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# **The Best of Both Worlds?**

## **Parents' views on dual placements.**

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## **Abstract:**

Dual placements, where a child receives their educational provision in two different settings, are promoted by government as being a way forward towards inclusion (Dfes, 2004). However, evidence into their success is sparse and evaluation on existing placements is limited. This qualitative study therefore aimed to seek the views of parents whose children had either been in, or were currently receiving dual placement provision. In depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with seven parents; five face to face and two via email correspondence, to gain qualitative data on dual placements.

The study aimed to investigate whether elements that parents described as being positive and negative about mainstream and special school as separate institutions applied in the same way to dual placements, or whether different benefits and difficulties arose from this type of provision. Additionally, where parents had described dissatisfaction with their child's education, an insight into whether this improved through a dual placement was also sought.

For the dual placements that worked well, there appeared to be some key features, namely:

- Effective and proactive communication
- Partnership working and joint responsibility
- Sharing of resources and expertise
- Apt timing and timetabling.

Despite the literature claiming that special school provision provides less academic challenge, the majority of the parents interviewed had requested special school placements mainly for this purpose and had found that this differentiation and specialist teaching had enhanced their child's academic performance. Furthermore, although the literature also associates mainstream schooling with incidents of bullying and poor peer relationships of children with special educational needs, this was not supported by the parents interviewed, who perceived the mainstream part of the placement as offering the opportunities for socialisation.

Overwhelmingly, the knowledge that parents held of the educational system, whether this was through personal or professional

experience, greatly impacted on the success of the dual placement. Alongside this, the willingness of the mainstream school and the teachers and staff within it, and their agenda from the dual placement also had a huge impact on its success. Almost all parents viewed the dual placement as continuing for their child's primary school years, but were either doubtful, or had not considered continuation into secondary school. For those parents whose children had progressed from a dual placement to full time in special school, they were generally happy with this as an outcome, although some noted that they should have sought this provision much sooner for their child.

A definition as to what a dual placement is, and what provision should categorise itself as such would be highly beneficial, in order to allow for clearer distinction on how these placements are working. Finally, more proactive promotion of dual placements to parents who deem that the choice is either mainstream or special school, would allow them to find out whether dual placement really does offer their child the best of both worlds.

## **1. Background and Basis for the study:**

The term Special Educational Needs (SEN) arose from the Warnock Report (1978), which formed the basis of the 1981 Education Act. It defines special educational needs as when a child has a learning need which necessitates special educational provision which deviates from that normally provided (Barton, 1986). Using this definition of special educational needs thereby defines children under this term as having needs which are different from the 'norm', a value judgement imposed by society (Barton, 1986).

The defining of a child as having a special educational need is a socially constructed concept (Hadley and Wilkinson, 1995; Skirtic, 1988 in Florian and Rouse, 2001) and full inclusion will not be possible until the concept of "normal" is challenged (Whittaker, 2001).

As well as re-labelling children from "handicapped" to those with "Special Educational Needs" the 1981 Education Act also reviewed educational provision for disabled children and introduced the concept of integration (Warnock, 1978 in Ace, 2001). Although there is some acknowledgement that improvements have been made in the

education of disabled children, the “integration and inclusion of disabled children is far from complete” (Davis and Watson, 2001:671) and the number of children in special schools remains unchanged (Ainscow, 1997; Cook et al, 2001) or is increasing (Tomlinson, 1995). This is in spite of the Improving Life Chances of Disabled People (2005) strategy which claimed that “the rhetoric of mainstreaming needs to be followed up by specific action to include disabled children” (DRC, 2005:8) and the view that the number of children in special schools should decrease as mainstream schools increase their skills (Dfes, 2004). It is suggested that to resolve this situation, the function of education as a whole needs to be challenged (Tomlinson, 1995, Oliver, 2000, Lloyd, 2000, Whittaker, 2001).

Schools not only provide children with academic education; they also have a broader role to play in the lives of children, as they:

“shape children’s life chances, transmit society’s values and provide a focus for interaction and engagement between different children and communities” (DRC, 2005:1).

Thus schools are agents of social change (Barton, 1986) and are environments which can disseminate inequality and discrimination



(Lloyd, 2000). Consequently, when considering where and how children with special educational needs should be educated, a long-term view should be taken, reflecting on the aim of disabled people to achieve equality in a society which currently subjects them to oppression and discrimination (Kenworthy and Whittaker, 2000; DRC, 2005).

Although the government has put the steer towards inclusive schools firmly on the agenda through, besides others, the “Removing Barriers to Achievement” strategy, there has been little support for schools to place more emphasis on this. The introduction of attainment tables and the defining of failing schools has been said to promote a competitive market within education, which is obstructing inclusion (Clark et al, 1997 in Davis and Watson, 2001; Fulcher, 1999 in Cole, 2005) and Hadley and Wilkinson (1995) suggest that it is special education which will be the victim of this conflict. “Competition as the instrument of selection will include and it will exclude” (Barton and Slee, 1999:5).

In fact, removal of children who pose a risk to school attainment

appears to be ever increasing, and is a key reason why schools are reluctant to admit children with special educational needs (Audit Commission, 1992a in Cuckle, 1997; Duncan, 2003; DRC, 2005). Children with special education needs are significantly more likely to be excluded from school and in addition to overt exclusion, covert exclusion can also occur; for example by excluding children from particular classes or by using untrained teaching assistants to educate on individual programmes (Ainscow, 1997).

Oppression of certain groups occurs by the defining of “difference”. Attributing the focus of the difficulty as being within the child, rather than as a problem with the education being provided, uses an individualised, medical model of disability (Kenworthy and Whittaker, 2000; Riddell, 1996 in Davis and Watson, 2001). Applying the social model of disability, a child would be said to have special needs, or to be disabled, because of society placing restrictions on his/her ability to participate fully; thus the emphasis is on the inequality of society, rather than a child’s impairment. This does not appear to have been encompassed in policy development and underlying ideology, which continues to define children in deficit terms, rather than addressing

the barriers they face.

The drive towards the education of all children in mainstream provision has undergone a change of direction, in part due to Mary Warnock's recent pamphlet, which suggests that "the ideal of inclusion ... is not working" (Warnock, 2005:35 in Barton, 2005).

Consideration needs to be given to the definition of inclusion and the distinction between the concepts of inclusion and integration. A recent government report declared:

"There is considerable confusion over the term inclusion with a wide range of meanings applied to the term" (Education and Skills Committee, 2006)

Indeed, interpretation of inclusion is varied and some local authorities have been more proactive in inclusion than others (Dfes, 2004; Florian et al, 2004).

It would also appear that some children are content in special schools, whilst others are happily integrated into mainstream settings. Indeed the students studied by Pitt and Curtin (2004), felt that there were positives and negatives to both mainstream and special

schools. Perhaps then contentment with education is concerned with how education is delivered and how children feel that they are included, rather than in with the setting in which it takes place.

In any deliberation about education for disabled children, the issue of how schools can assist society in providing equality for all must prevail over the pros and cons of special or mainstream provision (DRC, 2005); and the views of disabled people, which have generally been overlooked, need to be heard if we are to move towards a more inclusive educational system (Cook et al, 2001; Pitt and Curtin, 2004; Fuller et al, 2004).

Florian et al (2004) suggest that dual placements may be one way to change the focus of inclusion, with special schools using their expertise to support mainstream schools in inclusion. Recent government discourse also suggests a “third way” of inclusion, with co-location and sharing of facilities and environments for special and mainstream schools (Education and Skills Committee, 2006). In 2003, 2000 children were dual registered (Dfes, 2004), but evidence supporting the success of these types of placements is very sparse.

Despite this, the government encourages schools to “consider the scope for a dual placement” implying that this is a way forward (Dfes, 2004:35).

Cuckle (1997) suggests from his study of children with Down’s syndrome that those who are in dual placements benefit from specialised teaching, alongside the opportunity to “experience ‘normal’ educational, language and social interaction” (pp:178). However, he also acknowledges that opinion on the success of dual placements is mixed. Some evidence suggests that the changing from one setting to another may confuse the child, whereas other evidence indicates that dual placements can be very successful, with children benefiting from both school environments (Cuckle, 1997).

This study will reflect on the experience of children who have undergone dual placements, by seeking their parents’ views. Initially the rhetoric of inclusion from a political context will be considered, followed by reflection on how integration and inclusion are defined. Evidence on views about both mainstream and special school provision will be identified while taking into account the fact that

evidence on dual placements is very sporadic.

This study will therefore attempt to investigate whether the factors that are highlighted as being challenging or beneficial for individual settings equally apply to dual placements; whether dual placements overcome the challenges and enhance the benefits of the settings. That is, do the benefits get greater and the challenges less pronounced or do dual placements present new challenges and benefits for the children concerned.

As it is proposed that “dual registration can ... support transition to a mainstream education” (Dfes, 2004:3), the likely outcome from the dual placements will also be addressed, in terms of whether the parents of the children concerned view dual placement as a long term option, as a stepping stone, or as a transitional placement onto to either special or mainstream provision, and the reasons for this. Throughout, the concept of inclusion will be questioned and reflected on and the model of dual placements as a way forward will be considered.

