



Estyn

Rhagoriaeth i bawb - Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

The impact of 'unlocking the potential' funding on promoting the use of special schools as community focused resource bases



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



APRIL 2009

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities (LAs);
- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ adult community-based learning;
- ▲ youth support services;
- ▲ youth and community work training;
- ▲ LAs;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies;
- ▲ offender learning; and
- ▲ the education, guidance and training elements of the Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright 2009: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the document/publication specified.

Contents	Page
Introduction	1
Background	3
Main findings	4
Recommendations	6
How well have local education authorities and schools responded to the funding?	8
How effective have the projects been in promoting special schools as resource bases?	12
What has worked particularly well?	15
What has not worked so well?	16
Appendix 1: Case studies illustrating good practice	
Glossary	
The remit survey team	

Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this paper is to respond to a request from the Welsh Assembly Government in its annual Ministerial remit to Estyn to provide a review of the impact of the 'unlocking the potential' funding with a particular focus on how effective it has been in helping special schools to develop their role within local authorities (LAs) as community-focused resource bases.
- 2 As part of its strategy to raise standards for disadvantaged groups, the Welsh Assembly Government has made £5.1 million available over three years, starting in September 2006, to the 22 LAs in Wales to set up a wide range of special school pilot projects. This funding is referred to as: 'Unlocking the potential of the special school'. The aim of the funding is to promote further inclusion and develop the role of the special school in identifying and disseminating good practice.
- 3 The funding aims to promote the use of special schools as a community-focused resource base, to support a range of joint activities such as post-16 transitional planning and multi-agency support and provision.
- 4 During the period 2006 to 2009, bids for funding to unlock the potential of special schools were sought from LAs in collaboration with special schools. All LAs responded with bids to fund proposals for a wide range of projects including:
 - support for individuals in mainstream settings – advice and guidance for mainstream schools;
 - delivering training – formal and informal to a range of settings and services;
 - modelling and coaching – mainstream and specialist staff working together to enhance their skills and knowledge;
 - sharing specialist resources – such as specialist equipment and communication aids to enable pupils to access the curriculum;
 - working with parents/carers and carers – providing support, advice and guidance;
 - multi-agency support and provision – working with the statutory and voluntary agencies to increase capacity and meet the holistic needs of their pupils; and
 - improved transition arrangements post 16 – working with FE institutions and developing work based learning opportunities in collaboration with local businesses.
- 5 Local authorities without a special school could submit proposals to share expertise on a regional basis or to develop a role for a resource base attached to mainstream schools.

- 6 A further criteria for bidding for funding was that projects were to be part of the local authorities' wider school-improvement agenda, aiming to support an inclusive education system of the highest standard working in partnership with other providers.
- 7 One LA included the following selection of activities in its Unlocking the potential of the special schools' work. This list gives some impression of the diverse range of work undertaken by special schools across a local authority:
- supporting the parents/carers of pre-school children with complex additional learning needs in developing play skills;
 - a range of outreach work by the special school to increase the capacity of mainstream schools to work with pupils with complex needs such as autistic spectrum disorder and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD);
 - devising a structured literacy programme for mainstream pupils at level 1;
 - a parenting project for pupils in special school and resource bases attached to mainstream schools;
 - a reintegration and transition project to support special school primary aged pupils, with BESD, joining a mainstream secondary school;
 - counselling to support pupils making a transition to mainstream schools from special school; and
 - working with Careers Wales to develop alternative curriculum and work placements for pupils with learning difficulties.
- 8 Between October 2008 and December 2008, Estyn conducted a survey of the impact of the funding on local authorities and special schools across Wales. Inspectors sent comprehensive questionnaires to all LAs and special schools involved in the funding pilot. Eighteen LAs and their 34 special schools and one autism unit responded. One of these LAs does not have a special school. Inspectors also visited a representative sample of six local education authorities. They held discussions with senior officers and visited a range of special schools. During their visits, inspectors met with the headteachers, teachers and pupils and, where possible, the mainstream school partners.

