs. As a preliminary to the implementation of the Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) the funding mechanism was revised. A basic sum for each pupil was allocated, mainly on the basis of the numbers of children on free school meals and the proportion of pupils not achieving Level 4 in Year 6 or at least 5 A-C grades. Local authorities are able to retain a certain proportion of this money to pay towards the cost of additional support for children with severe learning difficulties. Out of their share schools must find the first £6,000 towards the cost of extra provision for children with statements (or in future an EHCP) and must also cover provision for those registered as action or action plus.

Previous studies (West, Pennell, West & Travers, 1999) note a long standing tendency among local authorities, beginning under the previous Conservative Government, to concentrate on provision of statutory services as opposed to discretionary ones, partly as a cost-cutting exercise but also in an attempt to retain as much influence as possible over areas where the authority has retained some vestige of control. Some fifteen years later, with the recent rapid growth of academies reducing the sums available to local authorities, in some cases fairly drastically, it would appear that in respect of special needs provision that some LEAs have reduced the availability of central resources to a minimum (literacy support and a limited psychological service) and left it to schools to commission their own services where needed. In other cases where a limited service is provided, schools have to buy into the system out of their allocated funding.

‘There is no support from the Local Authority at all. I get the impression they like to keep away as everything is just too problematic. They are, frankly risk averse. See and hear no evil.’ (Headteacher, primary school)

‘The Local Authority offers not a lot. They set up specialist resource basis units on behaviour, autism, dyslexia and learning. They haven’t been able to cope with demand and the learning unit is closing down this year. We send them to them, they’re a bit like PRUs. For autism there’s two for the whole county. There’s the short stay school which we buy into. They have psychologists. They have to take excluded pupils so there aren’t many other places.’ (SENCO, Secondary School)

In one area in the north of England the once vibrant headquarters of the local authority was referred to as a ‘ghost town’ and, playing on the metaphor, ‘you only have a ghost of a chance to get a visit from an adviser’, as the School Improvement Team had been reduced from 40 to 10 but with the same coverage of schools widely dispersed in a rural area. Allocations were often hotly contested, particularly the emphasis given to free school meals (FSM) as a major indicator.
Criticism of such indicators is provided by West et al. (1999) who found that they bear little relation to subsequent pupil achievement whereas the latter was highly correlated with measures of poverty such as children from families receiving ‘income support’. The pupil premium, based as it is on fsm provision, had made little difference, according to one primary headteacher because

_There’s always been additional funding. We had an extended schools budget which was shared within our cluster. That’s gone and the pupil premium doesn’t cover it. Because it’s based on free school meals there are some children who have learning difficulties who don’t qualify. It certainly helps inclusive purposes for the benefit of all such as help with sports, music but not much else._

**Fizzling out**

The impact of diminishing support from the local authority was a common theme, described by one head as having ‘fizzled out’. The most common working arrangement was for schools to be grouped in clusters and to distribute the sums available on the basis of perceived need.

_‘We hold a meeting in the summer term. Each school prepares a case. These are read by two other people from another school and given a score of 1 to 5 for various categories. The total scores are then added and the money distributed proportionally. We keep a little back for emergencies.’_

In one primary school an international company provides a shared forum which includes 13 primary, 2 secondary, one nursery and one special school which, taken together, substitute for local authority support. However, in the view of the head and deputy head it fails to compensate for the progressive attrition at local authority level over the last few years. This has entailed the loss of support from advisers and LA personnel with expertise in special needs. A School Improvement Officer who offered valuable support for the senior team has never been replaced and there was no longer a school champion as the statementing officer was now part time, two days a week, his workload and infrequent appearance in the school adding to the long drawn out statementing process. Having to support pupils while waiting for a decision from the Local Authority in respect to any funding retained centrally was a frequently mentioned experience.

_There’s a particular problem when a statemented pupil transfers from another school. Previously the funding automatically moved with them – now it doesn’t and you have to apply for an adjustment and this takes time. It’s a particular problem for small schools. They tend to attract these pupils because of the family atmosphere and they get the smallest allocations from the budget. (Head, primary school)_
By design or by default the differences among local authority support for schools were a telling factor in respect of the support for inclusion and professional agency. In two London boroughs serving very similar socio-economic catchments, a strategic collegial approach in one was compared by senior leaders with the fragmented and competitive approach in another. Where one Authority was described in terms of ‘support’ the other was conveyed in the language of ‘exclusivity’ and ‘secrecy’.

**Going it alone together**
Who do children go to for support? Who do teachers go to for support in a situation of constant disequilibrium and efforts to accommodate the unpredictability of everyday life?

With the progressive demise of local authority support the putative gains are for schools themselves to form their own supportive networks. There was evidence from a number of schools that the lateral collaboration that once existed locally has now disappeared with schools being more guarded and competitive. Fragmentation of services and unforgiving targets at individual school level, it was said, had militated against any collaborative work. Professional development was now more likely to be ‘in house’ rather than in collaboration with local schools or what had once been provided by the local authority.

Particular difficulties can arise in the case of the move from primary to secondary school. In their study of transfer Galton, Gray & Rudduck (2003) noted the improved arrangements for SEN pupils over the previous decade. Whereas before, identification of children with learning difficulties had to do mainly with the administrative needs of the transfer school (number of support staff needed; timetabling of special literacy provision etc.), the focus had switched to identification of learning needs. It was not unusual in the past for the SENCO to visit feeder schools on a regular basis and work alongside the Year 6 teachers so that by the time children attended the first day of the new school year, the SENCO could recognise and name each child. Extra visits to the school prior to transfer and a special summer school were also common events. Now however, most of these new initiatives were no longer in place.

*I no longer have the time to visit feeders regularly. I’m only off timetable for two and half days each week and the parental choice agenda and academies means that our intake is from a much wider area. There are just too many schools. I meet with the Year 6 teachers and we have the SEN kids in for an extra induction day and also start them one day earlier than the rest of Year 7.* (SENCO, Secondary School)
Bereft of local authority support, most schools have responded by expanding their own professional development programmes. In the one case, with support from consultants and its own internal development team, a school has adopted a restorative approach which means that after an incident staff attempt to avoid blame, try to de-escalate rather than escalate the problem. This involves sessions with staff on dialogic approaches with questioning techniques that do not threaten but probe deeper into the issues whose origins may not lie with the individual but with other social factors and, in some cases, with teachers who have exacerbated the problem.

Staff are introduced to critical incident analysis or critical pathways and ‘social stories’, an approach described as ‘a tool not a prescription’, de-centring the problem away from the student to consider wider contextual issues.

Inherent in this approach is a focus on guided language, paying attention to the kind of expressions which can make such a volatile contribution to the conflict, its roots very often located in terminology and ‘hearsay’, or “She said, he said”. Recording and examining language has proved to be a powerful professional development activity. An example of ambiguity that may arise in interpretation is the use of subordinate clauses and qualifiers which may simply confuse the issue. This has particular relevance in a multi-lingual context.

Such a focus on language is not confined to inter-personal exchanges in conflict situations but applies equally, or even more significantly, to classroom teaching where failure to grasp meaning or nuance may be at the root of disruptive or attention seeking behaviour.

Continuing professional development is seen as the key to de-escalating conflict, to the creation of calmer more inclusive ethos and the path to more effective teaching and learning. What constitutes ‘bad behaviour’, how it is conceived and described allows the kind of cross-departmental dialogue which vouchsafes a coherent approach to support and challenge.

This may include, as one member of staff pointed out, a greater degree of tolerance, and openness to change, in recognition that young people’s lives are not what they used to be and that there are emerging forms of challenge of which teachers may be unaware.

‘We have a very proactive SENCO’, said one head, drawing a distinction between the reactive and remedial role played by some SENCOs. In this secondary school 30 staff come in to school on a Saturday to take part in courses, one on outstanding pedagogy and the other on leadership. The pedagogy programme
provides a toolkit of strategies which, it is claimed has been successfully embedded routinely in practice by at least six members of staff who have since been highly commended by Ofsted.

We also came across several SENCOs who were on University Master’s degree courses with special needs as their option. These were paid in-part (in one case in full) by the school. It was also common to find Teaching Assistants who had attended short courses on particular aspects of special needs provision; dyslexia, autism, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) being the most common. Aspects of literacy provision are generally carried out in house.

‘Teaching Assistants have really good training here. We have plenty of training opportunities. This year we had 7 new TAs so we organised training days, one in guided reading, and another on speech and language. They spent a day with the consultant who comes in to help with specific language difficulties [from the LEA]. They did ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) training out of school and spent time in other schools with TAs who had training in some other special aspect of SEN such as ADHD. (SENCO, primary school)

I noticed that Mr. Murphy spent a lot of his lunch times talking with the children with really difficult problems, and it seemed to be really helpful. So I asked him if he’d like to be a full-time counselor. He said yes so now he’s doing a part-time course at the University. In the long run, it’s cheaper than buying in consultancy. (Head of a primary school)

A wish list
Despite the absence of support, when asked as a final question what would make life easier for their schools, headteachers’ demands were very low key, as if the experiences of nearly a decade of inclusion policies had lowered their expectations to a minimum. Among these modest requests were

A little more money for repairs and decoration to ‘brighten things up a bit’ and create ‘a nice place for children to learn’,

Help for a child who needs the constant supervision of two staff and we only have resources to have him in school for two days a week.

Others wished for speedier decision making.

‘He came in November and we’ve been promised a decision after the Easter break’.
A few wanted more supportive parents.

‘Our bugbear is trying to get parental support. You can go into a classroom and see children not doing well at reading and these will be the ones who don’t get help at home either because the parents don’t know how to or they haven’t got the time. It’s a vicious circle. We run workshops for parents but not all come.’

All headteachers, however, wished for a level playing field and for greater appreciation from policymakers given that operating effective inclusion policies often required considerable amounts of time to be spent on those so called ‘ghastly peripherals’. As one interviewee said,

‘If we don’t first get them [pupils] to feel good about themselves how are we ever going to get them willing to learn?’

References


The role, expertise and contribution of Teaching Assistants

In our previous report we heard testimony from Teaching Assistants in primary, secondary and special schools, the term 'velcroing' used to described the close attachment of a TA to an individual child, sometimes seen as overprotective and risk averse. Six years on, Teaching Assistants appear to be more knowledgeable, experienced and better trained.

‘Things had changed for the better since I became a TA thirteen years ago’, said one member of staff, ‘Then you were the person who simply sorted the paper, gave out and collected pencils and kept certain pupils quiet. But now it’s real consultation’. She shares both the planning and the discussions with the teachers. She will try (tactfully) to indicate when she thinks worksheets may be too difficult by saying, “I don’t quite understand what you are getting at there. Could you explain it for me again please?”

The Teaching Assistants we interviewed came from various backgrounds. In primary schools many started as lunchtime supervisors, although others were attracted to the post because their own child had some form of complex learning disability.

‘These [TAs] are people who started off as midday supervisors and have been offered training over time and developed special areas of skills. Although it’s not supposed to happen it’s preferable to have someone who knows the children and is familiar with how we work to cover.’ (Primary school Headteacher)

‘I got interested because of my daughter – she’s got Down’s syndrome. I read quite a lot about it and when my daughter started at the school the Head asked me if I’d like to become a TA. Since then I’ve done the higher level course and I’m now doing a part-time early years degree. I now run our special unit where we take the children out of class for special help or behaviour problems.’ (HLTA in a primary school)

Teaching Assistants appear now to have greater expertise, enjoy better training and have more opportunities for professional development. They are also able to be more flexible and pragmatic in their approach to working with individual children. According to Teaching Assistants in a few of schools visited there was
greater license for them than for the teachers to be ‘eccentric’ or ‘crackers’, as one TA put it, perhaps accounted for by less pressure, less stringent professional accountability or due to the closer relationship they were able to forge with individual children. They also had more time to experiment, to support, persuade and cajole children into behaving well and engaging with the task at hand. It was claimed that this resulted in fewer sanctions, exclusion being an option rarely resorted to.

Interviewer: If I said, “What’s the difference between Miss X [the teacher] and Miss Y [the TA] what would pupils say?"

SENCO (laughing): We go to Miss Y for a cuddle.

It was the special relationship with individual children that was seen as the most rewarding aspect of the Teaching Assistant’s job, although, it was said, ‘at times you feel like a failure when you just haven’t made that connection’. It was also described as a process of trial and error, trying to find the task or medium that would most engage his or her interest attended by inducements and rewards – ‘Stickers prove to be the biggest incentive. They will do anything to get a sticker’.

In one secondary school the SENCO and subject teaching staff admitted their debt to the Teaching Assistants whose inside knowledge and expertise they sought on a regular basis. Their close individual relationships with some of the most ‘difficult-to-manage’ children alerted them both to problems and talents which lay beneath the surface, some of which teachers were unable to detect or address within the busy demands of a mathematics or science class.

There were frequent references to ‘partnerships’ between teachers and TAs, with less of a reference to the hierarchy and more emphasis on the ‘Teaching’ than on the ‘Assistant’.

‘Ten years ago teachers would not be taking advice from a TSA but would call for help from the Authority’s learning support team. It indicates the extent to which schools have trained up their own staff so that they are self-sufficient.’ (HTLA, primary school)

‘I do most of the planning. I might show it to the TAs and they might say, ‘Is this OK for Owen or is this OK for Michael?’ and then suggest how it could be tweaked, say using a different coloured paper for dyslexics or telling me they found the wording difficult themselves and I’d listen because I’ve got the subject knowledge but they know more about these students’ learning needs. It’s a partnership.’ (English secondary school Teacher)
The one-to-one relationship and issues of attachment

Schools varied in the ways that they deployed Teaching Assistants. In some primary schools the SENCO was responsible only for TA’s working with children with complex learning difficulties. The remaining TAs were allocated by the headteacher to support and, in some cases, to replace teachers. In other primary schools the SENCO managed the deployment of all the TAs. At secondary level it was more common to find a division of labour whereby the SENCO was in charge of a core of staff who offered remedial provision while the remaining TAs were deployed by heads of faculties or departments.

The teacher is the one that’s always there but the TA can be moved to a different class at times according to need. They’re seen as additional – they might be with one Year 4 class in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Most of our TAs have level 3 NVQ or better. I discuss matters with staff and sort out a weekly timetable. (Primary school SENCO)

I don’t have much contact with the other teaching assistants. I work with one child. He has cerebral palsy, sight problems and is prone to epilepsy. I have to hold him under his armpits because he needs support for walking. The Authority team has planned his programme. I try to get him to join in with the others when it’s carpet time but he’s often too disruptive. He should be in a special school but there’s no room for him at present. (Primary school TA)

We have two HTLAs who are capable in maths. I decide how to use them but if it’s a pupil where Mr. W [the SENCO] has decided to allocate regular help then he manages that. We would just be aware they [his TAs] were around whether for some lessons or every lesson. Our two HTLAs are not trained but we give them the title. They don’t work with the children with serious learning difficulties but with pupils who are falling behind – they work at intervention – although it might sometime be a pupil with serious learning problems. One works with pupils in lower years and one with year 11 who are falling behind. (Secondary school, Head of Mathematics)

It was common for TAs to withdraw children from lessons where it was judged that the curriculum topics were beyond a child’s grasp. In a few schools TAs would be attached full time to an individual child, sometimes spending a day or two each week in the community, in shopping centers, in the cinema, in the street, focusing on social and life skills.