Firstly, a review of the literature will be undertaken. This will address the political context into which special educational needs is placed, including addressing the subject of placement of children in special schools. Consideration will then be given to the definition of special educational needs and to inclusion. Finally, an overview of the opinions on what special and mainstream schools offer will be carried out, to give a broad perspective.

## **2. Considering the existing literature:**

### **The Political Context:**

In considering policy relating to special educational needs it is important to take into account the legislation and government direction that has guided its path. This will be done through a historical viewpoint, giving an overview into what has been decreed by post-war legislation.

Compulsory education was first introduced by the 1944 Education Act. This act stated that disabled children (then termed “handicapped”) would be educated in special schools, unless conditions allowed the children to be educated in “ordinary” schools. The Warnock report and subsequent Education Act (1981) overturned this view, proposing mainstream school as being the usual place of education for all pupils and giving positive support towards integration of children with special educational needs into mainstream schooling (Hadley and Wilkinson, 1995).

Subsequent government legislation continued to acknowledge that children should be educated in their local schools (CSIE, 2005; Dfes,



2004) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) re-emphasised that when a parent wants a place in a mainstream school for their child, this should be provided whenever possible (Dfes, 2004; CSIE, 2005). In fact the last two decades have produced a plethora of government policy supporting inclusion of children in mainstream schools but the view is that this is merely rhetoric, rather than reality (Cole, 2005).

Indeed, educational reform has produced potentially conflicting policies (Davis and Watson, 2001; Florian and Rouse, 2001; Cole, 2005) forming a rift between the drive towards league table positions and school effectiveness on the one hand, and adaptation of schools and teaching to meet the needs of a diverse pupil population on the other (Duncan, 2003; Florian and Rouse, 2003).

Legislation has continued to define disabled children within an individualised medical model of disability (Kennedy, 1995; Hall, 1997 both in Kenworthy and Whittaker, 2000) and an exploration of the impact of this definition of “difference” will now be considered.

### **Defining of difference:**

Whether children are viewed as having special educational needs or being “disabled” depends on how these concepts are defined and the “viewpoint of the perceiver” (Hall, 1996:512). Florian et al agree that “variations in the context produce different ideas about who has special needs” (2004:117).

The 1981 Education Act, which has been described as the “integrationist charter” (Whittaker, 2001:13) compelled local education authorities to provide written details of a child’s needs, when they had been identified as having “special educational needs”. Provision of this written “statement” placed a greater emphasis on the local education authority to provide suitable education for a child, but it has been suggested that the statementing process has instead led to a “... painful and laborious process in which the child is categorised, labelled and segregated” (Whittaker, 2001:13).

Challenging the use of language, rather than challenging the “structural and cultural practices of an organisation” is an easy acquittal for policy makers as it presents less confrontation (Davis

and Watson, 2001:684). However, whilst children continue to be defined as having special educational needs, segregation and exclusion will continue to exist (Tomlinson, 1995; Oliver, 2000; Whittaker, 2001). Some suggest that the process of labelling children will compound them to conform to this description, with the consequent status this implies (Davis and Watson, 2001).

Duncan (2003) suggests that children with special educational needs should be viewed as contributing to a diverse society, rather than being viewed as presenting a barrier to educational accomplishment; we should “relish difference” and discard being “special” (Corbett, 1996:49 in Cole, 2005:340).

Kennedy emphasises that:

“Disabled children must not be segregated, labelled or characterised as “special” children; this de-humanises and isolates them” (Kennedy, 1995 in Kenworthy and Whittaker, 2000:222).

Thus the terms “special needs”, “special educational needs” and “disabled” can be interpreted in many ways and this can lead to

confusion (Hall, 1996). Oliver proposes that the debate around special education has moved from being concerned with “integration/segregation” to being concerned with “inclusion/exclusion”; he suggests that reflection on society, rather than just education is now apparent (Oliver, 2000:18).

### **Inclusion or integration?**

When addressing issues around inclusion, it is helpful to consider how this concept is perceived. Inclusion is a relatively new term in use, compared to the term integration which is utilised in early literature (Bunch and Valeo, 2004). The terms inclusion and integration are sometimes used interchangeably and precise definitions are difficult to affirm. Ainscow (1997) distinguishes integration of children into mainstream schools that are unchallenged in their provision, from inclusion, which she suggests starts with the assumption that all children have a right to attend their local school. The government define the concept of inclusion as “... pupils with SEN should, wherever possible receive their education in a mainstream school” (Lloyd, 2000:140). Hence the debate around inclusion of children with special educational suggests that

mainstream is the way forward in achieving equity. Lloyd (2000) suggests that the aim is to “normalise” children to fit into the existing system, rather than challenging what is provided.

Inclusion is a whole school issue concerning provision of an inclusive environment for all, tackling discrimination of all kinds (Barton, 2005), and developing schools that are responsive to a more diverse pupil population (Ainscow, 1997). However, Hornby and Kidd (2001) describe inclusion as being “fraught with tension” (pp. 26) and portray an increasing withdrawal. The inclusion agenda has also shifted to be a concern for equality of rights and opportunities (Kenworthy and Whittaker, 2000).

“Inclusion is much more than the type of school that children attend: it is about the quality of their experience; how they are helped to learn, achieve and participate fully in the life of the school” (Dfes, 2004:25).

Fundamentally inclusion is an ethical question and suggests that schools should be “integrators and community builders” rather than “sorters and dividers” of children (Biklen, 1985; in Wong et al, 1999:773). Therefore inclusion and exclusion from school can impact

on inclusion and exclusion from society (Slee, 1993; in Wong et al, 1999). Barton and Slee (1999) suggest that moving towards inclusion must involve listening to each other and becoming familiar and comfortable with a diverse society which is non-discriminatory and just. Whittaker too argues that inclusion will never be realised in a system that presents "... partial access, partial support and partial rights" (2001:16).

When considering schooling for their child, it is suggested that parents either base their preference on their own reasoning for the needs of their child; or because they are influenced by professional advice (Ainscow, 1997). Cuckle (1997) also suggests that informal advice, perhaps from other parents, influences parental choice in deciding on school provision. Relevant factors in deciding on school provision will now be considered, by looking at general views on special and mainstream schools.

### **Views on special and mainstream provision:**

Since the Warnock Report was published, the assumption has been that educating children with special educational needs in a mainstream setting was the means to ensuring “equality of educational opportunity” (Lloyd, 2000:133). Recent Government legislation has also implied the reduction of places in special schools and a consequent move towards the education of more children in mainstream schools (HMSI, 2006). However, there have been both positive and negative aspects expressed for both school settings and these will now be explored.

### **Attitudes:**

Whatever the definition of inclusion, in order for it to succeed there are a number of factors that need to be overcome (Wong et al, 1999). Evidence suggests that attitudes of adults and peers affect how disabled children are included in mainstream schools (Leicester, 1992 in Davis and Watson, 2001) and that teachers have a vital role to play in displaying positive attitudes to inclusion, which impacts on the attitudes of all the children in turn (Wong et al, 1999). Some have noted that the teachers most receptive to inclusion are those able to

perform in a reflexive manner (Davis and Watson, 2001); that is, those who question and adapt their teaching to meet the needs of a more diverse pupil population. If teachers are not able to be reflexive in their practice, it can result in the exclusion of disabled children (Davis and Watson, 2001).

Academic provision:

Academic attainment at special schools has been challenged (DRC, 2005). Tomlinson (1982, in Barnes, 1990) suggests that special schools provide inadequate education to children, condemning them to a future typified by “dependence and powerlessness” (Barton and Tomlinson, 1984 in Barnes, 1990). This is substantiated by the 2020 campaign, where “survivors” of segregated education agree that this experience habituated them into becoming passive beings (Alliance for Inclusive Education, 2002).

Statistically children from special schools do less well academically and are less likely to gain employment (Alliance for Inclusive Education, 2002). Despite this, there is also evidence that some children prefer special school education. Disabled people who have



been high achievers felt that attendance at special school provided a protected and supportive environment which aided self identity, but at the same time offered a limited curriculum, inadequate teaching and narrow opportunities (Shah, 2004; in DRC, 2005). Some suggest that segregated schooling can engender self confidence (Cook et al, 2001) perhaps because of being with individuals who have similar capabilities (Hurst, 1984 in Barnes, 1990; Pitt and Curtin, 2004).

However other evidence indicates that many special schools provide an ineffective education and insufficient preparation for adulthood, including preparation for work (Barnes, 1990), and that it is mainstream schools that engender in disabled people the drive towards achieving standards which enables them to compete in a chiefly non-disabled employment market (DRC, 2005). It is suggested that the enhanced resources, better differentiated curriculum and better peer support offered by special schools, may be substituted for low expectations and limited achievement (Hendy and Pascall, 2002 in DRC, 2005).

Pitt and Curtin, in undertaking research with students in further education, found that with the increasing academic demands of secondary education, disabled pupils found themselves disadvantaged by the limited accessibility to the curriculum and the increased pace of work (Pitt and Curtin, 2004). This would suggest that the teaching staff had not differentiated the curriculum to meet the requirements of the pupils concerned, which Wendell et al (2000; in Pitt and Curtin, 2004) attributed to a lack of time for preparation.