Background

- 9 Over a decade ago, The Best for Special Education¹ and Shaping the future for Special Education² introduced a changing role for special schools. These policy documents recognised the need for special schools to become 'centres of excellence' and work far more closely with mainstream schools and with local authority support services for pupils with additional learning needs.
- 10 More recently, The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 stresses the right to a mainstream education for all children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002) advises the adoption of a range of strategies to encourage inclusive practice in schools.
- 11 Inclusive education requires the commitment of schools and LAs to develop policies and practices that ensure equality of educational opportunity and access, that safeguard vulnerable pupils and focus on raising the achievement of all learners and increasing their participation in schools and local communities³.
- 12 The Inclusion and Pupil Support, National Assembly for Wales Circular No: 47/2006 states that the majority of children and young people will attend their local mainstream school. However, special schools and resourced provision attached to mainstream schools will continue to play an important role for those children and young people requiring very specialist and specific support.
- 13 Broadly, special schools have the same duties and responsibilities as other schools. What makes them different is that almost all the pupils in them have a statement of special educational needs. Special schools have a lower ratio of teaching staff to pupils, and a broader range of other practitioners and support staff, to help meet the individual needs of pupils that have been identified in the statements.
- 14 However, for special schools to be fully part of an inclusive system, it has been recognised that they need to become an integral part of a local service that is there to meet a wider range of needs⁴. Recent government policy across the UK has sought to enhance the role of special schools so that they become confident, outward-looking centres of excellence, building on their strengths, as an integral part of an inclusive education system for pupils in their areas and beyond.
- 15 This requires staff to work more flexibly and actively with mainstream schools to plan support for pupils who could benefit from a mainstream setting and act as a source of expertise, advice and professional development for mainstream colleagues⁵.

¹ The Best for Special Education, National Assembly for Wales 1997

² Shaping the future for special education, An action plan for Wales 1999

³ Inclusion and Pupil Support Guidance Circular Social Inclusion, National Assembly for Wales Circular No: 47/2006: November 2006

⁴ Position Statement on Specialist Provision for Children and Young People with Additional Support Needs, National Association for Special Educational Needs, March 2008

⁵ Building partnerships. Working to develop extended services and community focused schools in and around special schools, ContinYou Cymru 2008

Main findings

- 16 The 'unlocking the potential' pilot has been very successful. There are many examples of good practice and benefits resulting from the funding. There are very few instances where the projects have not worked as well as they should have done. If further funding is to be made available, in order to achieve maximum benefits from this initiative, the areas for improvement are mainly in strategic management and in monitoring and evaluation.
- 17 The 'unlocking the potential' of special schools funding has raised awareness of the expertise that exists in special schools and promoted a good exchange in skills between special and mainstream school staff. The funding has also increased collaborative working between schools and local authorities across traditional boundaries. However, whilst there are a few good examples of LAs and schools sharing this good practice from the projects, overall most staff carry out this valuable work in isolation and do not know enough about what is working well in the projects across Wales.
- 18 Specific outreach and training programmes have been a particular strength. The use of special school staff to provide training for mainstream school staff is effective and efficient. In the 18 LAs that responded to our questionnaire, over two thirds of the projects in 34 special schools focused on outreach work and training mainstream staff to make better provision for pupils with additional learning needs. The projects have reached over 1,400 pupils. The pilot has made an important contribution to building the capacity of mainstream school staff to improve their provision for their pupils with additional learning needs and be less reliant on other professionals and agencies. Mainstream school staff and parents have benefited from a very wide range of training provided by special school staff and in a few cases this training has been offered to other agencies within the local authority. There are very good examples of pupils who have received such good support from the special school staff that they are able to maintain their place in their mainstream school.
- 19 Special schools involved in the pilot have made good progress towards becoming resource bases which offer training, appropriate resources in a central location, model good practice and give advice and guidance to individuals and groups across the authority, in education and the wider community. Special school staff have benefited from the opportunity to share their expertise and this has resulted in feeling part of their local education community and feeling that their work is valued by others. They have also gained curriculum expertise from their stronger links with mainstream colleagues. However, a very small number of the projects have been limited to special schools and their pupils.
- 20 Staff are committed to and enthusiastic about the use of the funding. Often it has given them the opportunity either to extend existing work or put longstanding ideas into practice. There is much anecdotal evidence that this funding is having a very positive impact on individual and groups of pupils' educational and social outcomes in special and mainstream schools and that many of the improvements in relationships and trust between special and mainstream schools are now embedded and permanent.