TAs also described a 20 hour week given over to intensive individual coaching. This could also have its downside. In one school the closeness of the relationship had proved to be a problem and the issue under discussion was how to stop
children getting too attached to the TA and not getting sufficient teacher attention. In some cases while a TAs attachment was to an individual child, he or she would circulate round the classroom giving help to other children. Although much of TA’s work was on a one-to-one basis they could also work with children in small groups. This, it was agreed, required a different kind of skill, an understanding and sensitivity to group dynamics and managing the balance of the three TIGs – task, individual and group.

A noticeable change from the past concerned the awareness by most schools of the dangers with certain children of creating over-reliance and dependency on particular TAs. In the course of previous research (Galton et al, 2012) we observed several cases where TAs often did the work for some pupils during group activity in the belief that having something to contribute in the plenary session would improve these pupils’ self-esteem, whereas the opposite effect often occurred and the extent of their ‘learned helplessness’ increased. Except in extreme cases as in the previous example of the child with cerebral palsy, most schools visited operated a deliberate policy designed to prevent such ‘velcroing’ effects.

‘Ultimately children need to do things for themselves. We insist the same TA doesn’t always deal with the same child. Where there is a need for special attention we get the TA to deliberately come and go with ‘carry on with that for a few minutes and I’ll be back to see how you get on sort of thing.’ It’s all part of the training.’ (Primary school SENCO)

Teaching Assistants could also have more time for parents although it was comparatively rare for TAs to meet parents as this tended to be seen as the province of teachers, and parents generally wanted to meet, as one TA described it, ‘the organ grinder rather than the, well you know what…… ‘.

On the other hand, because many TAs, unlike the teachers, tended to live in the immediate catchment area and had children in the school they were willing to go the extra mile for the pupils when there were school plays and concerts and they provided an important conduit for information about family circumstances that could help explain a pupil’s negative attitude or poor performance.

‘I live just a few streets from the school and I meet quite a few of the parents at local social events. I get to know things that can be useful in this job. Often a teacher in the staff room will say something about a particular child – her work, her behavior – and I can have a quiet word later about what’s going on back home.’ (Primary school TA)

Knowing how to speak with parents, the language used, the explanations offered, often could prove sensitive. In disputatious situations sympathetic listening
and questioning in particular needed to be facilitative rather than construed as blaming or threatening, but being local could help as the TA was not automatically perceived to be ‘more even handed’ and not always ‘on the side of the school’. Credit was given by HMI to one school in which the issue of dealing with parents was given high priority and where teachers and teaching assistants worked as a team.

On the downside, this enhanced expertise and higher qualification has provided an incentive for some schools to deploy TAs in a teaching capacity. Two Teaching Assistants in one primary school, about to be assessed as HLTAs, said that what they were most looking forward to was being able to teach whole classes. Another primary head confessed that sadly she could no longer operate the distinction between teachers and classroom assistants. ‘Now anyone available would take a class when there are problems’. In another primary school a HLTA offered the following rationale:

HLTA: Now I’m a HLTA I’m first in line for cover duties. I do the first day for any teacher who is absent and that’s the whole day.

Interviewer: Is that across all Years? [HLTA nods] How do you cope with that?

HLTA (laughing): Well during my time here I’ve seen a lot of teachers come and go. Each have had their own way of doing things, so I’ve absorbed a variety of techniques for teaching different subjects and different children.

However, when this issues was raised in other schools there was sometimes a reaction of shock horror – “That would never happen here”.

In one secondary school the number of Teaching Assistants had been reduced from 20 to four. It was felt by senior management and the Special Needs Director that there could be a more cost effective deployment of staff, together with concerns that children were being ‘over-helped’, an issue that had arisen in our previous visits and commented upon in previous paragraphs of this chapter.

Since our first inclusion study, the numbers of TAs has risen considerably (official statistics show that numbers have more than trebled since 1999). What emerges very clearly from this round of visits is the wide degree of variation among schools in their approach to, training and deployment of TAs. In 2002 HMI reported in the following terms:

The way in which teaching assistants are deployed and managed in schools is improving, but few schools monitor the often fragmented work patterns of teaching assistants or include teaching assistants in their performance
monitoring procedures. Similarly, few schools monitor the time that
individual pupils, particularly those of low ability or with special educational
needs (SEN), spend with teaching assistants rather than teachers.

Ten years on, a study by Peter Blatchford and colleagues at the Institute of
Education – The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) Project – found that
pupils who received the most support from TAs consistently made less progress
than similar pupils who received less TA support. The authors argue that these
results demonstrate that ‘the fault is not with TAs, but with decisions made –
often with the best of intentions – about how they are used and prepared for
their work’. They continue

‘There has been a drift toward TAs becoming, in effect, the primary educators of
lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. Teachers like this
arrangement because they can then teach the rest of the class, in the knowledge
that the children in most need get more individual attention.’

Sometimes, however, it was the external pressures of accountability and
performativity that led the school to formalise this approach:

‘Some years ago we were in danger of going into special measures so the head
said we had to concentrate our resources where it mattered. So in Years 5 and 6
we set for maths and literacy. The teachers take the top two groups, the certain
and possible level 4s, and the TAs take those who don’t have a chance of making
it.’ (Primary teacher SENCO)

Being a SENCO
In the schools visited we asked the special needs coordinators about their roles
and responsibilities. Most SENCOs saw their role mainly as a decision maker and
an adviser. He or she, (the SENCOs we interviewed were mostly female) tended
to come to the post as a result of having previously undertaken some other
pastoral role within the school. Few had specialist qualifications prior to taking up
the position but most subsequently underwent further training, either as part of
a government funded scheme or as part of a further part-time qualification at a
local University or college.

‘I’ve been two years on my own – before that I job shared. My background is in
ethnic minority achievement so I’ve always been concerned with children who
have some form of learning difficulty. I did a compulsory national government
funded award on special needs coordination for recently appointed SENCOs. It
took 15 months. I did it as a first year of an MA.’ (Primary SENCO)
'I was a PE specialist, a form tutor, then a year leader and finally head of one of the houses. I enjoyed the pastoral side so I did a part-time diploma at [mentions city] University and one of the options was special needs. That was 11 years ago and I applied here for the SENCO post and got it. At the time the school had lots of problems and I don’t think any of the existing staff wanted the job.’ (Secondary school SENCO)

Even in the largest secondary establishments SENCOs did some teaching, usually in the lower bands or sets where this system operated.

‘We have 3 HLTAs in my team, 18 LSAs and a deputy who is not a teacher but was designated as my PA. She’s very knowledgeable. I get bottom sets for teaching.’ (Secondary school SENCO)

‘I also teach Year 7 Literacy for 6 lessons a week. Sometimes it’s difficult when there is some crisis over a student. I just juggle it – sometimes I’ll take them into the class with me, sit them in a corner and let them draw something. It’s often the case that they need space and quiet to calm down.’ (Secondary school SENCO)

‘I have afternoons – in the mornings I do maths. (Primary school SENCO)

**Roles and responsibilities**

In most of the schools visited the main task of the SENCO was to deploy the teaching assistants under their charge. However, the extent to which the SENCO determined what TAs did varied. Some saw it as the class teacher’s job to identify the needs of particular pupils and to bring it to their attention so that they could then develop an appropriate intervention programme. This was the approach adopted in most primary classrooms and concerned those pupils previously listed on the action or action plus register. Support for children with severe learning difficulties was a matter for the SENCO with the help of the authority’s SEN advisory team, where this existed. In secondary schools, however, there was usually a core team over which the SENCO exercised total responsibility for conducting various interventions. Other TAs worked under the direction of the Heads of the relevant department with the core team used to advise on specific cases of need, where, for example a pupil was failing to make adequate progress or there was a problem concerning behaviour. Beyond this SENCOs carried out a range of duties which included liaison with concerned parents, attendance at meetings with other agencies, regular assessment, monitoring and observation of certain designated students, organising training provision for TAs, provision of records for Ofsted and, in the case of primary SENCOs, for secondary transfer
schools. For secondary school SENCOs there are also the transfer visits to feeder schools. For one secondary school SENCO

‘A typical day will start with students coming up to my room because they need to finish homework or they just need somewhere quiet to gather themselves before classes begin. And from then on it’s varied; there are meetings with parents, with outside agencies – I try to get them to come to the school to save on travel time. Then there are training sessions to organise, visits to classrooms to respond to requests for help from teachers. We’ve talked about visits to the feeder schools in the period before transfer. I do most of my record keeping after school and generally leave around six o’clock.’

While in the case of the primary school SENCO who taught mathematics on five mornings each week

‘Two and half of these afternoons are taken up with meetings, following up with agencies or writing reports. We have another teacher responsible for child protection but I’d get involved in that if it was a special needs’ child.’ (Primary school SENCO)

This left little time for other activities. This SENCO continued

‘I prioritise my remaining time for dealing with parents, many of whom have poor command of English. I have termly meetings with all parents – all those on action plus – and there’s the annual review for the statemented ones. But I like to feel that parents can come and see me at any time. This week I’ve seen one parent three times. Sometimes it’s a question of educating them; about levels and such like. They may feel their child has done OK, but I have to say, ’Yes. He’s made progress, but.... I see these pupils for maths but I don’t often get into other teachers’ lessons to see how they are coping in other subjects.’

Child protection issues have come to the forefront in the last few years with recent increased concerns following cases of reported abuse by well-known members of the entertainment business. This had added to the workload in some cases as one headteacher said, she, her deputy or the SENCO could find themselves at meetings called by the Authority at least once in any week. She had decided to create a post of Parent Liaison Officer at TA level who would deal with these matters in future. In this she was following a common practice in many primary schools

**Funding: a major concern**

We were visiting schools in the run up to the full implementation of the changeover to EHCP across the whole mainstream system. Some SENCOs in
Authorities who were participating in the Pathfinder Scheme had already been involved in drawing up an individual plan. The main concerns centered around increased parental power and whether the demands made on the school would be unreasonable in some cases.

‘I’m not clear about how the finances will work. If funding goes to the client, I’m not sure how this will work out.’ (Secondary school SENCO)

‘It’s all a bit scary. If you apply for element three funding it’s back to the child’s personal budget. The school gets the money but it’s the parents’ prerogative. At the moment it’s the school who makes decisions about how to use the funds, but technically a parent could say, ‘I’d like Auntie so and so to come in and help because he’ll do things for her or I’d like extra swimming lessons’ At the moment we’re keeping this quiet as we have some difficult parents. It’s a tricky situation. I know what’s been said at the conferences but if a parent takes legal action – what then? There’s also the question of employing TAs. Do we stop contracts while we negotiate with the parents?’ (Primary school SENCO)

The uncertainties involved in settling the contracts of teaching assistants and the possible effect on the morale of the workforce was also a concern in other schools visited. The motive behind the decision to give parents greater control of the funding was, in part, politically driven, in that the documents specifically instanced the right afforded parents to switch to non-mainstreamed schools as the chosen example of this opportunity. This situation creates financial problems; in that a school might have spent the allocation by the time a parent took the decision to remove their child, leaving the local authority to find the remaining allocation out of limited reserves. To safeguard against this possibility some authorities had ceased to distribute funding on an annual basis.

‘Under the old system the allocations were done in February and March and the money distributed in April, but now it’s on a monthly basis so if the child moves to a free school or an academy he or she takes the money with them. It makes planning and staffing very difficult. At the moment we are buying in help from an agency on a monthly basis for our EHCP child. This doesn’t help continuity or staff morale and nor does it enable us to provide training.’ (Primary school SENCO)

**Slipping through the cracks**

In the Pathfinder Authorities, the new procedures had also added to the workload. Setting up the meetings to ensure a good attendance could be difficult; there were often cancellations at the last minute, and the meeting to draw up the EHC plan was time consuming and not always productive. The situation seemed little better than when in 2011 Ofsted reported as follows:
Across education, health services and social care, assessments were different and the thresholds for securing additional support were at widely varying levels. In some of the individual cases that inspectors saw, repeated and different assessments were a time-consuming obstacle to progress rather than a way for effective support to be provided.

The inspectors found poor evaluation by a wide range of public agencies in relation to the quality of the additional support provided for children and young people. Too often, these agencies focused simply on whether a service was or was not being provided, rather than whether it was effective. Our evidence from interviews in schools found consistently that external agencies and ‘providers’ who are often turned to for crucial support often had as much a negative as positive influence, a revolving door of services, rarely working in collaboration, sometimes even competitive. As one headteacher asked, rhetorically

‘Do these agencies ever speak to each other? Do they have case histories or have they lost them somewhere? It seems they each live on their own remote little island, speaking different languages and worried more about their own survival than children who are drowning.’

Some SENCOs also worried about the ways in which widening participation in the EHCP meetings sometimes resulted in attempts to promote vested interests, particularly when some external agencies stood to benefit financially. In one interview a Secondary school SENCO observed in relation to an EHC planning meeting

‘We were chaired by a person from a charitable organisation. He clearly had a fixed agenda.’ (Secondary school SENCO)

There was, however, a general recognition that the old system needed improvement because as the Children’s Minister, Sarah Teather, had acknowledged in 2012

‘Thousands of families have had to battle for months, even years, with different agencies to get the specialist care their children need. It is unacceptable they are forced to go from pillar to post, facing agonising delays and bureaucracy to get support, therapy and equipment.’

SENCOs also endorsed the most recent Green Paper’s affirmation that a joined-up set of services was a high priority, and agreed with its authors that what ought perhaps to have been commonplace was ‘a huge step forward’.

It is a huge step forward to require health, education and care services work together. The reforms will give parents better information and a comprehensive package of support that meets their needs.
However, in the Pathfinder scheme such problems appeared largely unresolved, particularly when it came to obtaining the contribution of certain services, particularly in relation to health.

‘G.P.s never attend these case meetings and the nurses who do attend generally know nothing of the case.’ (Headteacher, primary school)

‘Two years ago we were part of a pilot where our Year 9s who were transitioning to Year 10 went through the EHCP process. It was very different from a statement meeting – much longer - more people involved. If I am honest with you I don’t think we achieved much more than was the previous case with the annual statements’ review. I can’t afford all the time it requires. I’m needed here to help staff sort out problems on a day to day basis. I’ve sat in meetings with a number of highly qualified professionals and mentally counted the cost of their time. Another problem is trying to find dates when everyone can come.’ (Secondary school SENCO)

‘I’ve done one ECHP cycle but we have had networking meetings to help get us up to speed. The new system does rely on health coming and often they don’t turn up, partly because they are usually in their hospital clinics and how can they cancel these for a two hour meeting for one child? They usually send a report. In the one I’ve done it was a small room with twelve people crowded in. We had the Ed Psych, the special needs service team, the physiotherapist, occupational therapist, the early years support team, the home services team, myself, my TA, the parents and the child and various interested facilitators from the charitable sector. I have lots of other meetings; family support meetings, early years review meetings and sometimes health professionals turn up and sometimes they don’t. But it’s also true of other specialists like speech therapists.’ (Primary school SENCO)

A secondary school teacher, frustrated with changing personnel, cancelled appointments, hiatus in information, said in interview, “We are now doing what they used to do because we have developed the capacity and the internal relationships that help us, dare I say it, do a better job ourselves”.

In summary, therefore, while not opposing the overall funding model, and recognising that the new arrangements would take time to bed in, SENCOs expressed a number of reservations, mainly to do with uncertainties over the planning process and the mechanics of doling out funding. Most thought the new system would increase their workload and this, according to one SENCO from an inner city secondary school, would lead to more fragmentation because of the need to send other staff to some planning meetings.
‘My concern is that I’d have to delegate and would lose control over what was being decided about our students. I can’t afford all the time it requires. I’m needed here to help staff sort out problems on a day to day basis.’