Pitt and Curtin (2004) found that special schools were physically accessible and staff had the ability to adapt their teaching in a way that continued to provide challenges, whilst meeting individual requirements. They also noted that increased access to specialist provision, such as to therapists, was also an influential factor on choosing special school provision.

#### Training and resources:

Criticism of mainstream schools has been noted, not only in terms of lack of understanding of inclusion, but also due to the lack of resources (Davis and Watson, 2001; DRC, 2005). Resource issues

may also encompass the lack of training provided to mainstream teachers, which has been highlighted as a concern by teachers and parents alike (Hadley and Wilkinson, 1995). York and Tunidor report that “resistance from general teachers, lack of administrative support, inadequate resources, inadequate consultation and lack of training” (1995; in Wong et al, 1999:774) affect the move to inclusion.

However, the disability movement acknowledges its many allies in the teaching profession (Davis and Watson, 2001:685) and teachers recognise their lack of skills and training around inclusion (Hadley and Wilkinson, 1995). As Wong et al (1999) in their investigation into inclusion in Hong Kong discovered, teachers were aware of their limitations; “no knowledge, no confidence, no support” was summarised as the reaction to integration (pp: 784). Nevertheless, as teachers have a role to play in setting the ethos of the schools (Wong et al, 1999), their approach will impact on the inclusion of children.

There is also evidence that there is good practice in mainstream schools which need proliferating throughout the educational system (Alliance for Inclusive Education, 2002). Although acknowledging that they were the exceptions, Florian et al (2004) found that some

schools have been able to be inclusive and attain high academic standards, refuting the idea that including pupils with special education needs has an impact on academic standards (Audit Commission, 2002 in Florian et al, 2004).

### Well being of children:

Inclusive education is not only about achieving academic success, it is also about socialisation (Wong et al, 1999). Cole's study found that one of the main concerns of mothers was that their children were treated with "dignity and 'care'" and "were made to feel welcome" (Cole, 2005:338 & 337; Roll-Pettersson, 2003). Townsend et al (1993; in Pitt and Curtin, 2004) propose that one of the most crucial features of inclusion is social acceptance by peers. Where schools have been more successful in integration it has benefited the community as a whole (Guralnick et al, 1995, Hadley and Wilkinson, 1995, McGregor and Vogelsberg, 1998, Staub and Peck, 1994; all in Wong et al, 1999), and has led to disabled children being perceived in a "matter-of-fact, non-discriminatory" way (Hadley and Wilkinson, 1995:319).

However, in contrast, Chamber and Kay (1992 in Wong et al, 1999) found that this was not always the case, particularly for children who displayed aggression and disruptive behaviour, although when teachers facilitated social interaction with peers, there were most positive results (Sontag, 1997 in Wong et al, 1999).

Pitt and Curtin (2004) continue to ascertain that disabled children are subject to “rejection and isolation from their mainstream peers” (pp: 396). They agree with previous findings that bullying is an issue for disabled children in mainstream schools and is a concern for adults and students alike (Davis and Watson, 2001; Pitt and Curtin, 2004; Bunch and Valeo, 2004; Cole, 2005). Warnock suggests that disabled children are more likely to be affected by bullying, both in terms of the effect on the children and the frequency of occurrence; thus she argues that specialised schooling may be more appropriate (DRC, 2005).

Parents too sometimes regard the protectiveness of special schools as being beneficial, more so when considering schooling for girls (Hadley and Wilkinson, 1995). Others identify that concern over

safety of children leads to justification of segregation or exclusion, not just from schools, but also from individual classes or subjects (Davis and Watson, 2001). Acceptance of the removal from mainstream into special school of children who are being bullied is therefore also an acceptance of discrimination, by corroborating the rejection of some children (DRC, 2005) and does not challenge the aim of working towards equality for all.

Children attending special schools often have to travel a distance from home, thus isolating them from their local community (Florian and Rouse, 2001; Cole, 2005); where children attend a specialist unit within a mainstream school, thus being integrated on a locational basis, they remain isolated from their neighbourhood (Cook et al, 2001).

Hornby and Kidd (2001) suggest that in secondary schools, inclusion is mainly concerned with social inclusion and the Disability Rights Commission suggest co-locating special and mainstream schools, to offer disabled children specialist provision, whilst enabling integration with their peers in the mainstream (DRC, 2005). However, Santich

and Kavanagh's (1997) study of children who had been integrated in social aspects of the school day, such as morning assembly, showed that overall this did not improve the social inclusion of the children (in Wong et al, 1999).

**Summary:**

Lloyd (2000) suggests that education should be concerned with providing:

“... a barrier-free, flexible, responsive, inclusive learning environment where everyone is entitled to participate fully and to develop his/her full potential” (pp: 146).

Perhaps then those children in dual placements, who access both mainstream and special schools, will find the balance of forming effective social relationships whilst receiving an appropriately challenging educational curriculum, and this will enable them to attain their potential both academically and socially.

However, from the themes arising from the literature and from an epistemological perspective, it may be that rather than providing the “best of both worlds”, dual placements serve more as a compromise,

and are used as a way to effect the transition of pupils from mainstream to special schools, rather than as a mechanism for increasing children's involvement in their local schools and community.

In investigating the success of dual placements, the next chapter will address the methodology of this study, detailing the choice and selection of the participants and the methods of data collection and interpretation. Issues around ethics and the limitations of the study will also be addressed.



### **3. The Study:**

#### **The Participants:**

Although it is acknowledged that the voices of disabled children are often overlooked (Robinson and Stalker, 1998; in Cook et al, 2001; Fuller et al, 2004), there is also an acceptance that when considering school age children, it is the parent who must negotiate and advocate for their child (Duncan, 2003) and that parents will be conscious of the barriers that their children face (Crawford and Simonoff, 2003). Norwich et al (2005) note a paucity of research into parents' views, concluding that research considering home/school relationships focuses on the professional view, rather than that of the parents. For these reasons, in seeking opinions on the experience of dual placements, it was decided to seek parents' views, to give an insight into the experience for their children.

Purposive sampling was used (Robson, 1993) in order to recruit parents whose children had undergone dual placements, to enable them to give a personal view of the experience. The sample was initially gained from the information provided by the local authority for those children in dual placements; that is those that were

documented as being dual registered. It is likely that a number of other children are also experiencing informal dual placements, for example in the form of “day visits” (where a child in a special school attends their mainstream school for a limited time per week). As these arrangements are carried out informally, on an individual basis in schools, data defining which children receive this type of “dual placement” is not collected and therefore those children could not easily be included in the study.

In order that these parents could volunteer themselves to take part in the study, notification of the pending study was submitted into a newsletter which was distributed regularly to parents and schools. In this notification parents were invited to contact the researcher if they wished to participate. This broadened the remit to encompass those children who were receiving unofficial dual placements, which were not accounted for in the initial mail out. Through this a number of parents expressed that they wished to share their views on their child’s dual placement and contact was also received from a parent whose child had been in special school, with one day a week provision in mainstream; the child had received this type of placement

for a number of years and so the parent should be able give their opinion from a longer term perspective.

From the 42 children receiving “official” dual placements, 19 of these children were found to be known to the parent partnership service in which the researcher was employed, and it was decided to contact only these parents. In considering the invasive and sensitive nature of interviews (Hall, 1996), it was felt that by thus limiting the sample these parents would be familiar with the service and would therefore feel more comfortable in participating. Additionally, as these parents had previously been in contact with the service, it is likely that they had already felt concern or were seeking further information regarding their child’s education. It should be noted that although the parents contacted were known to the parent partnership service, they were not known to the researcher, as the researcher was not in a role that involved direct contact with parents, and neither the researcher nor the participants had met before or would have future contact following the interviews. The independent role this would allow the researcher to take was expressed to all the parents, in order to avoid any misapprehension that involvement in the study would impact on

any intervention from the parent partnership service.

Letters were therefore sent out to the parents/carers of the 19 children asking them to participate in the study. From these 19 sets of parents and the response from the initial notification, seven sets of parents indicated that they wished to participate in the study. In order to ensure that the parents understood the remit and context for the study and the role of the researcher described above, further information was then sent out and a consent form was completed prior to undertaking the interviews. The reasoning for this will now be considered.

**Ethical issues:**

Gaining informed consent from the parents to be interviewed was vital in starting to build up a trusting relationship between the interviewer and interviewees (Alderson, 2004 in Roberts-Holmes, 2005), which was necessary in enabling parents to have the confidence to speak freely. In addition to this voluntary consent to participate, it was also crucial that parents understood the purpose of the research. The fact that the research was for the interest of the

researcher and was being carried out independently of both the parent partnership service and the local authority was affirmed verbally and in writing to all participants. Through this, parents were made aware that although the research findings would be shared with the local authority, who had displayed interest in the subject area, the research had not been commissioned or funded by the local authority; hence their stake in the research was for interest only. Although the local authority might give consideration to the findings of the research, parents were made aware that impact on local policy was unlikely.

The intent of the research was therefore clearly expressed to parents prior to participating in the interview process. In conjunction with this, parents were also aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time, and that their decision to take part or not would not impact on any of the services that they or their child received.