- 21 The special and mainstream school pupils who were involved in the pilot have benefited from increased contact with each other. This has led to a wider understanding of disability and improved opportunities for pupils in special schools. The improved contact has had important spin-offs that have led to increased opportunities for pupils and staff to work and socialise with each other. There are good examples of projects that have improved transition arrangements for pupils, pre and post-16. This has reduced the stress for pupils and their parents/carers. Parents/carers have also benefited from the improvement in information that they have received as a result of many of the projects.
- 22 In the very small minority of projects that had not worked as well as they could have done, it was because the funding has not been managed or allocated carefully enough in line with the aims and conditions of the grant. Most areas for improvement relate to the management of the funding and monitoring and evaluation. Despite regular progress reports and feedback to LAs by special schools, monitoring and evaluation of the projects are not rigorous enough.
- 23 Generally, LAs make good use of the funding to harness expertise from special schools and develop and implement the LA's inclusion policy. Often, the funding has allowed LAs and special schools to extend existing good practice and try out ideas for improvements to provision. However, the use of this funding is not always clearly tracked within the new children and young people's plans.
- 24 Many of the projects have involved a wide range of professionals but there has not been a strong enough focus on multi-agency support and provision across the pilot. None of the projects focused specifically on working with the statutory and voluntary agencies in order to increase capacity and meet the holistic needs of their pupils.
- 25 A few LAs have not consulted all their special schools or included them in how the funding is used. Where special schools have been involved in the pilot but with little consultation, this has resulted in a limited sense of ownership of the project.
- 26 The complexity of evaluating outcomes for pupils with additional learning needs and the wide range of projects makes it difficult for LAs and special schools to evaluate how well the projects are impacting on pupils' outcomes overall.

Recommendations

The Welsh Assembly Government should:

- R1 consider the use of service level agreements between LAs and special schools to guide and monitor the use of 'unlocking the potential' funding in the future;
- R2 ask LAs and schools to produce exit strategies prior to receiving further funding;
- R3 remind LAs and staff of the need to keep to the conditions of the Welsh Assembly Government's specific funding requirements;
- R4 require project evaluations to include specific and measurable benefits; and
- R5 share information and best practice in relation to 'unlocking the potential' more effectively within and between LAs.

Local authorities should:

- R6 secure tighter strategic management of the funding by making sure that:
 - schools report the more specific and measurable benefits of the work;
 - all special school managers have a clear understanding of how the funding is to be used and the intended outcomes; and
 - the use of this funding is clearly tracked in local authority children and young people's plans;
- R7 work more closely with schools to plan their exit strategies or ways to embed successful ways of working into their future work;
- R8 encourage schools to include other agencies within the authority when scoping their projects; and
- R9 involve all special schools in the bidding, planning and implementation of the projects.

Special schools and mainstream schools should:

- R10 plan more systematically to sustain the benefits of the 'unlocking the potential' of the special school activities beyond the period of the funding;
- R11 make sure that they use the 'unlocking the potential' of the special school funding in ways that have a direct benefit to both special and mainstream school pupils and staff;
- R12 monitor the projects closely and measure the benefits to pupils and staff;

R13 scope their projects more widely to include other agencies within the authority;
and

R14 plan exit strategies or ways to embed successful ways of working into their future work.

How well have local education authorities and schools responded to the funding?