From dinner lady to HLTA
Some SENCOs wanted improvements in the ways higher level assistants were trained as they relied so heavily on them in providing specialist help, particularly in primary schools, often standing in for teachers. In the past the initial course which resulted in promotion to the grade had been run by the local authority but increasingly these were now being conducted by outside consultants. In one case, as described by one newly promoted HLTA, this 4 day course, for which the school paid £600, consisted of a two day sharing session, in which teaching assistants worked in groups, discussing their experiences of supporting large groups, working alongside teachers and helping individual children with specialist disabilities. This was followed up by plenary sessions in which groups reported back. The third day was spent back at school creating lesson plans for working with large and small groups and with an individual child in a specialist area such as autism or dyslexia. On the fourth day this plan was presented to the consultant who then watched the assistant work with various groups and individuals. Circumstances and availability usually meant that these observations took place at a time when the submitted plans were not yet being implemented.

Schools do provide teaching assistants with various other opportunities for professional development, either by providing opportunities during school time or by sending them on outside courses. In the last decade, since the previous Inclusion study, the decrease in the availability of support from local authorities and the high cost of consultancy has required schools to become more self-reliant and so increasing training opportunities. In addition, teaching assistants have often engaged in part-time study, which they pay for themselves. This trend has also increased in recent years, as the tasks they were required to perform have become more demanding and they ceased to be the people who ‘gave out paper and collected in pencils’. These trends are likely to continue. For this reason some SENCOs wanted to institute a profile system or a training log of the kind used by pupils as part of the implementation of an Assessment for Learning strategy.

In their log pupils record their learning goals, self assessing as to how far they have achieved these (using evidence from various assessments and their estimate of their performance in class or peer discussion). Having identified gaps between intended goals and outcomes, pupils are required to consider specific strategies for improvement. From time to time the log is shared with the teacher and also, in some cases, with parents and peers who are invited to add comments. Use
is made of rating scales to self assess the pupil’s achievement level (very good, above average, rather weak, and very weak) to determine in which areas more effort is needed and to make predictions about future achievement (Wiliam, 2011: 157). In the case of teaching assistants, the log would include details of courses attended, the results and evaluation of peer observations (HLTA for TA and SENCO for HLTA) as well as an annual review, and an ‘action-research’ style investigation of various challenging aspects of the assistant’s work with pupils, where it was deemed that improvement was required or a particular problem needed to be solved. The profile could then be submitted as part-evidence in promotion requests. Many schools visited had already gone partly down this road.

‘Any new TA is mentored by an experienced TA during a six month probationary period and I sit in on three meetings to review their progress over this time. We do performance management as teachers and I do the same for the TAs. I think promotion should be managed internally on the basis of the performance record, evidence of growing competence through courses attended, private study and reading undertaken.’ (Secondary school SENCO)

Parents, parenting and partnership
Revisiting a primary school eight years on, the impact on school life of a troubled and disadvantaged community had changed little. Although a minority, demanding and abusive parents proved to be a continuing source of conflict. ‘A parent coming into the classroom screaming and shouting doesn’t help her case’, said the head. Parents accompanying wheelchair bound children have direct access to the classroom and may be disruptive when the parent is unstable, under the influence of drugs or prone to violence. The advent of social media since the previous visit eight years ago had provided a new channel for some community members to channel their aggression. A history of harassment of the head through allegations and threats on Facebook had escalated as one internet post generated a host of others. In reference to the headteacher who had disciplined a child, a parent promised her ‘followers’ – “I’ll sort her out”.

Over the period there had been an increase in the number of complex medical problems; the impact of which had increased as funding had been squeezed and many of the previous resources, facilities and agencies were no longer available. Dealing with the repercussions of terminally ill children – three children dying within as many years – had had a devastating impact on school life. The significantly higher than average incidence of cancer in this school, attributed by some to the overhead power lines, was a continuing source of anxiety. Regardless of causation, bereavement, counseling and medical interventions had proved a source of stress for staff and families.
One head referred to ‘high maintenance families’, consuming a hugely disproportionate amount of teachers’ time. These parents were, it was said, often victims of circumstance and policy changes rather than poor parenting. How much energy and good will is invested, asked one assistant head in a single mother unable to cope, herself evicted due to complaints about her out-of-control child, with nowhere to stay and her child suspended, simply compounding the difficulties this lone parent is trying to cope with?

Another mother, left by her husband for a her close friend found herself coping both with the immediate trauma as well as trying to cope with two children with complex needs. Finding herself unable to meet the challenge she had since being evicted from her council house, with nowhere to stay. To compound the problems she had to try to deal with her seven year old son, suspended due to what the head described as ‘disturbing behavior’. The mother agrees that her son finds it hard to control his occasional outbursts and bad language and wonders if he has Tourette’s syndrome which she had heard about in a television documentary.

In a secondary school one hundred miles north, similar issues play out in the interface of school and community. As the only secondary school in the area it leaves little scope for parental choice and the school has to cope with dissatisfied parents worrying about who their children are mixing with, the impact on teachers’ time with so many children struggling to cope with an unsuitable curriculum and the high number of recently arrived children with English as a second language. The most ambitious parents are prone to withdraw their children after a brief period, at the same time draining off the social or cultural capital of the school community and having an adverse effect on high stakes attainment levels.

‘Why would I ever send my child to that school?’ asked one parent, referring in somewhat intemperate language to the children she would be associating with. The impact of the ‘peer effect’ and the rationale for parental choice is well documented and, as has been written, ‘it is who you send your child to school with’ that counts most.

**Have you done your homework?**

In disadvantaged social contexts homework remains a contentious issue, creating pressures on parents and on teachers, the pragmatic response of teachers being to turn a blind eye or avoid the inevitable confrontation and aggravation by the question “why haven’t you done your homework?” What is the rationale for
homework? it was asked. What kinds of homework actually help and what may hinder by increasing disaffection and lack of purposeful assignments?

Parents expect homework as a matter of convention but may also resent pressure on them to engage, to hear reading, to spend time with their children. In this school the policy is for parents to hear reading for 15 minutes every evening but in highly disorganised households this just doesn’t happen. Nor does it happen when it is left to the child’s own initiative and mood swings.

In a housing scheme with up to 16 people living in cramped accommodation there were issues with sleeping patterns, homework and study. Teachers described their struggles with helping children’s ability to make connections with prior learning, to deal with cause, effect and inference and sustained on-task behaviour. They attributed this to households in which there was no conversation with the child, the constant staple of the microwave meal, television and PlayStation in the bedroom.

‘It’s not just the children’ that the school is there for, was a common refrain, a recognition that if raising standards is the objective, the greatest source of leverage is in the home and the integral relationship between learning in the classroom, the home and the peer group – the ‘essential triad’. Where is the fulcrum in that relationship? Where is the best point of entry for breaking the cycle of underachievement?

‘Our bugbear is trying to get parental support. You can go into a classroom and see children not doing well at reading and these will be the ones who don’t get help at home either because the parents don’t know how to or they haven’t got the time. It’s a vicious circle. We run workshops for parents but not all come.’

Encouraging parents to overcome the antipathy to school was a continuing challenge in disadvantaged communities. Learning how to say things to parents which de-escalate, rather than escalate, confrontation, is a policy priority in one secondary school, introducing teachers to Transactional Analysis as one model for understanding the child-adult-parent interface and what it means to address another person ‘in your child’, ‘in your parent’ or in ‘your adult’, engendering a reciprocal response from the other party.

We came across a range of special initiatives designed to foster parental participation and cooperation. These included:

- In-house sessions for parents, engaging them with what and how their children were learning, including classes on reading or maths, ‘an eye
opener’ for mums and dads who professed to a new found ambition to work more closely with their children.

- Parental counseling was an option in some schools
- A family and community service, in some instances helping with pay day loans
- Breakfast and supper clubs for children whose parents worked long hours.
- A Family and Community Engagement programme providing courses free of charge for families, adults and children, encompassing arts and crafts, sports, traditional learning and events. For this headteacher

  ‘Our aim is to establish a community hub where members of the schools and local community can share experiences. We currently run courses during daytime, evenings, at weekends and during school holidays. We have events throughout the year e.g. the Summer Fayre, Harvest Festival and Healthy Living evenings and a Silver Service Banquet. The School Farm and Learning Zone is an exciting project where the school community is able to try their hand at soil preparation, plant growing and harvesting. In conjunction with our Food Technology area and the school kitchens, students and parents are able to cook and taste the harvested food. In addition to this, all faculties can experience the outdoors with our external Learning Zone which has seating and working surfaces for 32 students and this is all Wi-Fi enabled.’

- Parent support groups helping one another with coping and pre-emptive strategies.

A little bit of appreciation please!

Despite all the uncertainties, the heavy workload and the frustrations of increasing bureaucracy, the SENCOs interviewed all said they wouldn’t swop jobs for an easier life.

  ‘A typical day [laughs]. The best thing about this job is that there isn’t one. That’s what I love about it. I come in each morning and there’s always something new – fresh challenges. I wouldn’t swop it. It’s very rewarding.’ (Primary school SENCO)

But all wanted greater recognition from policy makers and particularly from Ofsted and from its leadership as to what the job involved, particularly, as discussed earlier in this chapter, ways in which schools had, due to lack of provision elsewhere, to take on additional social as well as educational responsibilities for students in need. Child protection issues could, at times, raise
concerns within schools, leading to drawn out and contested issues with social work and other agencies. An illustration of what this could involve, in practice, occurred while visiting one SENCO in a secondary school. The interview was interrupted by a telephone call from a social worker. It concerned a boy who had been absent from school for two days.

His mother, a single parent, had been due to come in to see the SENCO, but hadn’t turned up and was not answering either of her two mobile phones. The social worker had gone to the house and found it was empty. She thought that the mother had ‘done a runner’ due to rent arrears. It had happened before and she would ‘reappear eventually’. The discussion concerned whether they should report the pupil ‘missing’. The social worker was strongly against this option in order to preserve her relationship with the family.

This SENCO was then faced with a difficult decision. The boy had been a frequent truant but with the help of the social worker, and after much effort, the SENCO had established a good understanding with the mother so that the boy’s attendance was now regular. If he now reported the boy missing, the police would be involved and the mother’s whereabouts discovered to the advantage of the previous landlord but much of the work undertaken to establish a viable relationship wasted. On the other hand, if something serious had happened to the boy, and he had not reported his absence, then the SENCO position would be untenable and he could face suspension resulting in possible dismissal.

We found from our interviews that such situations are not untypical in today’s schools. This was particularly the case in areas of social disadvantage where some Free Schools (and according to some of the Headteachers we interviewed also Academies) appear to be ‘cherry picking wealthier pupils’ and ‘excluding the neediest’ (Green, Allen & Jenkins, 2014). Dilemmas of the kind described by SENCOs are therefore likely to increase, adding to the heavy workload and high stress levels they were already having to juggle with.

References


Chapter 3
Effective practice: Its impediments and limitations

The scope of inclusion
We first meet Samantha, staring at the wall in a corner of the library. She has not been put there; the librarian is quick to point out. This is her ritual place of comfort. She stays there for the fifteen minute break, venturing out and moving to her classroom at the period bell. She lives out her school day within her own self contained space never speaking to teachers or peers, electing to stay silent in class, in one-to-relationships, on visits outside of school on her one day a week trip to the shopping centre with her TA. She eats, voluminously, with others in the dining hall, and while never engaging with those around her will respond to requests to pass the water jug or to clean away her plates. Her behaviour is consistent with that at home. Her parents, and her younger brother, have not heard her speak for more than a year although there was a time before when she did converse with them.

Is a mainstream school the best place for Samantha? Does she get the access she deserves to expert help and support? Answers to the first of these questions varied among school staff. There are advantages for her of being within the mainstream, of school life, however ‘insulated’ she may be, but it was generally agreed that the necessary expert support is hard to access in the current climate and that a more suitable placement might be appropriate.

Samantha’s case raises the questions of what inclusion means, going beyond physical presence in the classroom or being fully integrated within the social life of school. It raises deeper issues of curriculum and assessment and the very character of a school tied to a range of external policy pressures.

The deputy head in one secondary school described the understanding of ‘inclusion’ which went beyond the narrowly interpreted ‘special needs’ to refer to the forgotten, invisible ‘easy riders’ (Galton, Simon & Croll, 1980) never drawing attention to themselves, never articulating their difficulties or acting out their frustrations, but giving the appearance of being involved whenever the teacher or the assistant’s eyes chanced to focus in their direction.
‘Targeting and monitoring at risk individuals and groups requires team work and focused and concentrated intervention’, says an SEN co-coordinator in a context where staff were struggling to deal with daily, and often unanticipated, challenges, with the unpredictability of behaviour, in the most extreme cases resulting in ‘classroom wrecked, chairs thrown and computers destroyed’.

A SENCO talking about her 48 hour day detailed the lengths the school went to in order to include children who might not turn up for appointments or whose parents were so disorganised that appointments were often forgotten. One headteacher talked about sending a taxi for parents to attend hearings after e-mailing, phoning, and confirming with the parents in person. Nor was it uncommon for the school to transport children to college in order to ensure they got there, or got there on time.

In this secondary school the ‘Hard to Reach’ initiative has, in the hands of a newly appointed member of staff, painstakingly identified a cadre of young people most at risk. The creation of small teams working together flexibly to share insights and expertise was a source of internal mutual professional development. Adopting a critical path analysis, brainstorming sessions, consultation and frequent meetings over a six month period within senior leadership staff, heads of year, SENCO and the SIG (School Improvement Group), have been complemented by discussion with home liaison officers so as to adopt a ‘family-based’ intervention (‘family’ sometimes a misnomer in at risk households). INSET sessions with the staff have been designed to raise awareness of the scope of ‘inclusion’ and what is entailed in a whole school approach.

There are implications for the school’s organisation involving issues such as streaming and setting which, in the context of the above initiatives, are not fit for purpose and require replacing by a more flexible and individualized approach, particularly in a climate in which there is understaffing, continuing investment in recruitment, short term appointments, high staff turnover but at the same time requiring a high level of skills and commitment. Effort is invested in matching teachers to children, dealing with children who become attached to a member of staff or conversely finding they cannot work with a given member of staff.

As well as monitoring and targeting students at risk or in need of support, in one secondary school teaching staff are monitored and supported on an ongoing basis. Senior leadership meetings once a week examine records of referrals, disciplinary issues, exclusions and consider ‘who are managing most successfully? Who are struggling to cope? Who are in need of more support? What further systems, professional development, mentoring, buddying or team teaching need to be put in place?’
A school that has developed a set of behaviour indicators provides its staff with a carefully developed approach to looking beneath the presenting symptoms to gain a better understanding of the roots of behaviour in school, home, community and in relation to complex individual and social needs.

These schools have taken to heart Mary Warnock’s (2005) admonition that inclusion requires all pupils to be included ‘under a common educational project’. That they have done so at a time of cutbacks and limited resources is truly miraculous.