### **Study Design:**

In addressing the complex issue of inclusion (Florian et al, 2004) it was decided to undertake a qualitative study. Although the rhetoric of

inclusion could be measured by analysing the number of children with special educational needs in a mainstream setting, this does not inform on effective inclusion:

“Meaningful answers to questions about inclusion ... can be found but they require more than number crunching” (Florian et al, 2004:120).

As qualitative information on the views of positive and negative aspects of education was being considered, it was decided to carry out interviews with parents as these would offer the opportunity to gain more detailed knowledge than responses to questionnaires would allow (Hall, 1996) and would enable clarification of any questions.

Individual interviews were carried out, as although group interviews can be perceived as being more thought-provoking for the participants, individual interviews offer the chance for gaining more in depth, specific data and allows those who would be reserved in communicating in a group the opportunity to make their views known (Pitt and Curtin, 2004; Crawford and Simonoff, 2003). Wong et al conducted individual interviews in addition to focus groups to

accommodate those parents who would not “feel comfortable at the prospect of telling their story in front of others” (Wong et al, 1999:776).

A semi-structured format was chosen, formulating questions to structure the interview schedule, based on the key themes on views of mainstream and special schools that had arisen from the literature search. The interviews were therefore based on gaining more in depth views on issues prompted by the questions, by means of a “guided conversation” (Hall, 1996:516). As Robson described an interview should be a “conversation with a purpose” (Robson, 1993 in Hall, 1996:516).

Due to the commonality of themes arising from the literature, it was felt that these key themes required more explanation than a fully structured interview would allow, but less flexibility than the “fluid agenda” (Robson, 1993:227) of an unstructured interview. Using semi-structured interviews appeared to strike the balance between limiting parents’ opportunity to stray from the focus, as an unstructured interview may allow, whilst allowing the researcher to

further investigate parents' views on a particular theme, which a fully structured interview may hamper.

Semi-structured interviews are seen as offering the “middle ground” in interview techniques (Robson, 1993:227). Undertaking interviews allows the researcher to prompt for clarification if the questions do not reveal sufficient responses (Scott in Christensen and James, 2000), what Roberts-Holmes (2005) refers to as probing. Using semi-structured interviews allows the interviewee to put their personal views across and share their feelings from lived experience (Murray, 2000; Roberts-Holmes, 2005). Thus the findings related to the views in the literature on mainstream and special schools will be compared to the knowledge of the lived experience imparted by the parents.

#### Acknowledging the practicalities and limitations:

In an attempt to provide more flexibility to parents who wished to participate in the study, but who perhaps were restricted by work or family commitments, email interviews were offered as an alternative to face to face interviews. In this way, following response from the initial questions put to the parents, key issues could be followed up by



further email correspondence, as they would in a face to face interview. This probing would enable the researcher to confirm and clarify any points which were unclear and to encourage the respondent to elaborate further if necessary (Roberts-Holmes, 2005:110).

However, it is acknowledged that the lapse of time that email, rather than face to face correspondence would incur, may give parents and the researcher more time to be reflective in the communication.

Postal interviews were discounted due to the subsequent extended time lapse in communication and length of time for reflection that would be inevitable.

By offering email interviews as an alternative, this would also give the researcher additional time to undertake further face to face interviews with other parents, as the email correspondence could be directly compared to the transcription of the tape recordings of the face to face interviews. This would enable more parents to be interviewed within the time limits available. Of the seven parents, five agreed to face to face interview, whilst the other two preferred to participate by

email contact.

On reflection, by inviting parents to participate only through written forms of communication, this reduced the opportunity to participate for those who preferred alternative methods of communication. Inviting participation by a written letter aimed to present a non-threatening means of gaining interest in the study, but perhaps alternative contact, possibly by telephoning parents, may have lessened this bias. Furthermore, as the information was written in the English language, this also discriminated against non-English speakers. This had been noted by the researcher and attempts were made to encourage participation of non-English speaking parents through a specialist worker, but these parents declined to participate. With reference to the location of the interviews, parents were offered the option of meeting in their homes, which may enhance the parents' feeling of power in expressing their views and may make them more comfortable in expressing issues of a sensitive nature. Alternatively, parents were offered the option of meeting at the researcher's work place, which would have resource implications in terms of saving of time for the researcher, but would have consequences for the parents

also, by taking more time and perhaps entailing travel costs. By giving two alternative options, this would allow the parents more control over this element of the research. All of the parents were interviewed in their home environments. As well as redressing any perceived imbalance between professional and parent, this also allowed the researcher more independence in substantiating that the study was supplementary to her working role.

#### Interpretation of the data:

Using a tape recorder to document the parents' views allowed the researcher to concentrate on actively listening to the parents (Roberts-Homes, 2005) rather than trying to make notes during the conversation. All interviews were then transcribed in full. These transcriptions were analysed and coded, based on the common themes identified in the literature. Any further themes which emerged were also identified as separate subject areas and were added to the analysis.

From the themes already evidenced by the literature and further subject areas that arose from parents' interviews, more detailed

coding was carried out. For example, from the theme of well being of children, this was further divided into consideration around peer relationships, how accepted parents felt their children were, social interaction etcetera and any further sub-themes that arose from listening to parents.

### Representation and demographics:

Gender and age are thought to have an impact on inclusion into mainstream schools, (Cuckle, 1997; Leyser and Kirk, 2004; Kenworthy and Whittaker, 2000). The ages of children when the dual placements commenced was noted and consideration was given as to whether this impacted on the success of the placement. In terms of gender, all of the children whose parents participated in the study were boys. However, as the balance of girls and boys documented as undertaking dual placements in the local authority was fairly evenly divided, it can only be assumed that this bias towards boys was co-incidental.

It is acknowledged that not all parents who were invited to participate were willing to do so, and that the experiences of those children in

dual placements could not be explored. Furthermore traveller children and looked after children in dual placements are not represented due to the practical factors of accessing their parents or guardians.

Demographic factors such as social class and marital status of parents which some suggest impacts on parental views (Leyser and Kirk, 2004), will also be disregarded, due to the limitations of this study.

Due to the recruitment issues highlighted above and the choice of carrying out time intensive in-depth individual interviews, it should be noted that a fully representative sample of parents and children cannot be gained within the confines of this study. However, it is also notable that the issue of representation of participants is common when undertaking research which concerns “marginalized, excluded groups” (Crawford and Simonoff, 2003: 487).

In order to offer a more rounded picture of the parents interviewed, to assist with understanding the depth of the information gained, a précis of the circumstances of the parents and children will be given, using pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

### **The Parents:**

Alison's son Adam experienced a dual placement as a transition between a pupil referral unit and a special school, following a permanent exclusion from his secondary comprehensive. Alison has two older children who both attended the local mainstream comprehensive.

Barbara's son Ben started off in a mainstream school and then had a dual placement between this school and a special school. Barbara has four older children who have all been through the local comprehensive school system.

Clare's son Charlie started a dual placement between special and mainstream school after private nursery provision. Charlie has three older siblings who have all attended the local mainstream provision.

Diane's son David started off school in mainstream and then had a dual placement between mainstream and special school. David is an only child.

Emma's son Edward had a dual placement between mainstream school and special school, following full time mainstream provision. Edward has older siblings who attend the local comprehensive.

Fiona's son Freddie was full time in special school and then experienced a dual placement through part time attendance at his local primary school.

Geoff and Gina are the parents of George who had a dual placement from the start of his school career. George has two older brothers who attend the local comprehensive and a younger sister of pre-school age.

**Aims of the study:**

This small scale qualitative study will seek the views of these parents whose children have experienced dual placements. It will aim to ascertain whether their views are compatible with the general views of mainstream and special provision for children with special educational needs and to investigate whether these factors are diminished or intensified through the experience of dual placement. It

will also identify key features in the success and failure of dual placements and the circumstances around this.



#### **4. Decision Makers:**

It was initially wrongly assumed that dual placements would involve children who were in a fairly evenly balanced split between special and mainstream school; however this was not the case. As can be seen from the above outlines, the type of dual placement was variable and was defined in different ways. Therefore defining the success of dual placements may be influenced by the settings concerned and accurate clarification of what constitutes a dual placement would be highly beneficial.

In considering the relative merits of dual placements, the parents were first asked to reflect on how they had become aware of dual placements.

#### **Who influenced the decision to try a dual placement?**

A number of parents found out about dual placements by chance, rather than being offered it as a choice for their child:

“we had never heard of it and I’m not sure how many parents will ... a lot think it’s a matter of mainstream *or* special school”.

Parental choice is becoming increasingly high on the political agenda for schools and the drive towards including parents in decisions around their children with special educational needs is explicit in government direction (Duncan, 2003). As Murray highlights:

“It is a widely held belief that within education generally and within special education in particular, a partnership between parents and professionals is both desirable for and beneficial to a child’s education” (Murray, 2000:683).

One of the key features that this study uncovered was how much involvement parents felt they had in the decision making process for their child’s educational placement and a commonly arising theme was the parents’ knowledge (or lack of knowledge) and their level of confidence about education in general and special educational needs provision in particular. Some parents expressed that they knew of other parents who had been directed in what was best for their child by professionals, but that they had used their knowledge from having older children who had been through the school system in guiding their decision making. Three sets of parents who had older children felt that this had increased their confidence in advocating for their child’s needs.

