

What Works? An evaluation of pilot schemes for school inclusion

Initial data summary (from first phase of research, December 2000)

Views of senior managers:

The individual interviews with senior managers (including head teachers, deputy head teachers and other senior staff) in both special school and mainstream settings, together with an analysis of school policy documents, suggests that while managers in both settings tend to agree with the principles of inclusion, there is some diversity of opinion as to what constitutes effectiveness. There were differences of opinion about the kinds of benefits that might be expected, about who might benefit from what, and about the kinds of factors that might inhibit inclusion.

There was a common perception that children with a diversity of impairments and needs could be educated in mainstream schools. However, there were considerable differences in the emphasis given to different factors that might contribute to, or detract from, the success of specific inclusion schemes. This may be partly explained by a distinct lack of clarity of purpose about the inclusion agenda, within mainstream schools. There was general concern amongst management teams in mainstream schools that they lacked a clear understanding of the purpose and objectives for inclusion schemes. As one manager commented, 'if we know what it is that they are trying to achieve, and what criteria have they used to make that judgement about including particular pupils, then we can be more pro-active'. This view, shared by others we spoke to, suggests that while mainstream managers are generally positive about inclusion schemes, the specific objectives and practicalities still concern them.

Views of management teams in special schools:

Assumptions underlying a vision of success

- It should work for everyone, whatever their impairment, and must be available to all age groups.
- Success in inclusion depends on achieving outcomes in all areas - including educational outcomes, social outcomes and health outcomes (although some prioritise educational outcomes).
- Pupils should be considered as part of the mainstream school, rather than part of a unit within it.

Factors inhibiting the inclusion agenda

- Lack of continuity of support for children with certain diagnoses (such as Asperger's syndrome and Autism, at all levels).
- The perceived demands on mainstream schools to operate formula funding and to raise whole school achievement through SAT results.
- Funding and bureaucratic restrictions.

Views of management teams in mainstream schools:

Assumptions underlying a vision of success

- Inclusion will benefit pupils from both settings in different ways: for special school pupils, the benefit is primarily social but also potentially educational; for mainstream pupils it is seen as purely social.

- There should be a benefit to mainstream pupils as well as those from the special schools. Mainstream pupils will benefit socially (by developing experience of meeting more people with diverse needs). This may raise their awareness of disability issues and improve the self-esteem of some hard-to-teach pupils with emotional and behaviour difficulties.
- Children from special schools will benefit from developing new social networks, from being in a busier environment, and from working alongside other pupils.
- Educational outcomes for special school pupils are not seen as a necessary criterion for success. As one manager put it, 'as far as pupils from [the special school] are socially included, the scheme could be said to be successful'.

Factors inhibiting the inclusion agenda

- Developing ways to involve special school pupils in mainstream classes requires a lot of planning, which cannot be done without adequate time and resources.
- The lack of common knowledge and understanding about what the scheme is to achieve, how to achieve and assess it and what administrative outcome it would have for them.
- An absence of clear criteria against which children's progress, or the success of the scheme, could be measured (at the moment, success is judged largely by the absence of major problem, rather than by any particular achievement).

Views of parents of special school pupils:

Initial group discussions and individual interviews with parents of special school pupils suggest that they share many similar concerns, and value similar criteria for success in school inclusion schemes, irrespective of their child's level of impairment. Their concerns clustered around the following themes: support, bullying, continuity, accessibility, flexibility, transport, and acceptance.

Adequate support in the mainstream setting: Parents wanted to ensure that the mainstream school would offer the same level of security and resources to their children as they might receive from a special school.

Continuity in support: Parents stressed that there should be continuity in the inclusion programme. It may not be easy for some children to adapt to new environments, and it would therefore be very difficult for them if support were suddenly withdrawn.

Physical accessibility: Parents wanted to be sure that mainstream schools were adapted to provide a safe environment for their children.

Bullying: Parents wanted to make sure that their children would not be bullied in mainstream settings.

Flexibility of the scheme: Parents valued the choice to opt out of the scheme if, for any reason, they felt that it was not working for their child. They also wanted to ensure that their children would not lose their place in the special school.

Long-term transport arrangements: Parents wanted reassurances that the responsibility for transport to the mainstream school would always remain with the special school and would not become theirs in the longer term.

Positive acceptance from parents of children in mainstream schools: Some parents were concerned that parents of other children in mainstream schools might be hostile towards the inclusion of their children.

Despite these concerns, none of the parents we met were opposed to the idea of the new

schemes for inclusion. Most felt that inclusion might have a positive effect on their child (by providing them with new role models and discouraging them from certain behaviours).

Views of teachers:

While our initial discussions with teachers highlight a shared commitment to schemes for inclusion, and some shared ideas about potential success criteria, they also suggest some significant differences and concerns.

All of the teachers we spoke to, whether in mainstream or special school, confirmed that school partnership has had a positive effect on their pupils' behaviour. In the case of mainstream pupils, inclusion was said to have had a calming effect on pupils, in particular on children with emotional or behaviour difficulties. It has also encouraged them to take a wider view of disability issues. In the case of pupils from special schools, inclusion is said to have had a positive effect on their behaviour by providing them with new role models.

Taken together, the views of teachers suggest a number of key factors for success in inclusion schemes. These include: personal commitment to inclusion, adequate resourcing (financial, physical and staffing), time for joint curriculum planning, additional time for personal planning, shared staff training and support, continuity of provision, and funding security for long term partnership between staff.

Teachers in mainstream schools

One of the major concerns for teachers from mainstream schools was that some children from special schools could not be accommodated within a mainstream model. For example, while both partnership and support schemes were seen to work at primary level, many felt that the same children could not be included at secondary level (because they would find the work hard, and because they might not have the necessary social skills).

Even within partnership at primary level, inclusion was sometimes seen as appropriate to 'less formal' classes, while inclusion in more formal classes, and for older groups, was felt to require more careful consideration. Similarly, in the case of support work, some teachers argue that while their provision was suitable for children in Key Stage 1, the curriculum would be too complex at Key Stage 2. There was often a feeling that inclusion would have little specific outcome for special school pupils (other than a social outcome). Following this argument, some teachers expressed a rather different vision of inclusion to that articulated by the LEA. Mainstream teachers in particular were more likely to argue for flexibility, on the grounds that some children's needs would be better met wholly or partly within a special school.

Teachers in special schools

assumptions underlying a vision of inclusion

- The inclusion agenda should not be impairment specific. It is important to ensure that every pupil is included, whatever his or her impairment (there is a perceived danger that the most able pupils would be transferred to mainstream and those with more complex impairments left behind).
- There should be a continuity of inclusive provision across Key Stages (so that partnership or support does not cease when a child leaves primary school).
- Children should be part and parcel of every part of mainstream school life.
- Inclusion should be considered as a whole school issue (not just an issue for classes where special school pupils are present).

Special school teachers emphasised the need to differentiate work, to set clear targets, and to

develop systems for recording pupil progress (these issues were not generally offered as a priority by mainstream teachers). There was a general view that inclusion would have educational outcomes as well as social outcomes, provided there was an appropriate school ethos, adequate resources and good planning. As one teacher put it, "as long as people are realistic and differentiate the work to the correct level for our pupils, and where you cannot differentiate the pupils take along the work of their own, within the same subject area, and work in the room, working on the things which are appropriate to them". The main message from special school teachers was that their pupils should be treated equally rather than the same within mainstream classes. Special school teachers also raised issues around transport, health professionals' input and lunchtime arrangements.