**A statement of value?**

In all schools visited in this, and in our previous, study the process and outcomes of statementing have proved contentious. ‘With 56 fully statemented pupils, without extra funding, it is impossible to offer the level of support that these young people require’, said one SENCO, struggling to match the numbers and the resources in a school with an even greater number of pupils on School Action or School Action Plus, together representing more than a third of the school population of 1100. Although bringing no financial benefit the process, it was claimed, involved an inordinate amount of effort, considerable paperwork and staff time, taxing teachers’ good will. Nonetheless, one could not fail to be impressed by the direct evidence from statemented young people in this school; a lunch hour conversation a testament to the investment by staff in social skills training, these 12 year olds proactive in helping a stranger to the school, listening intently and engaging him with questions, anecdotes and invitations to join them in their classrooms.

There was, in some schools, a welcome for a more flexible approach to statementing as a prelude to the inauguration of the EHCP process in September 2014.

‘My problem with the old system was you were trying to make the child independent but by providing the exact number of hours you were tying them down again. This year the Y7 parents have commented on how much better their children feel as a result of this change. They’re more confident.’ (Secondary school SENCO)

‘Not having specific funding for statemented children has helped because we no longer tend to attach the pupil to the particular TA paid out of that money. There may be one or two children who need extra support but they know they don’t need to go to a special person. Keeping everyone in the classroom helps.’ (Primary school SENCO)
For others, however, the changes in funding remained problematic. For a headteacher of a small primary school with only 117 pupils, 12 of which had statements, there were issues of resourcing:

‘We used to get all the hours a pupil was statemented but now we have to find the first nine and a half hours out of the school budget. There’s a particular problem when a statemented pupil transfers from another school. Previously the funding automatically moved with them – now it doesn’t and you have to apply for an adjustment and this takes time. It’s a particular problem for small schools.’

‘We have to find the first £6000 out of our own budget for each statement and there are some parents who are difficult because they want their child to have totally individual attention according to the number of hours provided.’

An Ofsted (2010a) report pointed out that it was not enough for pupils to have a statement of special educational needs. The inspectors were particularly concerned about what they saw as inconsistencies in the identification of the needs of young people, and opportunities for fair access to high-quality services to meet those needs. Parents saw the current system as requiring them to ‘fight for the rights’ of their children, and they often wanted their child to be formally identified as having special educational needs – and especially to have a statement – as their guarantee of additional support.

Over more than two decades, therefore, statementing has remained a contentious issue and the accumulating evidence from Ofsted and parent support groups have played a big part in the Government’s decision to introduce EHCPs, given mounting evidence of long delays in being assessed, the wide variation in approaches by different local authorities, teacher dissatisfaction, parental complaints and, as the Government watchdog found, pupils being unlawfully excluded from school and denied specialist support. In its report it quoted the case of an autistic boy who lost out on appropriate education for two years because of delays in assessing and reassessing his needs.

**Accounting to Ofsted, waiting for Godot**

Most of the schools visited expressed a degree of unhappiness over the manner in which children with statements or registered as ‘action plus’ were assessed. There was a spectrum of views on Ofsted visitors. Some were seen as experienced, sympathetic and understanding of the social background of the school and the challenges that staff were facing. In such cases it was likely that some of those inspectors had been heads in a previous life, some still serving heads, approaching the school with a positive and collegial attitude. However, there were others seen as too keen to rush to judgment and even ‘woefully
ignorant of what it means to teach in a school such as this’, as one headteacher put it. This could result in considerable variation in the approach adopted by different inspection teams; ‘a lead inspector with some understanding of different types of SEN could make all the difference’, said one headteacher of a primary school which had faced the possibility of closure but less than a year later, with a different inspection team, had been rated a ‘good’ school. These reservations parallel those in the findings of the Policy Exchange report on the inconsistencies of Ofsted, discussed in the first chapter.

Doubts were also expressed as to whether it was possible to make informed judgments in the time allocated to these inspection visits, particularly when a school had above average numbers of special needs pupils whose progress could not be assessed and documented using pencil and paper tests.

> In just two days it’s very difficult to get a picture of what a school looks like. This is a very challenging area – a whole range of child protection issues – you never know what’s coming up so to have such a continual focus on attainment is difficult for us. The teachers see their main task, by which they are judged, as pupils’ attainment and that’s why we’ve had to build up these teams of support around them. The children when they come are below the average and although they make progress we do struggle to meet the national standards. (Headteacher, primary school)

There was, in virtually every school, a complaint about the 20 minutes visit to the classroom by the inspector, often with feedback that teachers were not very happy about. Common to all, however, was dissatisfaction with the categorical assessment on a four point scale, an ‘unforgiving’ and ‘high stakes’ judgment.

Ofsted, ‘waiting for Godot’, as one headteacher put it, continued to have a momentous and disproportionate impact on school life and professional morale. For this secondary school, living with an uncertain future weighed heavily on staff. The school had had a turbulent history of special measures, five headteachers in as many years, and as an academy under extra political pressure to ‘perform’. Nor was ‘changing the goalposts’ (as it was described) seen as helpful requiring constant changes of strategy to keep up with the rapidity of policy shifts.

In one junior school the head described compiling ‘a vulnerable pupil’ file in which they detailed all the various cases of learning or behaviour difficulties, the special problems and interventions that they were taking. Both the Lead Inspectors for the first two inspections, it was said, ignored the files, although on a third occasion the Lead Inspector did show an interest in the file and awarded an improved grade. This was a theme repeated in a number of other schools:
‘We’d prepared a vulnerable children file. We had a grid which we marked up various factors – home circumstances, learning and behaviour problems and actions taken. The last two inspections took little notice of the file.’ (Headteacher, primary school)

The visit to a ‘junior’ only school disclosed another problem, that of the ‘transfer dip’, where the assessment of the Year 3 teachers did not accord with that of their ‘infant’ colleagues, although, nevertheless, the latter was used as the baseline by the inspectors.

‘They [inspectors] don’t tend to take account of the move from infant to junior where there can be a bit of a dip in progress. If they come up as 2C and we have them at 1A you’ve got to make your 2+ levels of progress and that’s hard work.’ (SENCO primary school)

Ofsted pressures were, it was claimed by one primary headteacher, ‘forcing some schools to try not to take pupils at risk who were not statemented as ‘they were a financial drain on resources’ and, more importantly, lowered the SAT scores. Another primary head, told to show ‘rapid and sustained improvement’ or risk special measures, was at the same time witnessing a rise in social problems, a rapid increase in the number of children with special needs (dyslexia, autism, ADHD, Asperger’s) and struggling to maintain even the previous levels of attainment. In this school many of the children represent a third generation that have lived in this community, that have left school without qualifications and been unemployed.

Closing the gap has become something of a mantra and a continuing source of contention as, it was said, ‘a rising tides raises all boats’. While there was evidence to show that by virtue of intensive one-one tutoring and diversion of resources there had been literacy or numeracy gains it was sometimes, as one member of staff put it ‘robbing Peter to pay Paul’.

In one primary school in an area of multiple disadvantage, where the inspection team’s oral report had been generally critical, the following final word from an HMI, who was monitoring the team’s performance, was both an acknowledgement of the issues and an unwelcome counsel. The headteacher told the interviewer:

‘We also had an HMI who was inspecting the inspection team and as he left he said to me “Just remember to tell your staff they’re having to work ten times harder”.’
Hamstrung by data
In a school that had been rated outstanding on its previous inspection, senior leaders expressed concern as to whether ‘toughening up’ of categorical standards with a heightened emphasis on quantitative data, would enable the school still to merit an ‘outstanding’ accolade? “The fluctuation in data takes you on a roller coaster ride”, said the head, pointing to the serendipitous nature of inspections which could take place in a school during a peak or trough in attainment measures.

The same concern was voiced by a primary school and reaffirmed in one secondary school whose Ofsted rating had indeed been downgraded by virtue of policy changes rather than changes in the quality or performance of the school. The practice of ‘decanting’ children with special needs to other schools prior to an Ofsted visit appeared to be widespread and was mentioned routinely in schools visited.

Some primary schools went to enormous lengths to chart the progress of their vulnerable pupils recording extensive individual portfolios in which were listed particular incidents, the diagnoses, the approach and the consequences. Summary charts showing milestones achieved in the course of each school term were also included. As recounted earlier, in one primary school Ofsted inspectors chose to ignore this evidence in arriving at their final judgment. Another primary school SENCO justified the need to produce these individual cases.

> ‘I'm afraid they [Ofsted] are data driven. I've done case studies on children, the things we've done, the progress they've made, the problems they've had so I feel confident that I can defend what we do... but who knows.’

Where the SENCO was computer literate, as was the special needs coordinator who also taught mathematics in one primary school, then it was possible to create individual profiles electronically by merging data from other sources, thus avoiding additional work and a certain amount of the duplication.

> ‘We are starting a new system to try to get it right. It’s IP (Individual Portfolios) and a Provision map. When the school action disappears the school’s provision will cover those children. So any child who gets extra help will go on this system and I haven’t got it running yet. Do I put on the children who are already on the school action register or do I add them from now on as they come into the school – we’ve decided on the latter. Otherwise you are duplicating. We’ve a good tracking system and I can pull out all the existing children who have made a mini level, so I print them off three times a year when I need to make a report on special needs. We’ve also got pen portraits where we record things that are not going to change.'
Ofsted increases the pressure. You do have to make certain everything is up to date but electronic forms of data handling help. If my list isn’t the way they want it, they want pupils’ records listed in a certain way, I can change it.’

In primary schools, the decision to end the use of the school action register also created problems as to who and who not to include in these individual portfolios. Drawing the line at a particular point meant that those above this cut-off position would be subject to appraisal by Ofsted, mainly on their progress in terms of attainment levels. When these pupils reached Year 6 and took the SAT tests this earlier decision could have far reaching consequences. As one SENCO explained:

‘Under the new system they will amalgamate the school action and school action plus and some of the school action pupils will stay off the register completely. I think that’s a bit scary because they could fall by the wayside. Our Authority is trialling a new category called ‘school contract’ which is part way between the old school action plus and the new EHCP.’

Secondary schools faced a different kind of problem. When pupils with special needs chose their options, prior to entering the upper school, they were encouraged to take vocational subject rather than follow a narrow academic route. This often required day release at the local Further Education College. But the failure to create a viable Diploma pathway, a legacy of the previous Labour Administration (Bangs, MacBeath & Galton, 2011) often meant that there were no objective measures for assessing progress. Schools were often torn by the need to provide these pupils with the necessary life skills while at the same time producing a credible record of achievement which would satisfy the inspectors.

‘At the end of Year 9 when choosing their options some students are encouraged to take what we call Future Pathways which was recognised as a qualification but has now been down graded under the current legislation. They go to college for half a day in Year 10 and this goes up to one day in Year 11.’ (Secondary school SENCO)

‘We’ve outsourced many of these pupils on vocational courses for key stage 4 but it doesn’t provide qualifications. Some of these [pupils] are relatively able so we’ve a gap in our data. We see it as something positive… But it’s a risk. We’ve come out well in previous inspections because we’ve identified problems and looked for solutions. But the Head’s a bit worried now at the tightening of the criteria.’ (Secondary school SENCO)

In order to satisfy Ofsted requirements for numerical data of some kind some secondary schools admit to adopting practices which they know to be counter productive. In one secondary school, an Academy, all Year 7 children were given the CATs (Cognitive Ability Test) test, from a battery provided by the NFER
(National Foundation of Educational Research) item bank. The purpose of testing the students on their first day in their new school was to establish a baseline to assess future progress, the results of the Year 6 SAT tests being deemed unreliable. All students, including those statemented, were required to complete the CATs which were computerised so that the marks were automatically recorded on the individual’s profile. Observing this activity, it was obvious that the experience was extremely disturbing for some of the students from the group with learning difficulties. Some had expectations for help from the Teaching Assistant as they were accustomed to while at primary school. When they were informed that no such help was allowed because ‘it was a test’ they were advised to ‘do their best’ and that ‘it was not important but was to let teachers know where to start their lessons’. Some of the children just stared at the screen, one girl began to cry and a boy was so disruptive that he was removed and told to come back at lunchtime to do the test by himself. The teacher in charge acknowledged that ‘we shouldn’t be putting these kids through situations like this’ but claimed it was necessary to satisfy ‘the demands of our sponsors who have targeted a good Ofsted as a key objective’.

Another secondary school, this time a specialist Arts College, was also visited on the first day of the school year and a class of Year 7 pupils was observed in a drama lesson. Pupils were placed in groups asked to role play a family scene, such as a funeral, or a wedding. The teacher gets them to sit down and continues:

‘OK I’m hurrying you, 3 2 1 and zero. You’re ready to listen. You will get better at this. First you’ve got to show me your skills so don’t be a baby asleep in your cot or a dead person unless you come back to life in the coffin. If the dead person comes to life that’s okay, that’s acting. Also you’ve got to face the audience because I need to see your face expression. Also make sure there is something to praise.’

The students went into groups and the teacher walked around with a clapperboard on which was pinned an assessment sheet. Students were not told the criteria but it was clear from the exchanges between the teacher and students that the ability to convey ideas within group discussion, the ability to demonstrate ‘tracking’ (revealing one’s thought processes by facial expression and gesture) and the quality of one’s evaluative comments on another group’s performance was being assessed. Afterwards the teacher told the observer that this was a baseline assessment which would be repeated at the end of each term to provide information about a student’s progress. This would form part of the ‘statistical evidence’ to be presented to the Ofsted inspectors.

In this heady rush to demonstrate progress, the value of drama and other artistic forms as therapeutic interventions with benefits for a range of pupils with special needs, improving self-confidence, concentration and motivation seems to have
become a secondary consideration. Yet research suggests that ‘controlling environments’ with an emphasis on outcomes rather than processes inhibits intrinsic motivation and induces greater dependency (Deci and Ryan, 2008), whereas a key objective in the education of children with special needs is to create a greater sense of autonomy, resilience and self-efficacy (Cooper, 2002). The potential of drama for achieving these goals is illustrated by one secondary school SENCO’s comment on a particular student.

‘Things have loosened up here in the past few years. There’s less didactic teaching, more peer work, more practical activities in drama and art and this carries over into other subjects. We have one SEN child who responds to drama, fully engaged and doing it in a history or RE lesson brings him on board.’

It would seem, therefore, that the arts based departments could have an important part to play in the education of children with special needs, in particular, but living in the present performativity culture seems to inhibit this potential. One SENCO from a secondary school told us, he would also like to work closely with the music and drama departments but the pressure of getting children through GCSE and the like has so far prevented this.

‘At one point we had a music therapist from the Authority but that stopped [laughs]. It’s some of the things we’d like to develop. Sometimes you create provision from what you’ve got and not what you need. In terms of drama it helps with cooperation and I do it with my lower sets but the [subject] departments are under pressure to get results and we haven’t got round to working out some form of special provision, although I’d very much like to.’

Concerns were also expressed about the impact of the Coalition Government’s recent changes to the curriculum framework and examination format. English teachers questioned the decision to move to written examinations and to exclude listening and speaking components in the language assessment. One female teacher with six years experience spoke for many when she expressed her feelings.

‘Formal examinations bring pressure and for students with little confidence to have to demonstrate a range of skills under pressure doesn’t always bring out the best of their ability. I appreciate that examinations need to become more rigorous but there are many ways of doing this. One thing I strongly disagree with is that speaking and listening is no longer to be a part of GCSE. Almost every job application requires an interview and maybe a presentation in public. So I worry for my lower sets. There needs to be variety’

In terms of the 100% written exam it will mean less work for her but she felt it would increase pressure on the lower set students and, in an area of low expectations, ‘it will makes things worse’. As the school takes a number of
travellers’ children, she was particularly concerned on the impact of these changes on them. She has had to work hard to get the parents to let their daughters stay on to try for college and university. She feels that the changes will make situation worse. She is already in the process of modifying her teaching approach.