Enhancing the development of the role of the special schools

- 27 Generally, special schools have been very enthusiastic and committed to making the best use of this funding to develop a wide range of innovative projects designed to improve outcomes for pupils and make stronger links with mainstream schools. This has led to a significant exchange in skills. For example, special schools have gained greater access to subject specialists to support the curriculum for their more able pupils and mainstream schools have gained advice and guidance about how to improve outcomes for their pupils with additional learning needs.
- 28 The use of 'unlocking the potential' funding has had a very positive impact on many special schools and what has often been regarded as their isolated position within their local authority provision and in relation to mainstream settings. One LA officer said of the special school: 'People are coming in and out all the time now and this is how it should be'. Special schools have made strong links with other local mainstream schools and as a result there is a marked growth in the mutual understanding of each other's work. There is greater trust between many special and mainstream schools and improved partnership working.
- 29 These improved relationships mark a big change in culture. Generally, staff in special schools are beginning to feel that their work is more widely valued and the pupils feel more included. Most respondents to our questionnaire feel that the funding has empowered special school staff and given them a welcome opportunity to put longstanding ideas for joint working into practice.
- 30 The projects have often led to other benefits for staff and pupils in the special and also the mainstream schools. For example, as a result of one special school's outreach service to support pupils with complex needs in secondary schools, staff from the special and then mainstream schools worked together on a joint cultural project between teachers and pupils in Tanzania. This meant that the special school pupils benefited from a very good opportunity to widen their horizons.
- 31 Prior to the funding, many special schools had expressed the wish to set up improved ways of working with mainstream schools. There were limited attempts to start this valuable work. This often involved working in an advisory capacity but special school staff could not be released to support and join in with ongoing activities to benefit mainstream staff and pupils. They did not have the resources they needed and had difficulty in persuading their local mainstream schools that they had the expertise to contribute to improved support for pupils with additional learning needs and their families.
- 32 With this funding, special schools have had an opportunity to raise awareness in mainstream schools of the resources and support they can access and in many cases schools have taken them up. However, not all mainstream schools welcome this support particularly in relation to pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties as staff do not always expect to have to work with these pupils.

- 33 Generally, LAs make good use of the funding to harness the existing expertise in special schools in order to develop and implement their inclusion policies. Many projects involve outreach work by special school staff which enables pupils to remain in their mainstream school with good quality support. This outreach support not only has a direct benefit to individual pupils but it also contributes to building the capacity of mainstream school staff to improve their provision for pupils with additional learning needs. For example, one secondary school headteacher commented that they appreciate the reassurance from the special school outreach worker that they are 'doing the right thing' with the pupils with less complex needs.
- 34 However, despite many examples of good practice and innovative working as a result of the funding, this valuable information is not shared formally within LAs and their schools or across Wales

The encouragement of multi-agency support and provision

- 35 There are a few very good examples of improved working across professional boundaries within an LA. However, generally the pilots are not scoped widely enough to include other agencies within the LAs. Many of the projects involve other agencies, however, often this joint working comes about more through implementing a one-off project rather than as a result of a specific aim to improve the working between special and mainstream schools and other agencies across an authority or shared provision. There are only a few projects which specifically state that one of the project's aims is to improve the collaboration between agencies and services across the authority.
- 36 Projects designed to improve access for pupils to speech and language therapy, understanding of the autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and projects on improved transition often involve other professionals. These professionals include:
- health professionals such as a community nutritionist and a continence support nurse;
 - speech and language and occupational therapists;
 - Careers Wales advisers;
 - voluntary organisations;
 - child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS); and
 - social services.
- 37 One LA and its special school have used the funding well to set up single co-ordinated service to support pupils with ASD and other communication and behavioural disorders and the professionals who work with them. One of the aims of the project is to work with social services, health services and voluntary organisations to develop inter-agency approaches. This includes attracting resources from these partners to further develop the services.

- 38 A project in another LA provides two education social workers for two special schools. Their role is to act as link workers between agencies such as education, social services, CAMHS, the youth offending team (YOT) and families. They are line managed by the headteachers of the special schools but receive supervision from social services.
- 39 Three special schools in another LA worked closely with health and social services, mainstream schools and parents/carers to develop agreed manual handling strategies.
- 40 One special school is working closely with the local youth offending team (YOT) to construct a peace garden. This gives young people who offend good opportunities to make reparation to the community and supports YOT workers who find meaningful reparation opportunities hard to find. This work involves training staff in environmental citizenship, horticulture and landscaping.
- 41 There are good examples of improved working with health services in a few LAs although this is not often the case. One planned speech and language project floundered due to the issues with the health authority about providing a speech therapist. This reflects the finding in Estyn's report in 2007 in that many local authority departments have a relatively narrow view of multi-agency working. Most commonly, they do not have effective partnership arrangements with community health and social services⁶.