Note was also made as to the impact that this had on gaining the support of the schools in facilitating a dual placement. As Clare said:

“I think it helped that my three elder children had all attended the school, so the school knew my son and all of us as a family quite well”.

However, this was not always the case and Barbara reflects:

“I thought that, all my kids have been there and I’ve certainly been involved in that school since my eldest has been there ... and I would have thought the staff and the parents would have given me the support that I needed as well ... and it wasn’t there, it was a totally different kettle of fish”.

Duncan (2003) notes the enormous stress that opposition of the special education needs bureaucracy causes for parents and suggests it creates more anguish than “Divorces, family bereavements and serious illnesses ... “ (Duncan, 2003:352). In a similar vein, parents recurrently commented on the emotional impact that school had on them and their children, and the effect that this had on their acceptance of things that they previously would not have endured “we just couldn’t face it anymore and we just needed relief”.

Swain and Walker (2003) found that parents reported the need to display certain behaviour, at odds with their usual personality, in order to get what their child needed:

“You shout loud and you’re very aggressive and you’re heard and you get....you have to learn to be aggressive sometimes and that hurts.” (pp: 554).

This was corroborated by the parents interviewed for this study, who felt that they had had to persevere in gaining access to a special school:

“it was always a fight, and you really had to stand your ground and to fight for it because if you didn’t it wouldn’t be offered to you” (Geoff and Gina).

Children need a statement of special educational needs to access special school and consequently a dual placement, and comment was also made on the struggle to achieve this:

“we found the statementing process very arduous and far too long and quite ridiculous but it was something that you have to go through” (Emma).

Diane, who was very resistant to David going to a special school described how she spent the first day of his attendance there crying, but that looking back, and seeing the progress David had made since accessing the specialist support felt “it was the best decision I could have made”. Perhaps then despite Diane’s reluctance to consider special school for David, professional opinion played a part in swaying her opinion.

The reasoning behind the move to a dual placement and how much control parents had in this will now be considered.

### **What were the reasons for seeking a dual placement?**

Both Clare and Emma felt that special school provision would be needed at some point in their child’s education and that mainstream would not be the correct placement long term. Emma felt that dual placement would pave the way for this transition from mainstream to special school and Clare wanted Charlie to be educated firstly alongside non-disabled peers in order to experience mainstream society, prior to entering special school.

Diane and Barbara sought support from special schools to sustain the mainstream placement because the mainstream schools were failing their children and lacked the mechanisms to gain support. For Alison, the dual placement offered support to all concerned. For Fiona, the aim from the dual placement was to allow Freddie to experience social integration with local children from his community. Geoff and Gina felt that a dual placement offered a compromise between their wish for George to go to special school and the local authority's drive towards mainstream.

The important role that parents have to play in the education of their children is acknowledged (Orlowska, 1995), but it is questionable as to how much choice parents really have when professionals remain the "gatekeepers" to decision making (Swain and Walker, 2003:549). As is clear from Geoff and Gina's experience, professionals play a key role in the decision making around access to placements and this will now be addressed further.

Three sets of parents noted the resistance from the local authority and the educational psychologists within it, in accessing special

school provision for their children. Geoff and Gina described the local authority “pushing the mainstream” and were concerned about George being “chucked in” and left to cope. Emma described her reluctance to let Edward be used as a “guinea pig” and felt that there was “too much pioneering about mainstream schools”.

For Emma who instigated the dual placement, a positive and proactive response was received from the head teachers of the special schools she visited, though all of them made reference to the resistance that may be encountered from the local authority in pursuing such a placement. In different circumstances, for Freddie who was being educated in a special school, the drive towards a dual placement came from the special school itself, although his parents had never considered that this would be a possibility.

These examples would suggest that special schools are more motivated to engender the idea of dual placement than mainstream schools or the local authority are, although the smallness of the sample needs to be acknowledged in making this assumption and further exploration needs to be undertaken with a larger sample size.

A number of parents noted that the mainstream schools their children were attending did not want to admit defeat by acknowledging that they lacked the skills to progress the children:

“They didn’t want to say that they’d failed and thought it would look bad on themselves if they thought they had to ask for help”  
(Geoff and Gina).

Emma commented that so much of the success depended on the willingness of the mainstream placement to embrace the concept of a dual placement. From all seven dual placements, it is noteworthy that only two sets of parents commented on the fact that the school staff had spent time in each other’s settings. In light of this, it can only be assumed that school staff either had little or no knowledge of each other’s setting, or that they gained their knowledge through some alternative means. A number of parents interviewed made reference to how their preconceived ideas about special schools that were not borne out in practice and that the lived experience was different. Other factors that influenced the decision making will now be considered.



### **Other influential factors:**

Parents noted that they had been influenced by society's view of mainstream and special schools. Emma felt that society's belief was that to move to a special school would be like "throwing the towel in" and that special schools were endorsed as symbolising failure. Geoff and Gina commented on parents' drive to place disabled children in mainstream school "because it makes them the same as everyone else", and that they knew of parents who had put their children into special schools for their secondary education and then wished that they had done it years before.

Parents commented on how the dual placement gave them a clearer choice in deciding on their child's future education:

"with a dual placement you can see both sides and it gives you that choice then...you can see where they thrive and what works for them and it may be that both work and they can continue with dual placement and if it doesn't work at least they've had the option and they've seen..." (Geoff and Gina).

Alison agreed:

"...they're not thrown in at the deep end ... he's still got one

safety net in case the other one fails”.

Another important aspect in the decision making process requires consideration. This is the role that the children had in making decisions around their school placement. Although a specific question on how much involvement their children had in deciding on their school placement was asked, few parents made explicit reference to their child’s involvement. Although it is accepted and endorsed that parents are responsible for advocating for their children in deciding on school placements, some interesting comments were made by parents who did acknowledge their child’s input.

**The child’s view:**

For some children, attending two different schools can be perplexing:

“he still can’t come to grips with why he goes to two schools and he gets mixed up with which one’s which” (Diane).

For children who are unable to verbally express their views, some demonstrated their feelings in other ways. For example, Edward took to hiding his school uniform to protest at his attendance at special school. Although this was an initial reaction and Emma felt that Edward had begun to be more positive about his attendance at

special school she said:

“it has been harder, perhaps because he wasn’t consulted; we didn’t particularly take his feelings into account. We knew that he wouldn’t like it, but we didn’t realise quite how much he would object to it and we should have thought about that. He’s ten years old and we took him away from his mates, we didn’t respect that really”.

Ben started to display aggressive behaviour on the days that he was due to go to special school. Barbara took this as an indication that Ben was objecting to the dual placement:

“we came to the conclusion that it was (Ben) telling us that he didn’t like it, that he liked the other option”.

Geoff and Gina also took George’s repeated requests for the bus which took him to special school as a sign that he preferred this option.

Tuning in to Ben’s display of his feelings in deciding when to end the dual placement had a positive impact for Barbara:

“I used to have to drag him to the car, carry him to the car, carry him into school because he wouldn’t go in, now he’s up

and happy ... he's all excited when he sees the bus, he's a totally different little boy".

Schools also failed to acknowledge children's ability to make their views known. Alison commented that whilst she felt that Adam was manipulating school staff through his behaviour, "he'd say jump and they'd say 'how high'", the school's response was "no he's not, no he's not, he's not that clever", despite Alison's assurance "he is that clever!"

These examples show that despite parents acting in their child's best interest, the opportunities for children to make their needs known were not fully addressed either by parents or by schools. It is also acknowledged that in overlooking their children's views, parents were striving to find a perfect fit for their child's education, when neither special nor mainstream seemed to be the perfect match. As Barbara said; "I obviously didn't give (Ben) the credit that he deserved and I thought he would benefit from both sides".

As the above demonstrates, the opportunity for children to participate in decisions is restricted and parents also struggle to be heard, thus society's views and input from professionals continue to play a role in dictating children's school placements. For the children in this study, none of whose prior placements had been wholly successful, dual placement was felt to offer the best solution, whoever, or whatever influenced this decision.

Views about mainstream and special schools have already been highlighted in chapter 2 and consideration will now be given as to how these views apply to dual placements.

## **5. The specifics of dual placements:**

As has been shown, the reasons behind opting for a dual placement and the planned aims from it are varied. Benefits and limitations of mainstream and special schools have been highlighted in chapter 2 and a comparison needs to be made between those general views and the views of parents interviewed to see whether there is any corroboration with the experience of dual placements.

### **Collaboration.**

Norwich et al (2005) suggest that one feature of an inclusive school is that it offers “greater participation and collaboration” (p. 149). Emma also made reference to this need for collaboration in order to make a successful dual placement, “that’s the magic ingredient, if they’re looking at working in partnership”.

Effective communication was habitually the most important aspect of success for dual placements, with all but one of the parents making specific reference to the necessity of efficient interaction, both between the schools and with them as parents. Diane noted that the

lack of communication was the biggest downfall of the split placement and that she was seen as the conduit for information sharing:

“I’d hoped that there would be more communication between the two schools ... they tend to communicate to me and expect me to pass it on between the schools”.