‘In the case of the lower sets we will do more timed exercises. We will do more questions without scaffolding. I will give them a poem, for example, The Lady of Shallot, and I will give them a question, ‘How is sympathy created for the Lady of Shallot?’ and they will get a fixed time to do it. My fear is that it will take the fun away. We shall have to do this thing [timed practice] earlier and earlier. We won’t do so much improvisation and dramatising. Its quite nice to be able to work together but all these things will be swept under the carpet in the bigger picture which is you’ve got to prepare for this paper – you’ve got to pass this examination.’

It isn’t going to be a lot different: A Local Authority perspective

We contacted Local Authority personnel of one London Borough to gain their perspective on the changes. ‘I don’t feel it will be a lot different’ said a senior official. As to the expectations in the Green Paper, ‘I’ve no faith that it will happen’. The capacity of Health Trusts to deliver was a particular concern because

‘There’s now no delegated child budget so speech therapy and similar provision have to compete with other priorities such as improvements in the care of the elderly.’

However, the Authority also had a major concern over parental expectations.

‘We’ve put a lot of effort into getting our schools to see the allocation as a money resource and not simply a means of employing extra Teaching Assistants. We want schools to see it as an opportunity to move away from a one to one provision. We have concerns that some parents will still think that’s what the money buys.’

One consequence of differences as to how the money allocation should be used is the likelihood that some parents may want to appeal. Under the new system ‘we now have to foot the bill for this’, said the Authority representative. Money will therefore have to put aside to pay for the parents’ travel and the cost of the ‘legal bundles’. An Authority will, typically, produce documents to support their case from, for example, the Educational Psychologists, the ‘speech people’ and various other relevant groups. Parents will have the right to put forward similar bundles of evidence from their team of experts and the Authority will be required to meet the cost of this. This will mean that less money will be available to spend on direct support.
Coping with cutbacks

Under recent governments local authorities have moved from 80% to 90% and now 100% delegated budgets to schools. As with Health and other service providers, the rationale behind this approach is that it allows the purchaser, in this case the schools, to ‘shop around’ for the ‘best buy’ in terms of the quality of the service offered and the cost involved. This, according to those advocating such an approach, will lead to ‘efficiency savings’, so that ultimately there will be more money available to buy additional support. Where an authority needs to supply an essential service, such as a team of Educational Psychologists, who are required, not only to support schools but to carry out various assessments, it is likely that this will be paid for mainly from the monies collected through the council tax. If the council is controlled by a ‘low tax’ political party, as is the case with this particular Authority, this resource will be under continuing threat. The Authority also supports a higher than average proportion of ethnic minority pupils and recent changes have also affected budgets as a senior Council Official explained

‘We take a considerable number of refugees and economic migrants. The decision no longer to ring fence the EMAG (Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant) but to incorporate it under the DSG (Designated Schools’ Grant) also has led to the possibility of further reductions although with the agreement of the schools’ forum a portion can be retained centrally.’

The solution to these financial problems has been to set up a trading partnership with the schools and this has enabled the Authority to maintain a reasonable service. The partnership is run by a consortia of nominated headteachers, council members and supported by members from the various service providers. The services are therefore determined primarily by what teachers want and schools have to be prepared to commit funds to support these. However, officials acknowledged that the services provided would never reach the levels of previous years when the Authority was able to keep back a portion of the government funding. Similar schemes were also being developed in neighbouring Boroughs and the possibility of sharing some resources was being examined.

However, it was pointed out by one officer, who had previously worked for a rural county council, that the variable size and geographical spread of schools made such trading partnerships more difficult to establish. In a metropolitan district it was easier to build an atmosphere of mutual trust among headteachers so that the need to delegate responsibility to a few for running the partnership was not a potential problem. The absence of very small primary schools (with ‘small’ generally defined as schools with less than 100 pupils), which in some rural authorities amounted to over 35% of all establishments, also required
more complex decision making when weighting the extent of the contribution required of an individual school in support of the service. The spread of schools across a wider geographical area also involved difficult decisions about additional costs in travel and accommodation. Providing a centrally based service resulted in increased travel time. Dispersing the services required the maintenance of additional accommodation and possibly some duplication of personnel, almost certainly in the case of administrative and technical support. For these reasons some County Councils now offered a ‘minimum service’. Certainly this proved to be the norm in the case of the rural and semi-rural authorities that we visited.

The demise of the ‘Sure Start’ centres in the Borough has been another blow. Although it has been argued that they benefitted the middle classes disproportionately, they nevertheless did engage in a considerable amount of intervention work, particularly in language, with children from disadvantaged families. This can have a direct benefit on a child’s learning later on. A recent survey of Local Authorities by the Labour opposition concluded that over 600 centres had been closed since the Coalition Government took office [Oliver White, Sure Start centres risk closure, says Labour, The Independent on Sunday, 10 August, 2014, p13] although the Coalition disputes this figure and claims that only 75 have closed and that those remaining ‘are reaching 90% of those most in need’. The requirement to direct the ‘pupil premium’ at improving literacy and numeracy, also means that the money tends to be used for whole school purposes rather than specifically to support children with special needs. Our visits tended to confirm that this was the case for when asked about the use to which the premium was put the response of the primary head quoted previously in Chapter 2 was fairly typical when she said that although ‘it helped’ it didn’t cover the loss of the previous ‘additional funding of one kind or another’ which it replaced.

The uncertainties of Further Education provision
The council officials also reflected the concerns expressed by secondary school SENCOs about the absence of clear pathways on vocational courses that would allow schools to provide evidence to Ofsted which would demonstrate a student’s progression. The failure to create a system where a succession of ‘weighted’ vocational units of increasing difficulty could be accumulated over time and contribute towards an eventual ‘diploma’ qualification added to the difficulties of those responsible, who had to balance what was best for the school with what was best for the student.

‘One thing that hasn’t been thought about in all this is how it will work out in Further Education. We have cases where a student attends a college and does,
say, catering over and over again. The parents are happy because their son or daughter is fully occupied but there’s no progression. Ending the diploma qualification which would have provided parity of esteem and offered a means of monitoring the student’s progress has not been helpful.’

All these uncertainties were a worry because ‘I don’t think most schools are ready for the change’. This particular Authority was not part of a pathfinder consortia but it had run its own courses on EHCP and consulted with nearby pathfinder authorities. ‘We think that the system we’ve devised is better,’ said one senior official. The lack of readiness was probably more of a problem at secondary level ‘because it’s being phased in and, as a result, secondaries have had little experience of how EHCP plans work.’ Because of this phased introduction, ‘they’ve got the concerns about greater parental involvement but haven’t yet got the answers’.

‘Some of the above concerns were also endorsed by a consultant to this and other London Boroughs, whose task was to advise schools during their preparations in managing the introduction of the EHCPs in September, 2014. A former headteacher of a special school, sometime Local Authority adviser and then Ofsted inspector, was in favour of the change because it was “a more holistic process’ and ‘the emphasis is on what a young person can do”. One parent, for example, had emerged from a pilot review and remarked, “I did not realize [child’s name] was so good at so many things”.’

This general approval, however, came with a number of caveats. In this consultant’s opinion, while the overall meeting time to produce an EHC plan had been reduced in comparison to statementing, the amount of time actually required for the process from start to finish – meetings and paper work for each plan will prove to be longer. Of greater concern was that the problem of engaging health providers persisted.

The threshold between health funding to support education and health funding for wellbeing is going to be fraught – especially difficult in areas like augmentation for personal development. For example if a young person needs a piece of equipment to be able to travel on transport to school is that wellbeing or access to education? Is feeding at school an educational cost or a wellbeing cost? It feels as if Health has been lobbying ferociously to avoid paying for anything. If Health are not paying they may argue that they do not contribute to the EHC Plan and so may not come to review meetings. Will health issues get properly represented in EHC plans so that complex health needs impacting on education will still not be properly represented as currently happens with statements?
Problems might also arise in the transfer from school to further education. Consistency of funding arrangements will be difficult across borders because post-16 provision will recruit from a number of local authorities and these may have different thresholds for getting an EHC Plan. Some will use levels of need and intervention while others will use levels of available funding to determine the cut-off criteria. Thus two students could require the same provision but cost the FE provider differentially.

FE colleges will not have had the experience of the funding regimes, reviews and target setting that schools have had with the previous statementing process. Their language is different and the role of SENCOs is not quite the same as in colleges. Having to write a Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Information Report will prove to be challenging. Whereas the criteria schools use follows on from the experience of constructing statements, and tends to be applicable to younger children, the equivalent for post-16 provision will need to focus, amongst other things, on preparation for employment or continuing education, participation in society, independent living and staying healthy. For most FE staff this will constitute a sea change, coming at a time when some colleges are attempting to re-negotiate conditions of service that will be less favourable than those currently operating. There are also risks that the voice of the young person will be neglected, since the reviews for post-16 provision will be carried out when that individual is still pre-15. For all the above reasons this consultant felt that more thought at governmental level was required, particularly on the question of disproportionate funding and the training needs of FE staff. However, he was not hopeful of a favourable outcome because

‘the fact that the government saw the reforms as a ‘cost neutral’ exercise in the first place is an indicator of a certain level of lack of understanding of what they are dealing with.’

This consultant also confirmed our own findings that schools were particularly concerned about the level of raised parental expectations they were going to have to deal with. He had personal experience where special interest groups were preparing to extract what they could from available sources of funding, particularly in cases where the school or college ‘hadn’t got its act together’. In some cases, such groups were sending in freedom of information requests, in one example, for social care provision for deaf children. The fact that schools and colleges must ‘make their best endeavors’ to provide the provision required to meet the needs of children and young people allows such groups to ‘drive a coach and horses through an open stable door’. Schools will remain anxious about the use of such vague terminology until it is clarified further. Otherwise the situation will need to be tested in court to build up case law as this particular form of phrasing has never previously appeared in education statutes.
Further reservations were expressed about the limited support provided by local authorities. The authorities he was working with only had a skeleton School Improvement Service. The role of Senior Special Educational Needs Adviser had mostly disappeared. Its replacement, the SEN Manager, was now responsible for SEN placement, statements, organizing and servicing panels among other things. These managers rarely had a schools’ background and their relationships with headteachers could often be difficult as they were frequently pursuing placements that the school did not want. Parents also saw them as obstructive when for reasons beyond their control (for example, a school’s reluctance to take the pupil) managers were unable to meet requests. Contacts with parent partnerships were therefore sometimes confrontational. This is clearly not the best environment for partnership working and co-production. Some local authorities have been recruiting retired SEN team members to write statements and EHC plan conversions, but this is clearly a short term solution.

The use of consultants with specialist expertise, as in this particular case, is also a temporary expedient because the pool is diminishing rapidly as the career pathway to this strategic role has all but dried up. Very few consultants have SEN headship experience in mainstream and special schools, a somewhat relevant issue in terms of credibility. The route from senior school leader to adviser started to disappear some 15 years ago and this trend has accelerated. Most advisers are now retired and there is no new cadre to fill the gap. Staff in many local authorities whose task is to oversee special education is often now recruited from social care backgrounds and have little or no personal expertise and limited access to high quality experience and advice. Yet under the new arrangements local authorities retain very significant responsibilities for the provision of special educational needs’ outcomes of young people and intervention when things go wrong. Schools therefore are finding it difficult to get the necessary advice or support. Either it is almost non-existence or demand is such that wait times can be extremely long.

At the end of his interview this consultant was also asked for his wish list. He quickly came up with two. Top of the list was a revision of the data used in the calculation of performance so that schools were not penalised by Ofsted and in league tables for being inclusive. The second wish concerned the need for greater clarity about the possible illegality and consequences of excluding pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.
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Chapter 4
Operating in a climate of uncertainty

On being a head
The overwhelming impression remaining after these school visits was that most schools were doing their best in a climate of uncertainty, increased parental pressure and declining support from the Local Authority and other complementary agencies such as Health and Social work. ‘It’s rare to get a break’, said one head about to take premature retirement at Easter, no longer able to cope with the long days, no longer willing to ‘spend the day jumping around from one set of demands to the next’. Weekends were given over to ‘catch-up’; ‘meaty work’, which could not be addressed in school time, occupied every weekend, leaving little time for family and friends.

As with this headteacher, heads often chose to share in the teaching, ‘a great way of monitoring progress, expectation and the suitability of curriculum and assessment’. They were also obliged at times to fill in for absent staff, in some cases where teachers were away for extended periods suffering from stress. A member of a secondary school leadership team elaborated on the nature of the stress; not simply due to overwork but attributed to the continual compromise of values, the progressive erosion of ‘a needs based approach’, which had become ‘too soft and woolly a concept in a hard nosed era of VFM [value for money]’.

This was reflected in many of the conversations with teaching staff, who spoke about the changing culture over the last decade which had become more impersonal, more bureaucratic, and contrary to many of their hopes, aspirations and values which had brought them into teaching in the first place.

Strategies for inclusion
Headteachers reported a continuing, sometimes ‘relentless’ pursuit of strategies to anticipate, to include and to avert problems for children and young people. These encompassed extended school hours, breakfast clubs and after school provision. Although in some schools children were taxied in, rather than missing school due to a lack parental encouragement, it did have the effect, it was said, of isolating parents further and reinforcing their lack of involvement with the school.
In one secondary school, having recently converted to Academy status to obtain a much delayed ‘new build’, the need to improve its reputation and increase the numbers on roll had led it to provide a small class of 15 for the Year 7 pupils who came from the feeder primaries with identified special needs. English and mathematics were taught by the form teacher who said her aim was to change these students’ attitudes from attributing failure to lack of ability to one which saw success as mainly determined by individual effort. ‘They came to the school thinking “we’re not very bright; we didn’t get our levels at primary” but I want them to leave me believing if they work hard they can cope’. The aim was to integrate these students back into mainstream classes as quickly as possible. When interviewed, students said that they were pleased with the increased attention they received at the hands of teachers because in primary ‘we didn’t get the teacher very often’.

Another secondary school took a different approach. In what was described as a ‘tiered approach’ in a six form entry, the move to mixed ability home room groups had had a marked impact. A period of 25 minutes in the morning, 15 minutes in the afternoon and an hour on a Friday afternoon provided the space for issues to be discussed, for peer collaboration, attenuating some of the stigma of always being in the bottom set.

A member of the senior leadership team described the inhibitions of language and vocabulary which can hugely disadvantage some children, but an issue that may, to some extent, be addressed by greater care being taken over vocabulary and esoteric cultural references. Examples of words such as ‘heather’, ‘mallard’, ‘attic’ which occur on written tests, were cited by teachers as being met with complete bafflement by some children, suggesting the need for a more sensitive approach to language, perhaps a glossary. With writing creating such a major obstacle to so many young people, why is so much of children’s school experience focused on paper and pencil tasks?, these teachers asked.

In a catchment with a high proportion of Latvian, Poles and Russians recently arrived and without facility in English language, this secondary school redeployed three TAs concerned specifically with English as an Additional Language. In the absence of communicative language and with reduced access to psychological and social services the school uses Raven Matrices to identify issues which may include visual perception, problem solving and inference abilities. Together with this was a continuing restructuring of the support system for young people, Faculty Heads, a deputy in each Faculty, the introduction of a house system to create smaller units, clear demarcation of roles, and ensuring support early before behaviour is allowed to escalate.
The form group composition proved to be a critical point of entry in another secondary school which had previously kept students within the eight stream ability grouping so that the 7X could become a self perpetuating lethal mix of alienation. The change in policy to spend extended periods within the home room (two 15-30 periods within the day plus one hour on a Friday afternoon) had effected a significant attitudinal shift.