The improvement in information to parents/carers and carers

- 42 The funding has enabled many special schools to offer more specific support to parents/carers. Parents/carers have a vital role to play in their children's education and their wellbeing, and special schools generally have very good relationships with parents/carers. The funding has enabled special schools to give parents/carers more information and include them in training, for example, in the use of particular therapies and augmented communication such as Makaton, the picture exchange system (PECS) and the sensory approach. As a result, parents/carers are more confident in communicating with and engaging their children.
- 43 One unit for autistic pupils and its LA are offering 'Earlybird plus' programmes to parents/carers of pupils aged 4-8 who have recent diagnoses of autism. These programmes address the needs of both home and school settings by training parents/carers together with a professional who is working regularly with their child. Parents/carers can also work with a professional of their own choice to support them through this difficult time. Parents/carers with children at this unit are also benefiting from training in the use of the picture exchange system (PECS) to communicate with their children.
- 44 One special school for pupils aged 3-19 has worked with the LA's early years forum, health workers and the voluntary service to set up a much needed local family centre to provide for families. The centre provides a valuable venue and a programme of activities to support parents/carers engagement with their children, who have complex learning needs. This is successfully reducing parental isolation and giving

⁶ 'Provision of community-focused services and facilities by schools', Estyn, 2007

them informal opportunities to meet and talk to other families who face similar challenges. Parents/carers can also receive one-to-one support, working in small groups to learn how to use touch therapy, sensory stories, music and dance and resonance board activities. Parents/carers were fully included in planning the programme of activities.

- 45 Two special schools have worked together to set up a valuable parents/carers support group which meets once a month. This group includes parents/carers whose children attend resource bases attached to mainstream schools. A member of staff at one of the schools produces a newsletter for parents/carers and will seek information on the parents'/carers' behalf. These parents receive specific support at transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3 and also when leaving school.
- 46 Special schools in two LAs have run successful day courses to give information about Downs Syndrome and a special school has run a course for parents/carers on sex education for children with learning difficulties.
- 47 Three other LAs have used the funding to improve their support to parents/carers. One has expanded its outreach service to include workshops and individual sessions for parents/carers at one of its special schools. Another special school has set up formal multi-agency training and information giving for parents/carers in matters such as physio-therapy and parenting skills. Parents can also access advice on important issues such as mediation and assessment. This work is carefully designed to help parents play a greater role in the assessment and decision-making process.

The improvement in transition arrangements pre and post-16

- 48 A few schools have used 'unlocking the potential' of the special school funding successfully to improve the planned and structured support for pupils when moving into or on from secondary schools. This support helps pupils to make a smooth and less stressful transition.
- 49 One special school has worked with a local mainstream school to produce tailor made resources for pupils who attend the secondary school. These pupils required more practical life skills work to help them make a smoother transition into further education or employment. This work leads to accreditation.
- 50 Another special school has used the funding well to set up a successful transition class for pupils who attend a primary resource base attached to a mainstream school to help them make a successful transfer into the mainstream secondary school. Pupils receive specialist teaching and attend between 10% and 50% of lessons in the secondary school. The class provides security and support within a small group but also allows pupils to attend mainstream classes.
- 51 Pupils at another special school benefit from the support of a transition outreach worker funded by 'unlocking the potential' of the special school. This worker helps pupils move in and out of the special school by planning inclusion opportunities, writing re-integration plans and offering mentoring support.

How effective have the projects been in promoting special schools as resource bases?

- 52 Where the pilot has worked particularly well, special schools have fully embraced the concept of becoming a local resource base or centre of excellence, the projects offer training and enhanced access to special school staff and resources in a central location.
- 53 The use of 'unlocking the potential' funding has given mainstream schools better and more immediate access to advice, support and training from a local source of expertise, the special school. One respondent to our survey said that the funding had resulted in mainstream schools asking for help more often and that they no longer viewed asking for help as a sign of failure.
- 54 With increased inclusion, many mainstream schools have concerns about their perception of an increase in numbers of pupils who attend with additional learning needs and the complexity of their needs. Often, teachers lack confidence in meeting these needs. Also, the support outlined in pupils' statements is often over-reliant on external providers and does not always expect local schools to meet these needs. The use of the 'unlocking the potential' funding has helped many mainstream teachers to meet these needs 'in house' rather pupils with additional learning needs receiving support from other professionals.
- 55 Many of the projects involve outreach work, where staff from the special schools are released from teaching to give mainstream schools the benefit of their expertise. This means that special schools are being used as a valuable resource for mainstream schools and in a few cases for other agencies and the wider community.