This challenges the role of the parent and their involvement in their child’s education. Although it is vital that parents are engaged in their child’s education, it should not be their role to facilitate its success by being the link between the two schools. As Emma expressed “I’m *his mum*, and although I am a teacher, I’m not *his teacher*”.

Gina and Geoff who were seeing a successful placement largely due to the skills of the teaching assistant (TA) working with their child across the two settings, observed that it was the TA who was expected to bridge the communication between the schools, although this was implicitly, rather than expressly, asked for. Clare too had seen a successful dual placement for Charlie, in part due to the consistency of the teaching assistant and their ability to form the link between the two schools.

Fiona and Emma especially noted the effort that the schools had made to elicit face to face communication, by spending time in each other's setting. Although communication was not a particular concern for Fiona, she did highlight that formal feedback on Freddie's progress was overlooked, and Emma felt that information sharing was more an exchange of news, than a proactive discussion. More successfully, when targets were agreed and worked on together between the schools, there were more positive outcomes.

Geoff and Gina felt that the key to a successful placement for George was the transparency of communication, although they had to be proactive in achieving this; "if you don't communicate with them then you don't find out half of what's going on". They also made reference to the fact that communication between the schools tended only to happen in formal meetings and reviews, rather than on a regular basis.

Parents made reference to the enhanced resources, particularly in terms of speech and language therapy, in special schools and how this was lacking in mainstream provision. Geoff and Gina and Emma



all commented on the lack of initiative and skill in the mainstream school to make effective use of the resources available to them.

Alison referred to the smaller class sizes in the special school "... I think he gets more quality, more time now". Emma too referred to the positive impression she had of the facilities in special schools and how this led them to reflect on wholly mainstream provision for Edward:

"we thought, we're missing out here, we're missing out on so much specialist help ... we're actually shutting doors on ourselves".

Alongside comments on resources, more frequent reference was made to the lack of training of mainstream staff to facilitate children's progress and that this, combined with the limited resources, contributed to the failure of mainstream placements to successfully meet the needs of their children. However, in a more positive situation, Clare noted that the special school had been able to pass on ideas and share resources with the mainstream school and sometimes this sharing of information was reciprocated by the mainstream school.

### **The Academic Aspect:**

Despite the literature indicating that special schools lack academic challenge for children, a number of parents sought special school involvement due to the mainstream school's inability to progress their child's learning. As Emma pointed out:

“He's been coasting at junior school for a long time, he has a lovely time, socially he's happy as anything, but they simply don't know how to move him on, how to educate him...”

This may reflect on the school's inability to find the balance between offering sufficient flexibility whilst continuing to offer appropriate challenge. One way that this is managed is by getting children to repeat a year. Of course this is only manageable for a short period of time; as Geoff and Gina pointed out for George “he can't keep on repeating year 3 forever”.

Parents also observed the lack of knowledge of mainstream staff in facilitating success for their children and the misperception that if a member of staff had previously worked with a child with special needs, this gave them the knowledge and confidence to work with all

children with special needs: “I don’t think she realised what she was taking on” (Geoff and Gina).

Parents indicated that the reason why their child was not making progress in their learning was due to the school’s inability to adapt the curriculum to meet their child’s needs “not just letting him get away with what he wanted to do” (Geoff and Gina). Diane, was able to identify David’s progress, but felt that the mainstream school failed to acknowledge this and she was often given negative feedback about his progress “he’s not achieving anything, we don’t know what to try to help him achieve something”. Barbara too acknowledged the lack of academic recognition from mainstream and said “I wouldn’t say he got anything” when referring to what that school offered Ben. In her reasoning for this, Barbara said:

“I don’t think they brought their curriculum down to his level, they would try, but it was still too big a chunk at a time”.

In contrast, parents commented on the progress in learning that their children achieved in the special school. Perhaps in addition to the differentiation of the curriculum, special schools are also able to be

more flexible in how they deliver the curriculum. Barbara felt that “they seem to be making the learning more fun”. Diane also commented on how much more David had learned in the special school, rather than in the mainstream:

“he’s come on in leaps and bounds and he’s started to read letters and words now which he never did until he went to (special school)”.

Comments as to whether this increased learning was encompassed by the mainstream school varied. Barbara commented on the reluctance of the mainstream to use any of the ideas that were suggested by the special school and stated that when specialist staff tried to impart their knowledge to support the mainstream school it wasn’t always fully embraced “it seemed too much trouble to activate that into mainstream”. More positively, Diane said of the mainstream:

“they wouldn’t have thought that he would have got to this stage, so they’re really pleased that he’s making this progress as well”.

Geoff and Gina spoke of the benefits of George’s teaching assistant being able to bring strategies for learning across from special into

mainstream school. Emma too spoke of the relief to the mainstream school when they could see the basics of learning being put into place by the special school, something that they had not been able to do: “they were running out of ideas ... differentiation was becoming more and more of an issue”. Alison also is positive about Adam’s learning at special school:

“...so his work is getting better, but he always has been bright, but I think he just needed the encouragement, you know, he can do it ...”

A number of the parents made reference to specific teachers or learning assistants who had made the dual placements successful, not only due to them being able to adapt the learning, but also due to their enthusiasm and attitude.

### **Attitudes:**

Reference is frequently made to the need for teachers and schools to adopt positive attitudes (Wong et al, 1999; Leyser and Kirk, 2004; Pitt and Curtin, 2004; Florian and Rouse, 2001) and as addressed in chapter 2, the attitudes of school staff play a major role in how

children respond and are accepted into school. Both Geoff and Gina, and Emma made reference to how the motivation from individual teachers had a huge impact on the success of the dual placement and to how the attitude of a class teacher could make or break a dual placement.

For those dual placements that had worked well, parents attributed a large part of the success to the skills and competence of the staff that worked with their child. For Geoff and Gina and Clare, consistency of teaching assistants working across both settings assisted the success of the placement. Fiona, in describing the success of Freddie's placement, said "All the teachers remained positive and enthusiastic throughout the placement". Unfortunately, the same could not be said of Ben's experience. Barbara described the comments of a member of the mainstream school staff:

"children like that shouldn't be in school, this isn't the place for children like that, they don't need to be here ..."

When questioned as to whether this was the attitude of a single member of staff only, Barbara felt that it was the majority view. Her conclusion from this was "if they've got that sort of idea and that sort

of prejudice, you're not going to get to them".

Diane believes that the positive progress that the special school was able to make with David impacted on how he was received in mainstream and that attitudes became more encouraging. Emma too commented on how Edward was received more positively by the mainstream school once his dual placement had started, feeling that for the mainstream school ".. it was pressure off". However for Barbara, this relief led to the mainstream school absolving their responsibility. She summarised their attitude:

"some one else is taking over, let them have him, we don't need this hassle and from that minute on school really sort of stopped trying if you like, put up more stumbling blocks"

Parents also noted the reluctance of mainstream schools to involve their children in extra curricular activities, such as school productions, either because of an oversight, or intentionally. With reference to George's school play, Geoff and Gina said:

"you would have thought that they could have found him something ... he could have sat with them to include him a bit,

but it didn't happen, so he got a bit upset about it ...”

How schools sought to include children generally and how they encouraged social relationships will now be considered, alongside investigating parents' views on what they felt the elements of mainstream and special schools offered from a social point of view.

### **The Social Aspect:**

Parents frequently made reference to their child's ability, or the ability of the school, to “cope”, rather than seeing school as an enjoyable experience for all concerned, and held the view that their child “wouldn't cope forever in mainstream”. Unfortunately, for two of the children whose parents were interviewed, the inability of the schools to “cope” had led to the children being excluded. For these two children, there had been a significant build up to this point, with both parents and schools identifying problems, but unable to find solutions.

Emma felt that Edward's academic needs were overlooked because he was superficially “coping” successfully in mainstream school and socially was very included. She knew that Edward was not having fulfilling days at school as the curriculum was going over his head,



but she felt that he was accommodated by the school as he was a “nice child” and did not present them with any behavioural challenges. In this way, children who behave well and comply with their school’s agenda have the potential to “slip through the net”.

For children who presented more behavioural challenges, acceptance into school was not always as straight forward. Barbara found that the school staff avoided contact with Ben, because they were apprehensive of him:

“I think it was lack of experience, prejudice and immaturity and fear because they didn’t know; they’ve never known anybody like it before”.

Diane commented on how David was educated separately, with a teaching assistant and two other children:

“we’re not completely happy with that, that wasn’t the point of him staying there; the point of him staying there was purely for him to get the social interaction with his peers”.

Reference was also made to the need for their child to establish new relationships with new peer groups, due to them repeating years of school and thereby losing their social group.

Despite the concerns highlighted above, the social element was the main factor for parents who wished to maintain the mainstream element of the dual placement. Four sets of parents commented that they viewed mainstream school as providing the social aspects of education for their children, particularly the aim to get to know local children, with Fiona saying that this was the sole aim for Freddie. This is perhaps reflective of how society discriminates against inclusion of children with special educational needs in a broader sense. As Diane highlighted:

“I still want him to have some mainstream in his life and at the moment that’s the only mainstream thing that he can sort of access”.