The following are some of the strategies pursued:

- **Complementary learning-based strategies**: These consisted of literacy seminars, enrichment classes, lunchtime clubs, after school clubs/Children’s University and two week summer schools.

- **Counselling and befriending initiatives** such as ‘Go-betweens’, progress workers and progress teachers, buddy ing and mentoring and cross-age tutoring in which older students adopt a young peer. Prefects were helped not to behave in the traditional mould but to act as big brothers and sisters with training on how to support younger children. Prevention and restorative approaches were in use with sessions devoted to anger management.

- **Policy and structural approaches** consisting of orientation events, regular phone calls to home and home visits and informal chatting opportunities for students to decide what they want to do in the future. There was flexibility and a degree of latitude for latecoming, absence, which would trigger phone calls and/or visits. Regular use was made of Inter-agency approaches, work experience and placements

- **Disciplinary approaches**: A ‘three strikes’ process which could result in a day in an isolation room.

- **Cooling off, come in and vent**: There may be times that children and young people need to vent their emotions without fear of comeback or punishment. Pent up emotions with no form of release within a strict regime may find other outlets in self harm and harm to others. As one member of staff said:

  ‘When you have inkling into the conditions in which these young people live on a day-to-day basis and the additional pressures from peers and within a classroom you might just want to scream yourself.’

Another teacher talked about going for a walk outside school on a one-to-one basis, getting away from the atmosphere and its associations and in which the problem may have originated.
Many of the schools visited adopted positive reinforcement strategies. The use of ‘vivo miles’ was a feature in some schools where teachers could use their smart phones to text ‘credits’ for students and the latter could spend their points earned for ‘good behaviour’ on top-ups for their mobiles, items of sports equipment and various other vouchers. Some SENCOs, teachers and TAs had mixed feelings about this form of reward because it tended ‘to pay out more to those behaving badly’. A graduated system of consequences for negative behaviour, ‘the three strikes and you’re out’ policy was a common feature of all secondary schools visited and had even trickled down into some primaries. One secondary teacher explained it to a class she was teaching for the first time as follows:

‘There are two sorts to me. I’m straight but I’m also a bit of a giggler. You can have both if you stick to my rules. Not paying attention I would give a verbal warning then number two would be a written warning and then number three would be 20 minutes in detention. Number 4 you have a detention after school so it’s a fair process. You are given a chance to sort things out but if you don’t improve your parents get an e-mail; it will be logged and your record will follow you.’

Whatever the system adopted it was characterised by extra work. At break and lunch times queues would form outside a Year Leader’s, form tutor’s or the SENCO’s office and students would come to report incidents that had taken place inside or outside the school, to bring slips from other teachers reporting failure to produce homework on time or to face questioning as a result of a phone call from a member of the public about something that occurred on the way to and from school. To guard against complaints by parents and the general public that ‘the school did nothing’, most incidents, however seemingly trivial, often needed some form of further investigation, requiring the identification of other witnesses or ‘partners in crime’, the taking of statements and so forth. It all added to the workload and stress, with no time for coffee, and a sandwich eaten at the desk at lunchtime. As one recently qualified teacher remarked:

‘I was a bit naive. I decided to do a PGCE because I thought the job would mainly be about teaching my subject and getting kids enthused about the things that interested me. How wrong I was!’

Conclusions and recommendations
The study was conducted at a time when there were many unanswered questions about the future of special needs education in a period of financial stringency, curriculum change and ever increasing pressures on the mainstream sector from the growth in academies and free schools. Added to this, the ‘ratcheting up’ of success criteria in pursuit of even greater emphasis on ‘performativity’ has caused some secondary schools to question their approach
in encouraging students who have little chance of obtaining five ‘good’ GCSE’s to pursue a vocational pathway. These decisions have been made more difficult for two particular reasons discussed in previous chapters.

First, there are no clear pathways. The various documents relating to the new EHCPs have little to say on the role of Further Education Colleges and the part they are supposed to play in a plan that carries a child ‘from birth to 25’ years of age. Matters are not helped by the decision to replace the school action and school action plus classification so making it difficult for schools to decide just where to draw the demarcation line, leaving them open to criticisms by Ofsted that they have not done enough to progress some pupils in terms of public examinations and standard assessment tests. The present guidance puts the situation back to the time when the distinction between children with complex learning difficulties (those now to be given an individual EHCP) and those in the ‘one in five’ category who at different times needed additional support was either ignored or blurred. Matters need to be clarified further in respect of vocational pathways at secondary school and in terms of the evidence required at primary level as to what progress measures are acceptable as a substitute for written test scores. Both the government and Ofsted need to direct their attention to this matter. Not surprisingly, when we discussed this matter with senior officials in a London borough, as reported in the previous chapter, they said they were advising their schools to continue to use the school action categories as a guide to suitable treatment.

Second, increased uncertainty also arises from the repeated testimonies of teachers at both secondary and primary levels that the inspection process is a lottery, ‘it depends on who you get’. As discussed in the first chapter, the report by Policy Exchange identified many examples where schools in similar circumstances received different treatment. The authors of the report recommend that only inspectors with ‘recent and relevant experience’ of the type of school being inspected or those with a ‘high knowledge of assessment and practice in the area’ should be used (Waldegrave & Simons, 2014: 59). They also state that inspectors should be required to take a ‘data interpretation test’ every five years and that all the various protocols used in the inspectors’ assessments should be visible to anyone including the schools. The report’s third recommendation in respect of consistency is that Ofsted should introduce better measures to test the reliability and validity of inspectors’ judgments and that these should be applied using a randomised design. We endorse all three proposals.

The chief inspector has acknowledged some of these weaknesses. His solution is to make inspection ‘in house’, so that inspectors would be employed directly by Ofsted and the use of outside consultancies would cease. It remains to be seen,
however, if this proposal is a genuine attempt to improve matters or a means of exerting greater control over the process, so that what appears to be a vendetta directed against schools in difficult circumstances could be pursued with even greater intensity than is the case at present.

Returning to the question of vocational pathways, the failure of the proposals set out by the former Chief Inspector, Mike Tomlinson, to create a vocational route to a Diploma which would have enjoyed ‘parity of esteem without seeking to establish equivalence’, is a matter which requires urgent attention, whichever government takes power after the coming General Election. We can point to the example of Hong Kong as an indicator of what is possible. Four years ago the Education Department took the decision to abandon examinations at 16 and 18 and to replace them by a single leaving diploma. The UK is now one of the few countries left which requires students to sit two public examinations in the senior secondary school. The New Academic Structure (NAS), or the ‘334’ system as it is usually called in Hong Kong, has students spending 3 years in the lower and 3 years in the upper secondary schools. A foundation year at University now means that undergraduates must spend at least four years over their degree. However, the relevance to the present argument is that those not wishing to enter a 4 year University course can opt to take vocational courses at further education colleges and if successful are then exempted from the foundation year. In response, the further education colleges have created a range of modular certificates, within a single agreed tariff framework, which allow students to gain exemption from the foundation year. Some colleges have gone further and now offer part-time degree courses covering the first year proper of the qualification. Thus the system is extremely flexible.

The evaluation of NAS has shown that it has been an unqualified success. Performance on the Diploma matched that on the old ‘A’ level although students take the former a year earlier. Elite universities here and in the United States have all agreed that the standards are more than acceptable for entry into their respective institutions. Most importantly the number of sixteen year old students staying on in education has increased dramatically. Having raised the school leaving age to 18, this country desperately needs something similar for all those students, including those with particular learning difficulties, who are likely to become more disaffected under the proposed ‘more rigorous examination’ system in predominately written format and for whom being able to name all the major rivers in England, or the kings and queens since the Norman conquest does not have an immediate relevance in their daily lives.

In Hong Kong, the requirement for schools to devote 15 per cent of the curriculum to Other Learning Experiences (OLE) such as community service
and projects, visits to other countries, or student-initiated research, has not only provided a relief from the intense curriculum pressure but broadened young people’s understanding beyond the curriculum. An external evaluation (MacBeath, 2012) found that while there are significant differences in uptake, imaginative initiatives and effectiveness, dependent in large part on leadership, young people’s education had been significantly enriched, changing attitudes to school and to society.

The progressive embedding of school self evaluation (SSE) and complementary External School Review (ESR) over a decade has also brought with it deepening insights and enhanced confidence among teachers and school leaders, responding to findings from independent and formative external evaluation. Devoid of cant, cherry picking and political intervention the complementary nature of SSE/ESR is exemplary and world leading.

**How much money have we got?**

There was clear evidence that there were wide variations both in the amount of funding schools received and the manner in which it was distributed. Some SENCOs had no idea of how their budget was allocated. Using measures such as free school meals and previous academic records rather than a direct measure of poverty – again Hong Kong, as an example, defines a disadvantaged school according to the number of families on the roll requiring support of certain designated kinds – has been shown to be a poor indicator of need.

A major factor in England is the provision offered by the local authority, some of which came out of the council tax budget; given that 100% of central government funding now goes to the DSG (designated school grant). Where it wished to retain some central provision then the Authority was likely to set up some form of trading partnership with the schools to complement the sums available. Some Authorities had turned away from this approach, offering minimum support (psychologists, literacy and some Pupil Referral Units) leaving it to clusters of schools to prioritise their respective needs. Clearly, organising a trading partnership is easier in a compact borough or a metropolitan district than is the case with a large rural county council and we found this generally to be the case. Even where trading partnerships were in existence the extent of the services supplied depended on the number of schools in a borough who had opted for Academy status and who were willing to contract into the central service.

Schools with little external local authority support mostly used the resources provided to employ additional staff, usually teaching assistants, whom they partly trained ‘in house’ but also sent on relevant courses. Although ‘velcroing’ TAs to
individual pupils was now generally recognised as an inappropriate practice, it was the case that where assistants were given specific roles these mainly concerned aspects of behaviour management and the development of social skills. Areas of specialism to do with cognitive difficulties were dealt with either through the use of consultants or on an ad hoc basis by relying on contacts in Special Schools. In the nature of things it is beyond expectation for schools facing such difficulties to cover the wide spectrum of possible learning disabilities. It must therefore be the case that although schools try to do their best for these pupils, the present system and what is now proposed cannot succeed in meeting the needs of every individual with special needs. There have always been variations in local authority provision (Lewis et al. 2010) but the evidence suggests that these disparities may have now become more extreme. The present system is simply not fit for purpose.

A market system in which the client calls the tune is claimed by its supporters to be more efficient because the use of the available funding is determined by the clients’ expressed needs and is subject to competitive tendering, thus leading to substantial savings, and so allowing a greater range of services to be provided. However, where public services have been in competition with private companies, whether it has involved security, care for the elderly or welfare entitlement, there has been a history of ‘cutting corners’ in order to maximise profit, leading to a succession of well publicised scandals.

In the case of the boy with severe cerebral palsy and sight problems who was also prone to epilepsy, quoted in Chapter 3, the teaching assistant, recruited from a private agency, had had no training whatsoever for such a demanding support role. Her previous experience had been as a care assistant in a nursery. Added to this, is the accusation by some headteachers that other colleagues in their neighbourhood, those in charge of Academies in particular, are ‘cherry picking’ pupils. The consequence is that an unfair proportion of learning and behaviour difficulties are concentrated in a particular establishment, resulting in ‘some pupils getting a raw deal’. Given the nature of our sample it is impossible to ascertain the degree to which this is representative on a national scale but they should be subject to a proper scrutiny by a competent, impartial team of researchers with a proven track record in the conduct of similar investigations. The Audit Commission should also be asked to investigate the impact of the present funding arrangements on local authority provision and asked for suggestions as to ways in which some of the present anomalies in the present arrangements might be dealt with.

It was a weakness of the present provision that we saw few examples of the use of the school’s Arts departments to provide therapeutic support for pupils with
learning or behavioural problems, in spite of a wealth of clinical evidence that this form of therapy can be extremely beneficial (Gladding, 2011) particularly in the use of dance and drama in school settings (Burkhardt and Brennan, 2012; Joronen, Konu, Rankin & Astedt-Kurki, 2011). One primary school visited was part of the Sing Up initiative. The evaluation of the programme showed that participation generally resulted in improvement in children’s self concept and sense of social inclusion (Welch et al., 2010).

Yet, a headteacher who wrote about his attempts to the widen children’s experience beyond the staple tested diet was ridiculed by the Daily Mail columnist Littlejohn, allowed a full tabloid page to deride such soft liberal thinking which the much lamented departing Mr Gove had tried to eradicate. A letter, a mere 200 words in reply to point to some of the evidence such as that outlined above, was never published. It is a reminder of the contested issue of voice. Whose voices are privileged and whose silenced?

By far the biggest arts initiative, which focused mainly on disengaged pupils and those threatened with exclusion, a high proportion of the latter being children with special needs, was the Creative Partnerships programme. Artists, the term used was creative practitioners, to indicate that as well as the visual and literary arts use was made of a wide range of creative individuals such as actors, dancers, film makers and photographers, worked alongside teachers in schools for extended periods. The programme was commissioned in 2002 by the departments of Creativity, Culture and Education during the lifetime of the previous Labour administration and the funds administered by the Arts Council, England. In the first round of cuts undertaken by the present coalition government, the funding was discontinued. A smaller scale organisation, Creativity, Culture and Education, now operates independently on a charitable basis.

During its lifetime, from 2002 until 2011, Creative Partnerships has engaged with 5,324 schools at all levels. Various evaluations have testified to its impact on student achievement (Sharp, Pye & Blackmore, 2006), wellbeing (McLellan et al, 2012) school ethos (Bragg & Manchester, 2011) and shifts in pedagogy designed to promote more active, participative forms of learning (Thomson et al, 2012). Ofsted (2010b) has also praised the contribution Creative Partnerships has made in raising standards. SENCOs in secondary schools said they would like to work more closely with the Arts’ Departments to create similar programmes but the pressures of turning out candidates with at least a ‘C’ grade in their specialism was a barrier to such cooperation. Primary schools in our study, some of whom had worked closely with Creative Partnerships, wished to continue to bring in creative practitioners, using money from the pupil premium for this purpose. The sums available, however, did not allow for extended residencies, a key element.
in the success of the original scheme. Whichever political party gains power at the next election, it should be a priority to fund a similar arts’ initiative targeted at disadvantaged schools in areas with above average proportions of pupils with special learning needs and disabilities.

We began this report by recounting how the first Cost of Inclusion Report had influenced the House of Commons Education Committee’s investigation of special needs provision. We think that this is an opportune moment for another enquiry into special needs provision by the present committee in the fallow period before the 2015 General Election. The enquiry should consider, among other things:

- The current approach to funding and the causes and effects of country wide variation on the support available from local authorities.
- The influence of academies on schools in the mainstreamed sector with regard to intakes of children with moderate and severe learning difficulties.
- The inconsistencies in treatment by Ofsted inspectors when arriving at judgments about the quality of SEN provision for these children. It is our hope that this present report would make a useful contribution to such an enquiry.

References


Chapter 5
The changing political world of inclusion

Introduction
What has changed? Eight years ago, in May 2006, we published a report entitled, The Costs of Inclusion, in which we set out to study the then current policies and practices that sought to integrate the majority of pupils with some form of educational need into English primary and secondary schools rather than placing them in specialised establishments. The report was well received both at home and abroad. The House of Commons Education Select Committee which was, at the time, studying the impact of inclusion, said that our report was one of the most helpful sources they had drawn on in arriving at their conclusions. From abroad we received a number of approving comments to the effect that this was a much needed study and that it accurately depicted what was happening back in the correspondents’ own countries. In common with a number of other letters, numbering close to one hundred, a five page letter from the United States concluded with these two paragraphs:

‘I'd also like permission, if you don’t mind, to circulate your study to scholars here in the US. I know a number of nationally famous and respected inclusion (pro inclusion) scholars who would find your study extremely interesting and challenging.’

‘Thank you for this work. I cancelled my Saturday outing today to stay home and read it, and after having done so, think I made a very good decision. As an aside – maybe it’s just because you are English – but I find your paper to be extremely well thought out and beautifully written.’ (Dee Alpert, Publisher, The Special Education Muckraker)

Initially, the rationale for some form of inclusive education was based on Article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights which, by implication, accorded all parents, if they so choose, the right to place their child within a mainstream school, irrespective of ability, ethnicity or gender. Some more sceptical observers noted, however, that the acceptance of this principle by Government also offered the possibility of financial savings, in that fewer special establishments would be required, so explaining the readiness to make the necessary legislative changes.
When it came to power the Labour government, under Tony Blair, set about extending the opportunities available for children with special needs by placing their educational provision within a wider context of social provision. The publication, *Removing the Barriers to Achievement* sought to integrate the services provided by schools with other outside agencies in health, welfare and other social services, and argued for earlier interventions so that education disadvantage would be reduced by the time children began their formal education (DFES 2004:133). However, it was noted by some commentators, such as Tomlinson (2005) for example, that despite these good intentions the notion of inclusion adopted by policy makers was still poorly defined. No distinction was made regarding the treatment of pupils with complex mental or physical health needs when compared to others with learning disabilities of the kind experienced by most children during the course of their school career. Earlier studies had suggested that around one in five pupils experienced some learning difficulties of one kind or another during their time in school (Croll & Moses, 1985; Ainscow & Muncey, 1989). Failure to make clearer distinctions meant that the boundaries between special and inclusive education remained blurred with the consequence that local provision varied enormously across the country.

One of the reasons for the finding that as many as 20% of students experienced some form of learning difficulties over the course of their time in school is explained by the rapid growth in medical knowledge about physical and mental health needs so that instead of couching the problem in general terms learning disability could now be addressed specifically using categories such as autism, and dyslexia, for example.

The public dissemination of this improved knowledge led, in turn, to more parental demands for special facilities designed to cater for the specific types of learning and behavioural problems. Schools attempted to meet these pressures but most of those charged with implementing special needs’ provision lacked the relevant knowledge, skills and training and found it difficult to cope with these new demands. Much, therefore, depended on the strength of local authority provision. In those authorities where sufficient expertise was provided the school’s special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) had a ready available source of support to draw upon. In some cases, however, where such provision was poor, schools were left to their own devices. The Ofsted (2004) and Audit Commission (2002) reports drew attention to the consequences of this variability. Many parents in some regions experienced considerable difficulty when seeking places in mainstream schools. Special schools were no longer clear about their role. Some schools attributed the growth of discipline problems to inclusion and employed increasing numbers of untrained classroom assistants in ‘child minding’
roles, charged with curbing bad behaviour rather than enhancing learning. This therefore was the context in which we undertook the previous study.

The context for the earlier study

The results of the survey and case studies carried out during the above period generally confirmed the concerns expressed by critics of government policy. Mary Warnock, who as chairperson of the 1978 Committee first introduced the terminology of special educational needs, suggested at the time that inclusion should not simply mean that children were ‘being educated under one roof’, but also that they were included ‘under a common educational project’ (Warnock, 2005:37). Our findings suggested that despite the good intentions of teachers this was not happening on any large scale.

Among the reasons for the varied responses from schools was first and foremost the lack of adequate resources, even where children were clearly in need of support. Some local authorities, in meeting the requirement of ‘balancing the budget’, found ways of delaying the statementing process, so encouraging some schools to play down the achievement of their children with special needs so as to make the worst possible case to the local authority in the hope that this would speed up the process of funding. Other schools sought to limit admissions of pupils with special needs, leaving it to more socially responsive school principals to take up the slack. There were also wide variations between the amounts of money that local authorities made available to schools and what they retained in order to support their own central provision. Due to these variations, provision became something of a ‘chicken and egg’ situation, in other words, local authorities who provided excellent support were likely to have less money to give out to schools, who then faced difficult decisions about whom they could, and whom they could not, afford to admit.

The impact on teachers in whatever situation they found themselves was likely to result in an increased workload and in the nature and balance of the work involved. Teachers with a limited amount of training in any educational needs specialism found themselves being called out of classes to help deal with problems elsewhere in the school, leaving the classroom assistant to take over the session. Most staff, although committed to the principle of inclusive education, and willing to do their best in difficult circumstances, were often torn between the need to cope with the curriculum and testing regime imposed by the Government’s drive to ‘raise standards’ while at the same time adequately tending to the needs of children with learning and behavioural problems. Year 6 primary teachers, in particular, faced a dilemma when the time came to revise for
SATs; whether to devote their time to the ‘borderline fours’ and give the so-called ‘no hopers’ to the TA, or to maintain a more inclusive environment at the expense of the schools public ratings.

Secondary teachers found that the fractured school day, where a subject teacher might have a particular class or set for only two or three periods in a week, was insufficient to meet the range of needs he or she was faced with. Part of the difficulty with the traditional forms of timetabling was that a teacher might have to meet with upwards of 200 students in any week so that identifying, let alone coping with, individual differences was extremely difficult. In particular, the rigid adherence to a subject based National Curriculum often meant that SEN students had to cope with topics that made little sense to them. Unmet needs often led to disruption so that more lesson time was then spent on classroom management to the detriment of learning. Such pressures often engendered feelings of guilt at not doing justice to all pupils. As one teacher put it, ‘[in this school] we do inclusion without education.’

**Bringing matters up to date**

Among the recommendations of the previous Inclusion report was a call for reform of the funding system to include streamlining the ‘statementing’ procedure, targeted professional development training for teachers and teaching assistants, an insistence that all special educational coordinators should be trained teachers with qualifications in various forms of educational disability, together with better integration of mainstream schools with the remaining specialist institutions.

The defeat of Gordon Brown’s Labour Government in the 2010 General Election, and the establishment of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, brought some hope of positive change as the new Prime Minister, David Cameron, was known to take a personal interest in the plight of families with a child with complex needs, having undergone the personal tragedy of losing a young child with problems of this kind. In particular, Mr Cameron had at the time indicated his concerns about the closure of so many Special Schools and lack of trained personnel at nursery level. Among the Conservative Party’s pre-election promises was a commitment to review the existing provision of Special Schools in order to provide additional places for children with severe learning difficulties and a reform of the existing statementing process so that parents had a greater say in their child’s educational provision. In 2011 the Department of Education produced its consultation document setting out ‘a new approach to special
educational needs and disability’ (DoE, 2011). The Green Paper argued that the current system was too complex and left families with little knowledge of ‘where to turn for help.’ The result was that money needed at the front line was largely spent on unnecessary bureaucracy with the consequence that pupils with special needs tended to be twice as likely to drop out of education than did other peers in mainstream schools at the end of compulsory schooling.

The proposed solution was to be based on early diagnoses by expert teams so that an intervention plan involving necessary education, health and social care could be drawn up and agreed with parents. This single assessment process consisted of an Education, Health and Care Plan, (EHCP) mapping out the support required from birth to 25. This would replace the current statementing procedures. Parents would be given more control over the implementation of this plan including the option of a ‘personal budget’ so that, they would be free to choose any form of state funded school including Academies and Free Schools. Further closure of special schools would be prevented, where deemed unnecessary, and parents and the local community organisations would be offered the opportunity to take them over in certain circumstances.

As a first step, local authorities and other relevant local services would be required to provide a clear offer to families, describing and clarifying exactly what support was available and from whom it was being offered. Ways in which funding was allocated would now have to be disclosed, bringing about a greater degree of transparency. Where difficulties between the local authority and parents occurred, and mediation failed, the latter could take their case to a specially instituted tribunal.

The current system of intervention, whereby children whose needs were such that the support required was beyond the resources of an individual school, would be subject to a statement of need while for those with fewer difficulties, classified either as school action or school action plus, would be subject to new measures. For children not deemed to qualify for the EHCP process, the use of non statutory Independent Educational Plans (IEP) was recommended, as the authors of the Green Paper argued that current designations around the notion of differing levels of school action plans often led to a culture of low expectations. The plan was for the existing provision to be replaced on 1st September 2014. Meanwhile, following the publication of the Green Paper, a joint Department of Health and Department of Education initiative, the Pathfinder Programme, designed to test out these new ideas was implemented.
The Pathfinder Programme

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Pathfinder Programme consisted of 20 ‘experimental sites’, involving 31 Local Authorities. These were tasked with creating the necessary assessment process leading to the production of individual, ‘joined-up’ EHCPs such that each child or young person had at their disposal a ‘personal budget’ encompassing their respective needs in education, health, social care and adult services as deemed appropriate. The programme was subject to monitoring and evaluation by a team consisting of a number of agencies lead by SQW. The company, based in Cambridge is, according to its website, a leading authority in research on economic and social development. Two reports have been published (Craston, Thom & Spivack, 2013a) and (Craston, Thom & Spivack et al., 2013b). The first, dated June, 2013, was largely descriptive and detailed the various implementation strategies developed by the pathfinder task groups, using a ‘self-reporting’ survey. Authorities rated themselves using an interval scale where at one end of the continuum no development had taken place, while at the other extreme either full implementation had taken place or the development was already in place prior to the Pathfinder Programme. In addition, 10 ‘in depth’ follow-up case studies were also undertaken to validate the survey results. The second report, published in October of the same year, describe the implementation from the family’s perspective using the results of a survey carried out by Ipsos Mori.

In general, the June Report found that the new arrangements had been received positively by all parties. Most of the pathfinder groups had appointed a key worker who provided a single point of contact for families. Some teething problems had been experienced in setting up the liaison arrangements among the various agencies and services. In particular, the attendance by representatives from the Health service had been patchy although it was suggested that the setting up of the Clinical Commissioning Groups involving the local General Practitioners should lead to improvement in this respect. The role of the voluntary and community services was also unclear and needed further clarification. The success of the assessment process depended heavily on the key worker’s experience and expertise. Most key workers had a background in special educational needs rather than in health or social services. He or she, it was, who tended to be given the responsibility for deciding the range and type of assessments required in each individual case. Where the key worker’s judgements turned out to be appropriate, it was frequently the case that the subsequent arrangements for liaison among the various services worked satisfactorily. Liaison between education and social services was more advanced than with health. Where agreement to share resources had been established offers tended to be couched in terms of a promise of staff deployment rather than a transfer of cash.
At this early stage the take up of personal budgets by families and the request for direct SEN payments had not been great. The report put this down to the fact that the various parties had difficulty in fully understanding the new arrangements which were somewhat complex. Furthermore, gathering information about the unit costs of various services was still at an early stage so that the necessary information to help parents with their decision making was not always available. Of the 290 direct payments recorded across the case study sites 270 dealt with transport provision between home and school.

The majority of referrals continued to come from school SENCOs so that most of the students seen were already in receipt of some form of support under the old system. As a result the assessment process tended to consist of a ‘one-off’ meeting in which the existing arrangements were adjusted to fit with the new specification. The authors of the report suggested that local authorities therefore tended to be more favourably disposed to existing cases because they could be dealt with speedily and therefore made it easier to meet their statutory obligations within the allotted timescale.

The case studies highlighted a number of difficulties. While most of the pathfinder groups felt that their existing multi-agency approach, developed from the Every Child Matters agenda, was working well, most recognised the need to build on existing strengths rather than starting anew. Problems mainly centred around the assessment process because the professionals drafting the assessment package were not always the same as the person with immediate links with the family or the child in question. The knowledge on which the assessments were based tended therefore to be ‘second hand’. Each service also tended to conduct its assessment at different times because appropriate staff were not always available on a particular day. Thus, in some cases, there was little coordination and individual assessments were undertaken by one service without any knowledge of the results obtained by the others. Similar problems occurred at annual review meetings where attendance could be patchy because lack of capacity made joint working difficult.

Problems were also experienced at the planning stage. Parents felt that professionals tended to focus on the negative rather than positive elements of the child’s capability. This led to feelings of inadequacy on the part of parents. Thereafter, discussion tended to focus on the provision required to support the individual child’s needs, whereas parents wanted to widen the debate to take a more holistic view about the quality of life available to all the family of which the individual being assessed was just one member. Professionals tended to resist this shift of emphasis because it tended to lead to demands for additional services by families. Consequently, families reported that they were ‘not listened to’ and that
their wishes were ‘often ignored’. Matters were not helped in this respect because different services made use of specialist language which was difficult for parents and carers to follow.

The report concluded that attempts to widen consultation with parents outside those with children with existing statements had not been totally successful. By March 2013 well over three quarters of children (84%) recruited had already been previously identified as SEN under the old system. Again, the authorities attributed this to having insufficient resources to undertake the necessary home visits which took up more time than originally anticipated. Some schools were not as cooperative as others in helping to indentify individual children or to engage with follow-up consultations with families. For example, while nearly two thirds of all referrals came from mainstreamed or special schools, only a small percent came from Academies.

The report concluded that more needed to be done with respect to key aspects of the initiative. Among priority areas identified for improvement were first, greater attention to the inputs of the children and young adults in the planning process; second, better coordination among services, particularly in the assessment process, and subsequent allocation of resources; third, earlier identification of pupils’ needs so that the majority of referrals no longer consist of existing holders of statements, and fourth, better communication with parents to include less focus on immediate needs and more attention to the long term possibilities for life within the family. What, however, the report did not make clear was that all these suggestions would create additional demands on existing resources at a time when these are being reduced in the interest of a national austerity programme aimed at deficit reduction.

The second report (October 2013) mainly consisted of a parental survey carried out by Ipsos Mori. Several approaches were used. In the first, only Pathfinder families were surveyed and interviewed. In the second, 237 parents with experience of the Pathfinder Programme were matched with 226 parents whose circumstances were similar. In the third approach, Pathfinder parents were surveyed before and after taking part in the programme and changes in viewpoint recorded.

There is some ambiguity in the descriptions of the matching process. The authors of the report claim that subsequent checks indicated that the possibility of bias was slight. Matching was done on age and gender of child, the nature of the disability, school type, SEN status, type of support and family characteristics (parental employment, qualifications etc.). No mention, however, was, made of the bias, as indicated in the June 2013 report, within the pathfinder sample;
namely that the majority of children in the programme had already been statemented. For this survey 64% of the Pathfinder sample had already been statemented. As identification of the matched sample could only have come about by identifying other special needs children or even perhaps those in school who were Action Plus, the principle confounding factor was the variation in the experiences of the statementing process rather than a direct comparison between those who had and those who had not had a Pathfinder experience. In Table 2, the characteristics of the pathfinder families, but not those of the controls, are given. Hence it is not possible to check the above inference. The report promised more details in its Technical Appendix, but no further reference to this sampling process was made. The report also only reports significance levels rather than the now more customary ‘effect size’ when estimating the magnitude of any change.