Despite the literature around mainstream schools suggesting that bullying of children with special educational needs occurs, this was not identified as a concern by any of the parents interviewed.

However, this may be because all but one of the children were still in primary school, where bullying is less common; Clare made reference to the risk of bullying influencing their decision not to prolong the dual placement into secondary school. In noting the benefits of

socialisation in mainstream, Clare said “the other children were really good with him and he was totally accepted”. However, this comment suggests that social acceptance of Charlie in mainstream school was not guaranteed and was a relief, rather than an expectation.

The perception of their child by their peers as being needy was picked up by some parents. Geoff and Gina pointed out; “especially the girls used to mother him”. Although they did not have any concerns about this and felt that George had benefited from the social aspect of mainstream school, they noted with interest:

“well the strange thing is we had a birthday party for him ... and we asked him who he wanted to ask and he said everyone from (special school) and no one from mainstream at all!”

Diane too made reference to the tendency of other children to look after David, but said that the school had sought to address this:

“the teachers have been quite good at trying to explain to all the children, you need to let (David) do what he can do himself”.

The removal of children from their local school to a special school setting also impacted on the child and family’s ability to establish their

social role in their community. For Freddie, who attended his local primary school at the request of the special school, the social impact for himself and his family was noted. Fiona said:

“two years later my son’s old classmates still stop to chat to him ... he has joined a local church youth group. I do not believe that he would have had the confidence to do this without the dual placement”

Barbara, in reflecting on the fact that Ben was no longer attending his local mainstream school said:

“all of the kids that go there (are local) he’d of being seeing them every day, it would have given him a little bit of a chance”.

For Edward, who had a “socially brilliant time at junior school”, the impact of a dual placement also affected his mainstream peers.

When talking about Edward’s friends, Emma commented:

“when he moved to a dual placement it really affected them, they were concerned about what was happening to him and it was almost as if they looked at him like a child with disabilities again, they’ve not looked at him in that way for such a long time”.

For Adam, Alison feels that having friends from both the local community and special school has benefits:

“he’s got friends at school that he can play with, and then he’s got his own little group of friends out of school ... he seems to like that better”.

Two sets of parents also commented on how they felt the presence of their child in mainstream had had a positive affect on the children as a whole. Fiona said:

“Several of the parents of our son’s classmates have told me that they enjoyed getting to know him and that they have gained an important insight into disability”.

Geoff and Gina affirmed:

“the main point of him going to mainstream was his socialisation, and to help him and in some ways to help the other children accept someone who’s not the same as them and I think from that point of view it did work”.

Fiona felt that it had been beneficial that a member of staff from the special school had spent an afternoon at the mainstream school

explaining to the children about Freddie, who had a physical impairment. Although this may seem excessive, it may have been that the children had never experienced a child like Freddie in their school before, as Gina and Geoff commented; “it was the first time they’d had a child like (George) at the school”. Gina and Geoff felt that the school’s experience of George may have paved the way for future successful dual placements.

A comparison has been made between the thoughts documented on special and mainstream schools and how these apply to dual placements. Similar themes arose in describing dual placements, but not always with the same emphasis. In terms of academic performance, despite the literature indicating that special schools offer a more limited curriculum and fail to prepare children adequately for the world of work, this was not a concern for the parents interviewed. In contrast, they sought the specialist knowledge of special schools to enable their children to progress academically, often with very positive results. The benefits of the enhanced resources that special schools offer had also progressed a number of the children and, as was highlighted in the literature review, both

these resources and the training of staff in special schools attracted parents to this type of provision. How well this knowledge was shared between the settings also impacted on success; and the willingness and ability to communicate affected this joint working. The vast majority of parents saw the mainstream side of the placement as providing the means to enhance their child's social skills and enabling the building of relationships with local children. As could be anticipated from the literature, the attitudes of school staff, both positive and negative, played a huge role in the success of children in the individual settings and on the outcome of the dual placement. Another factor in measuring the success of the dual placement arose from the interviews. This was the issue of timing; in relation to both how long the children had been in the dual placement and to when the placement first started. These aspects will now be considered further.

## **6. Timing:**

In noting the relief that Edward's mainstream school experienced when the special school became involved, Emma commented that if they had delayed the decision to opt for a dual placement then "it would have been too late". Timing of dual placements was a topic mentioned by a number of the parents interviewed, although it was not an issue highlighted in the literature review, probably due to the scarcity of evidence around dual placements. Consideration will therefore be given to timing, in order to correlate any impact between timing and the success of the dual placement.

For ease of reference, the table below indicates how old the children were when the dual placement began and ended, and how long it continued for.

### **Summary table to describe timing:**

Name of Child	Dual placement started (age)	Dual placement finished (age)	Duration of dual placement
Adam	12	13	1 year



Charlie	4	12	8 years
Freddie	8	11	3 years
George	3	10	7 years
David	7	Ongoing	3 years
Edward	10	Ongoing	4 months
Ben	6	6	2 months

Emma described feeling that by persevering with Edward's educational provision in mainstream that they were taking "more and more risks"; as Geoff and Gina described:

"you've only got one chance and you don't want to get it wrong, it's their life and their suffering".

Taking these views into account, further exploration will now be given to the issue of timing.

### **The start, distribution and end of the dual placements.**

For David, the move towards dual placement came when he was 7, when Diane felt the mainstream school "... just weren't coping with him at all". The placement was split between three days at special school and two days at mainstream. Diane, unlike the majority of the

other parents, was initially keen to continue the dual placement into secondary school, to enable David to maintain contact with his peer group. However, she commented “we’ve come across some stumbling blocks”. Following negotiation, it was agreed that David would attend the mainstream school for “just the odd lesson”. Diane, whilst acknowledging potential difficulties for David in mainstream school, felt “disheartened” at the reluctance towards continuing with the dual placement and felt “they were trying to put us off from the word go”.

George’s dual placement started when he was attending nursery. Initially George attended special school two days a week and mainstream for three. The balance shifted the other way around when George was in year 2, when his peers were undertaking SATS. This pattern of attendance continued until George reached the end of year 5. Geoff and Gina felt that “at some stage, you’ve got to accept the fact he will go full time at special school”. The pending SATS that would face George in year 6 led to an agreement that he would transfer full time to special school at the end of year 5, although his parents “ideally would have liked it to go through until year 6”. Geoff

and Gina felt that the decision to transfer George to full time special school was also influenced by George, as previously mentioned.

Barbara too felt that the major factor in ending the dual placement to transfer Ben to full time special school was Ben's choice. Ben's dual placement started early on in primary school but unfortunately only lasted two to three months. The other major influence in deciding to end the arrangement was because the mainstream school were considering excluding Ben; "they couldn't cope with him anymore". Barbara had hoped that the dual placement would be a long term option "for the rest of school", but this was not to be. Unfortunately, due to the negative experience of the dual placement for this family, Barbara has regrets:

"it took me an awful long time to get over it, to stop feeling guilty, because it was my choice to go for dual placement ... if we'd said no we want to go full time (in special school) and stuck at that we wouldn't have had the four or five months of upset that we did".

Charlie started a dual placement at the beginning of his school career and remained in this arrangement until the start of secondary school. The split between the schools remained constant, with special school attendance three days per week and mainstream for two. Clare did not consider continuing the dual placement into secondary education as she felt “a comprehensive environment would not be at all suitable for him”. Reasons for parent’s reluctance to consider mainstream secondary school will be considered later, but it is worthy of note that the success of Charlie’s primary school dual placement may be reflected in the fact that he stayed on an extra year, repeating year 6.

In Adam’s case, as previously mentioned, the dual placement arose due to the temporary nature of Adam’s place at the pupil referral unit, rather than the result of active decision making by Alison. However, it is significant to note that the reason that Adam was at the pupil referral unit was because of a permanent exclusion from his mainstream school. Although difficulties with Adam’s mainstream primary school placement were known, Alison felt that her concerns around his schooling in secondary school were overlooked to the point that Adam was excluded. Alison noted that prior to this the

school's view was; "we've got the support, we can cope, we know how to deal with autistic children" but Alison's view was "THEY DIDN'T!!"

Perhaps if a dual placement had been made available to Adam earlier then this situation would not have occurred.

Freddie started his schooling in full time special school; a dual placement, in the form of a half a day per week attendance at mainstream school started when he was eight years old. Because of concerns that the mainstream comprehensive would not be suitable for Freddie, the dual placement ended at the end of primary school, by common agreement.

Edward's dual placement started when he was 10 years old, in year 5 of primary school. Emma stated that they were considering a dual placement for Edward for year 6, to support his transition to full time attendance at special school for his secondary education.

Acknowledging the benefit of hindsight, Emma felt that in retrospect she would have started Edward's dual placement earlier: "possibly earlier on in juniors and I even wonder whether we should have gone

for it in infants”. Although at the time of the interview Edward was relatively new to his dual placement, Emma expected that it would finish at the end of primary school.

The split between days at special school and mainstream was usually balanced three days at special and two at mainstream (for four families). However Edward’s dual placement, although in it’s early stages, was working well, in part due to the skill of his class teacher, who had a good awareness of Edward and had instigated an innovative split between the two schools. The placement was split so that Edward spent the beginning and the end of the week in the mainstream school and the middle part in the special school. In this way, he was introduced to the topic of the week with his peers on the Monday and spent the Friday at the end of that week seeing what his peers had undertaken during the week and had the chance to experience some of the activities, as the teacher selected those appropriate to his level. This split worked well for Edward, but he may have felt he was missing out on what his peers were undertaking in the week.

This was the case with David, whose parents were regularly frustrated with the school's lack of insight when they sent home details of school outings that occurred on the days when David was in the other school setting, leading to him feeling frustrated and disappointed. Geoff and Gina shared this frustration in describing how they were not informed about events that George could be involved in at the mainstream school, as the letters were sent home on a day when he was attending the special school.

The majority of parents indicated that they couldn't envisage the success of the dual placement continuing into secondary school and therefore would not or did not consider prolonging it. As Emma described "he just wouldn't survive at the local comprehensive".

Reasons why parents were concerned about secondary education were that the curriculum would not be flexible enough to accommodate their child's needs and that the changing of classrooms and large size of the environment would be a barrier to success. Some parents expressed concern that the staff and pupils in secondary schools would not be as welcoming to their children, as primary schools perhaps could be. Two sets of parents made

reference to the conflict for schools in maintaining their academic performance in the league tables and felt that this presented a barrier for inclusion of their child. Emma said that she felt if Edward went to the local comprehensive he would be there as a token gesture, in order for them to “tick the box”, rather than out of a genuine desire to include him.

With regard to timing, the split between the two schools was generally done in blocks of days and did not appear to have a particular impact on the success of the placement. However, Edward’s situation had been more thoroughly considered, with the split between the schools being arranged to suit him, which may have a longer term impact on the success of the placement.

In terms of longevity, for those children who started their dual placement early on in their schooling, the longer it seemed to be sustainable for. The exception to this is Ben’s experience, which may be explained by the factors described in chapter 5. Most significant is the fact that all but Adam’s dual placement (which took place under different circumstances previously described) had either ended, or



were planned to end before secondary education. It seems that for these parents, the challenges of secondary education are insurmountable. As Emma said:

“...I can't be bothered to put my child through that and put ourselves through that, just watching the situation where he's not going to be welcome, it's just too much ...”

Further consideration needs to be given to issues around timing of dual placements. This is in respect to when the placement starts and how long all parties anticipate it continuing for. Greater flexibility around timetabling of the placement is also needed, to ensure that this is organised to suit the child's requirements, rather than the practical needs of the schools. Clearly timing does not solely dictate the success of a dual placement, but this area would benefit from greater investigation, taking into account the aspects described in chapter 5, as correlation between the timing and the success of dual placements could be made.

## **7. Conclusion:**

Barnes acknowledges that education has a significant impact on all children and that for disabled children, it can either be “the start of a life-long process of stigmatization, or the beginning of normalisation” (Barnes, 1990:94). It is therefore fundamentally important to ensure diversity is embraced and equality is affected for all children in their school lives. Whether this equality currently exists is highly questionable as, despite government legislation maintaining that mainstream school should be the place of education for all children, in 2005 there were still around 90,000 children in special schools (Education and Skills Committee, 2006).

Rather than challenging why significant numbers of children need to access this special provision, the government now proposes a “third way”; a flexible continuum of provision, which suggests that children with special educational needs should access both mainstream and special schools (Education and Skills Committee, 2006) and emphasising the promotion of dual placements for children with SEN (Dfes, 2004). This is a marked change from the move throughout the

eighties and nineties toward educating all children in mainstream schools that was initially proposed by 1981 Education Act and further endorsed by subsequent legislation (Dfes, 2004).

The Disability Rights Commission has said that:

“any debate concerning the education of disabled children ... must extend beyond simply the relative merits of placing children in “mainstream” or “special” schools and instead begin from the point of how our schools can effectively meet the quality of experience and outcomes that disabled children and young people deserve” (DRC, 2005 in Education and Skills Report, 2006).

Therefore this investigation into dual placements was undertaken, to establish whether this is a way forward in ensuring that children with special educational needs receive this quality of experience. It should be acknowledged that this study was able to encompass the views of just seven sets of parents and that significantly more research needs to be undertaken, to discern the views of the many more parents whose children are undergoing dual placements. Individual interviews

were carried out, which gave personal insight into the experience of dual placements. However, although this allowed for a depth of information to be gathered, with face to face interviews allowing for this more than email correspondence, this method of data collection presented very personalised views on the experience of dual placements. As such, it is difficult to take the views of the parents interviewed and generalise them beyond the limits of this study, but nevertheless there were some commonly arising themes, indicating failure and success of dual placements.

For all of the parents interviewed, there were limitations in both mainstream and special school provision, as neither were meeting their child's needs in their entirety. To establish what these limitations were, general views of mainstream and special schools were investigated and documented; and comparisons were then made with the experience of dual placements. Although a number of similar issues arose, they were not always applied in the same context (chapters 2 & 5) and different definitions as to what constituted a dual placement were also found.

For the dual placements that worked well, there were some key features, namely:

- Effective and proactive communication
- Partnership working and joint responsibility
- Sharing of resources and expertise
- Apt timing and timetabling.

Despite the literature suggesting that special schools are better able to facilitate peer relationships, the majority of parents sought the social element of their child's education from the mainstream school and saw their local school as offering the means to their children forming social relationships with their peers (chapter 5). However, this was not always successful and for children such as Ben, social inclusion in the mainstream school was lacking; this may in part have been due to the attitudes of the school staff. Positive and negative attitudes of school staff were a commonly occurring theme and were referred to in describing the success of the school placements and the reasons why dual placement was initiated (chapter 4 & 5). The motivation and support of individual teachers also led to success in

dual placements; and for those teachers who were able to be what Davis and Watson (2001) termed “reflexive”, that is those who could embrace the advice of the other school setting and adapt their teaching, there was more success than for those teachers who did not modify their approach.

In terms of academic performance, it was the special school part of the dual placement that parents felt had the expertise and ability to provide teaching which would enhance their child’s learning and educational development. However, it should be acknowledged that the concerns from the literature around academic performance of special schools refer to them inadequately preparing children for the world of work, which would not necessarily be at the forefront of these parents’ minds, due to the ages of the children.

The communication element was fundamental to the success of a dual placement; “...so I suppose yeah, it all comes down to the communication” (Diane). The schools that were able to communicate effectively between themselves and with parents did so by face to face contact and by sharing targets and feedback on the children’s

progress. In respect of successful communication from the parents' viewpoint, those who had older children who had gone through the school system, or who had professional experience of educational settings, were better able to facilitate communication with the schools, although they commented that they did not wish to be the sole mechanism for transfer of information (chapter 5). Parents also highlighted that they wished to be kept informed of their child's progress, both formally and informally, and that schools needed to be aware of how the placements were divided up, to avoid communication going astray, which led to frustration (chapter 6).

When the schools demonstrated that they were able to work together in partnership, this had a positive impact on the placement too. For those schools that could not, the children tended to respond better to one setting and in some cases ultimately ended up transferring full time to that school, such as in Ben's case.

In terms of resources, parents particularly appreciated the facilities available to their children at special school. Where the facilities either

existed or were offered at mainstream school, they tended to be underutilised “there were resources, but nobody was quite sure how to use them” (Emma).

The element of timing also highlights some interesting considerations (chapter 6), mainly in respect to when the placement started and how long it lasted. Timetabling in relation to when the children attended which school also played a role, with one successful compilation of a timetable due to the forethought of a teacher. The placements that appeared to work more successfully, without too many setbacks, were those that started early on in the child’s education, such as for George and Charlie (chapter 6). For those that started later, or for those that were instigated due to problems in the mainstream school, the focus appeared to change from one of providing support to schools, to one of providing relief, such as in Edward and Adam’s experience. With this comes the potential for delegating of responsibility, with the mainstream school almost handing over the child, rather than seeing the input of the special school as a new source of inspiration and advice; “...it was like someone else can take over because we’re not bothered any more” (Barbara).



However, although factors can be identified that facilitate the success of dual placements, it is also apparent that problematic factors for individual school settings are identifiable. Consequently if one is able to identify the deficits of a mainstream school as an inability to adapt the curriculum, a lack of resources and the knowledge of how to use them, a lack of appropriate training for staff and a lack of a suitable peer group, then the aim must be to overcome these factors, rather than accepting them as shortfalls and seeking alternative provision elsewhere.

Whilst Geoff and Gina believed that George's dual placement offered a compromise, Clare said that dual placement had given Charlie the "best of both worlds". Perhaps both of these viewpoints can exist concurrently. Children accessing dual placements do receive the "best of both worlds" in that they are able to access the best provision of both mainstream and special school. However, this fails to address the issue that neither school is fully meeting the needs of children with special educational needs, thus the children are having to "compromise" within a provision that remains unchallenged.

Although some successful experiences of dual placements have been described, the move to inclusion should be towards establishing an education system that provides for the needs of all, rather than accepting that separating special and mainstream provision meets the needs of children (Ainscow, 1997; DRC, 2005), which clearly it does not. If it is accepted that inequality for disabled people is in part cultivated by segregated education (Finkelstein, 1991), the situation will remain unchanged until the current education system is challenged.

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