Given the above limitations, differences between the quasi-experimental group and the control group are few. The Pathfinder Programme appeared to have little impact on the overall child and parent outcomes used in the evaluation. These included a rating of the experiences of the assessment and planning process, experience of the delivery of the service, and changes in child outcomes such as personal wellbeing and family relationships. The Pathfinder group had a better understanding of the processes involved. This is an unsurprising result and suggests, contrary to the previous Secretary of State for Education’s views, that ‘experiential learning’ has positive consequences. Pathfinder families also were more likely to say their views were taken into account (88% compared to 73% of controls).

The role of the key worker was crucial. Consortia employed different approaches, ranging from having a single individual to drive the process forward while others used a ‘group’ approach with each member dealing with a particular aspect of the assessment and planning process according to their experience and expertise. Parents’ understanding of the process tended to be highly dependent on the qualities of the key worker and satisfaction was greater where one individual rather than several was responsible. However, in some cases these professionals appeared themselves to have a poor understanding of the programme’s characteristics. The Pathfinder process also tended to make parents think more deeply about their own expectations and needs. Generally, however, those parents who strongly (as opposed to tending to) agreed to statements such that their suggestions were listened to or they were encouraged to think about what they wanted constituted just fewer than 50% of the sample surveyed. The lowest ratings (generally under 25%) were recorded when parents were asked if the child had been consulted. There were mixed views as to the value of the joint working arrangements between the different services. While some parents said
they improved their own knowledge and understanding from listening to the professionals ‘come up with different ideas’ and that individuals were more likely to fulfil commitments when these were undertaken in an agency setting, others said they found the expression of different opinions ‘confusing’, that there were power dynamics at play, and that limitations of time tended to mean decisions were taken without everyone present having the opportunity to express an opinion.

Parents also said that very often they found themselves having to take on the role of ‘link person’ in reporting the results of conversations with the professional worker from one service to other providers. Overall only 35% of parents were very satisfied with the process compared to 27% of controls. When the percentages of those who were fairly satisfied were added the respective values were 69% and 65% respectively. However, Pathfinder families felt that the choices available had improved and that the single plan provided a more ‘holistic’ package of care than did the SEN statement, although 50% felt things had remained much the same as before; neither did a majority feel that the process had led to significant improvements in family relationships or the child in question’s wellbeing. The authors of the report attribute these rather pessimistic findings to several factors.

Key workers were also asked about work satisfaction and workload. Most had a background in education having worked in Local Authority SEN teams or some other education provider. They noticed few differences between their Pathfinder groups and other clients, suggesting that earlier reservations about the sampling process were not without foundation. Not surprisingly, there were few differences between the present and previous working arrangements, the major change being the need to ‘learn new things’ (11% more reporting a difference). Around 10% of the workers found the new arrangements more stressful. The average hours worked on the Pathfinder Programme came to 25.5 hours a week. The main sources of stress had to do with lack of relevant knowledge and lack of time available to spend on individual cases. The median time spent on any case was 14 hours although in some consortia this figure increased to 45 hours. Costs of delivering the Pathfinder Programme varied considerably. The authors of the report suggest that, in part, this was due to the degree to which the percentage of pupils with existing statements varied from area to area, since these children would require less detailed assessments. There is, however, another possible explanation and that is that not all local authorities were minded to display the same levels of commitment during the assessment, planning and follow up stages.

In summary, the information collected from this rather superficial (and probably expensive) evaluation yields very little useful information. Partly this is because the timing was such that it was too early to expect significant outcomes to emerge as a result of the reform within the space of two years and until a
significant number of children without previous statements were available. Even so the analysis relies wholly on simple descriptive statistics so that it is not possible by means of more sophisticated multivariate procedures to identify particular groups of families and children who, for example, are at greater risk, or the effects of poverty and so forth. Above all, perhaps at the insistence of the Department of Education, there is no room in the study to examine the effects of these changes on schools and teachers; the institutions and people who are in the front line when it comes to implementing the eventual plans. Hence this present study is timely, in that it offers a different perspective on the reforms from that so far available.

**Providing for current needs**

In April 2013, the present coalition introduced changes to the existing funding system as a prelude to the introduction of the EHCP process. Basic funding continues to be based on the total number of pupils in the school. The exact amount per pupil is agreed locally so there is some variation across local authorities. The allocation differs for primary and secondary pupils but figures suggest that no secondary school gets less than £3,000 while the estimated minimum figure for primaries is £2,000 per pupil (Stobbs & Evans, 2014).

Schools now also receive a ‘notional SEN budget’. The amount is negotiated between schools and the local authority and is based on a formula with specific weightings for factors such as number of pupils on free school meals (FSM) and the numbers in previous years with low attainment in English and mathematics. The actual method used to allocate money to individual schools varies from one authority to another. Out of this notional budget a school is expected to pay for the first £6,000 of a statemented pupil’s needs. The Government’s Code of Practice states that money from the notional budget must ‘meet a child’s SEN that is “additional to or different from” provision made for all children and to ensure that ‘special provision’ is also made to meet the SEN of a child at school action or school action plus.

The third strand of money, ‘top up funding’ is available when a pupil with a statement of SEN needs more than £6,000 of provision. Schools bid to the local authority for money out of the ‘high needs block’ of reserved funds.

Academies and free schools get their funding from the Education Funding Agency but the respective payment for each pupil and the notional SEN budget is based on the figures used by the local authority in whose area they are based. Academies can apply to the local authority for additional money from the ‘high needs block’ of reserved funds. Although not related specifically to SEN,
academies can get additional money from the funding agency in order to buy additional services that the local authority provide for free to their maintained schools. This might, for example, consist of a place in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) for a child with behavioural problems.

**Shifting priorities and their enforcement**

In reporting our findings in the preceding chapters inclusion has to be seen within the current wider educational context and as it impinges on schools and teachers. In particular, the increase in the number of schools outside the mainstream has meant that the funds available to local authorities have decreased and by implication less money is now available for supporting special needs of all kinds and at all levels. At the same time schools are being held accountable with the new inspection criteria increasingly focussed on academic outcomes at the expense of social and emotional aspects of learning. In the latest inspection regulations, for example, all mention of students’ wellbeing has been removed despite the fact that the UK is near the bottom of the international league tables on this measure. Ministers in the Department of Education have justified these changes on the ground that ‘getting rid of these peripherals will allow teachers to concentrate on the essentials [i.e. the test scores]’. Ofsted under its present leader, Sir Michael Wilshire, would appear to endorse this shift in emphasis. Reminiscent of the so called ‘reign of terror’ embarked upon by one of his predecessors under Mrs Thatcher’s Conservative Government, schools regarded in the past as satisfactory are no longer to be tolerated. While few might challenge the motive behind this attempt to ‘raise the bar’ as a means of raising overall standards, it is the accompanying talk of an ineffective teaching force with low expectations that has caused concern among the profession, who see themselves, once again, being made scapegoats for the ills of society in general. In recent speeches and reports, Sir Michael has accused too many schools of ‘coasting year after year’, and castigated headteachers who fail to drag schools up to ‘standard’. (Daily Mirror, February 18th, 2014). The country’s children are being held back by too many teachers ‘tolerating low-level disruption’ in their classrooms, (Daily Telegraph, 7th March, 2014). Teachers have low expectations and are ‘writing off white children of working class families’. They moan too much about their problems and many dress scruffily, setting a bad example to their students (TES January 15th, 2014).

Those in school with responsibility for pupils with special needs, supported by expert opinion, tend to work to an understanding that improving the academic performance of such children is conditional on first raising their levels of self-esteem such that they gain the confidence to interact with their peers and teachers in ways that make them feel fully integrated within the school.
community. Research clearly demonstrates that ‘school connectedness’ is a vital ingredient of academic success. To be told therefore by those who formulate and monitor policy that social and emotional aspects of learning are to be devalued is in essence to undermine the rationale on which attempts to develop an inclusive school community have been based, and to call into question the values of those who have dedicated their working lives to improving outcomes for children with special needs.

Matters are not helped by the inconsistencies of the inspection process (as discussed above). Eight years ago, in the previous Inclusion study, we frequently came across anecdotal accounts of the inspection lottery where grades depended on the competence of the visiting team. More recently, a review of the inspection process has confirmed these accounts (Waldegrave & Simons, 2014). The report focused on two main issues; first, were the inspectors’ judgements accurate and second, whether the Ofsted judgements exercised a fair and proportionate impact on schools.

On the first issue the report found that that while most schools felt that the judgements on individual components of inspection (achievement of pupils, quality of teaching, leadership and management, and behaviour and safety) were appropriate there was considerable variation in the importance given to each component in arriving at an overall judgment and to the reliability of the quality of teaching measure. The researchers studied some 1,200 inspection reports and found a high degree of association between the achievement sub-grade and the overall result of the inspection. This was particularly true of schools with a ‘satisfactory – requires improvement’ or an ‘inadequate’ overall assessment. Only in outstanding schools did teaching quality appear to contribute significantly to the overall grade.

However, the lesson observation on which the teaching quality sub-grade was based came in for severe criticism with the research team concluding that the observations were neither valid nor reliable. In terms of their predictive validity at the extreme ends of the grading (outstanding and inadequate) the chance of agreement between judgements of quality and a measure based on the value added achievement of a particular class (i.e. their academic improvement) was only 29% in the best cases. In terms of reliability the report quotes figures showing that the probability of agreement between inspectors is only 61% in the best case. When this average figure is broken down by sub categories the results at the extremes are worse. For example, the probability that inspectors will agree in their judgements of ineffective teaching is only 38%. The authors of the report, therefore, suggests that lesson observation should be replaced by a student ‘school experience’ survey which asks questions about the teaching, behaviour,
bullying etc. Despite the fact that since 2009 Ofsted has deemed that lessons should not be graded there was overwhelming agreement among the panels of headteachers and teachers interviewed that this practice continued.

On the second issue, the impact of inspections, the Policy Exchange report not only notes the high levels of stress among staff and the drastic consequences which can result in staff dismissal, but also suggests that the process acts as an inhibitor of innovation because schools seek to ‘play safe’. The report notes that while schools at risk tend to over-interpret the Ofsted criteria leading to over-planning for inspection, this often results in adverse consequences. However, outstanding and good schools also tend to favour maintaining the ‘status quo’ on the grounds that changes in curriculum and methods of instruction might not produce a similar satisfactory result.

The report is also highly critical of the practice of recruiting additional outside people to carry out inspections, arguing that many of these function under a ‘twice removed’ form of accountability being employed indirectly through regional contractors (Regional School Inspection Providers or RSIPs). Many of these Additional Inspectors (AIs) who work in RSPI teams are part-time and lack the necessary skills for making the various judgments or the competence to interpret the data that results. The report’s authors conclude that inspector person specifications should be tightened, and that only those with recent teaching experience in a particular phase (secondary, primary etc.) or subject should be accepted for training. All recruits should have to pass a data interpretation test and that their judgements should be subject to a test of inter-rater agreement. Without more rigorous recruiting and quality control of inspectors the current concerns of the professions are likely to continue. In particular, since the evidence suggests that inspectors’ judgements are more questionable when they concern pupils of lower attainment, the consequences for schools that for various reasons have relatively high numbers of SEN pupils are likely to be severe.

The earlier chapters provide evidence which suggests that from the schools’ perspective, the new approach to SEN provision is likely to increase workloads, create further disparities in funding arrangements and leave teachers unclear about the nature of the information they need to record in order to demonstrate that children, previously on the ‘action’ and ‘action plus’ registers, are making acceptable progress. For this reason we conclude this report by suggesting that, of the various recommendations contained in the previous chapter, the following six need immediate action.
Key Recommendations:

1. As schools are often torn between the need to provide pupils with the necessary life skills at the same time as producing a credible record of achievement for Ofsted, serious attention should be given to the negative impact of inspection and current approaches to accountability. Ofsted’s reporting of SEN provision has been shown to be inconsistent and often counter productive, failing to take sufficient account of the experiences of many children with SEN, and the ability of schools to collaborate and innovate in the interests of those children.

2. Given the Education Department’s present emphasis on written examinations to the exclusion of other forms of assessment, Ofsted needs to engage with the profession in critical appraisal of what constitutes ‘adequate’, ‘good’ and ‘exceptional’ progress for children with learning and behavioural disabilities, together with reappraising the appropriateness of testing protocols.

3. SEN funding in different local authorities varies considerably and this can pose serious problems when families move from one part of the country to another. The Audit Commission should be asked to investigate the impact of the present funding arrangements with regard to SEN provision and to suggest ways in which some of the present anomalies might be dealt with.

4. Arts’ therapies are widely employed in clinical situations and in schools elsewhere, but not in this country. Given the reduced levels of support by most LEAs and Health Authorities for children with SEN who don’t qualify for a EHCP, funds should be found to bring back programmes such as Creative Partnerships, which were discontinued by the present government, but as evidence has shown, were extremely effective in improving behaviour and raising attainment among disaffected and excluded students, many of whom had learning or behavioural problems.

5. It is critical to the nature of provision that policy language and rhetoric does not of itself undermine teachers’ efforts to offer appropriate provision for children with special needs. The adverse references to social and emotional aspects of learning and to ‘peripherals’ (for so many children at the core of learning difficulties) is undermining of teachers, children and families. This is an issue that merits urgent attention by policy makers to the evidence from this study, among others.

6. The first Cost of Inclusion Report was used by the then House of Commons Education Committee to make recommendations on special needs provision. The publication of this follow up report, nearly a decade later, is an opportune moment for a similar enquiry by the newly appointed
committee immediately after this year’s General Election. In particular, the committee should investigate the admission practices of Academies and Free Schools for children with moderate and complex learning difficulties, the impact this has on the mainstreamed sector and ways in which LEAs can be supported financially so that they once more provide effective advice to and support for all schools.

References


INCLUSION:
Statements of intent

Since 2002, two Cambridge professors, Maurice Galton and John MacBeath have been researching the impact of government policy on children with special needs. In this their fourth report they identify some of the positive steps taken to provide better support for children and young people now ‘included’ in mainstream classrooms. They also identify aspects of government policy which have further disadvantaged children and families, while increasing workload and stress for teachers. This report highlights:

- Competitive policies which have encouraged the ‘cherry picking’ of more able children while excluding the neediest for fear of ‘reputational damage’
- Schools with well developed inclusion policies, admitting ‘rejects’ from academies then finding their once ‘outstanding’ Ofsted ratings downgraded
- In line with Ofsted’s own findings, SEN provision, shown to be inconsistent and often counter productive, underlining the urgency of rethinking current approaches to ‘performativity’ and accountability
- The loss of facilities and local authority support and a revolving door of services, rarely working in collaboration, often competitive and counter productive
- The heady rush to quantify attainment and ‘value added’ at the expense of music, art, drama and other forms of life enhancing and therapeutic interventions
- A disturbing increase in unqualified teaching. While Teaching Assistants appear to be more experienced and better trained, an increasing number of schools now deploy TAs as classroom teachers

The following from the Office of the Schools Adjudicator Annual Report, published in January 2015, subsequent to the end of our research, contains the following:

Para 48

Too many schools, both maintained and academy schools, that are their own admission authority, are failing to comply with the duties placed on them about admissions. Parents and everyone else are denied the opportunity to see the school’s arrangements and, if they think it necessary, to object on time if the arrangements appear not to comply with admissions law and the Code. Schools that have the status of being their own admission authority have many responsibilities placed on them and with that status comes the duty to take the responsibilities seriously and with respect to admissions to comply with admissions law and the Code.