The provision of advice and guidance to mainstream settings

- 56 Many LAs have successfully used 'unlocking the potential' funding to expand and improve their outreach work. In many cases, special school staff who have the expertise work alongside other mainstream staff and model the ways of working that they need to adopt to improve their practice and the outcomes for pupils. In this way, special school staff not only share their expertise but increase the skills of mainstream staff so that they have the confidence and the knowledge to offer pupils the particular support they need.
- 57 In one special school, staff with a specialism in early years pupils with severe and complex needs and communication difficulties, including autism, now visit mainstream schools once a week to give individual support, advice and guidance to pupils, classroom staff and parents. The staff have carefully designed this work so that it improves the practice of mainstream staff, and so that they are better equipped to work productively with these pupils and improve their outcomes. Mainstream staff also visit the special school to observe the special school staff modelling good practice.

- 58 Staff at another special school and their LA have used 'unlocking the potential' funding very well to extend outreach provision for early years children at school action plus who have language difficulties, and to up-skill mainstream school staff. This valuable project gives targeted support to the mainstream settings. Specialist teaching assistants from the special school run language groups for these pupils four times a week for six weeks. During this time they model good practice in language development and also offer training. Staff are also helped to write appropriate targets in pupils individual education plans and receive advice on how to prepare resources for the sessions. This gives the mainstream school staff the skills they need to carry on this important work when the six weeks are completed. Parents and headteachers are highly appreciative of this support, and pupils make good progress. There are a few examples of pupils who have made such good progress that they no longer need the provision.
- 59 Staff from three special schools in one LA are now able to be involved in annual reviews, discussions with parents/carers about their children's achievement and meeting with special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) and educational psychologists to discuss cases. They are also involved in training. Prior to the funding, the outreach work was limited to contact with teachers in mainstream schools in an advisory capacity.
- 60 One LA, which does not have any special schools, has used 'unlocking the potential' funding to employ two social, emotional and behavioural support assistants to support, advise and guide pupils in mainstream schools who are at risk of exclusion. Schools can access these assistants when there are difficulties and they are about to refer pupils for statutory assessment to meet their needs.

The delivering of training to a range of settings and services

- 61 The use of the 'unlocking the potential' funding has had a very positive impact on how well mainstream school staff access appropriate training so that they can improve their provision for pupils with additional learning needs.
- 62 Many of the projects involve delivering training, mostly by special school staff to mainstream school staff. This careful use of 'in house' expertise means that schools do not need to waste much time and money seeking expensive and training elsewhere. This training is wide ranging and much appreciated by mainstream school staff. A few projects open their training to other professionals within the authority. For example, one autistic support service is offering its training to all outside agencies and parents.
- 63 The specialist teacher for autism in one special school is now recognised by education staff in the LA as the person best able to carry out in-house training of augmented communication for teachers and learning support assistants.
- 64 In one LA, its education effectiveness service is currently auditing the skills of the LA's special school staff. This will be held on a database in order to manage training more effectively across the LA. The database is to be updated annually.
- 65 In the same LA, education staff from mainstream schools and parents can access a wide range of courses on autism delivered by staff from an autistic unit. These

include workshops on the picture exchange system (PECS) to support communication, Aspergers syndrome, the use of social stories and making games to support the development of key skills for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

The sharing of specialist resources

- 66 Many of the projects have resulted in the sharing of resources often on an informal basis as a result of newly forged relationships between mainstream and special school staff. There are very good examples of staff getting together to devise courses or resource packages to meet pupils' particular needs. However, there are very few examples of projects that have set out to create a bank of resources.
- 67 One special school loans its INSTEP materials to its mainstream partners. This helps them to assess pupils' levels of attainment accurately and decide how their needs can be met. Two special schools have tailor-made training resource packages to support mainstream schools in their speech and language work. These are on loan during their training but available to buy when the training is complete.
- 68 One large special school makes its classrooms, faith garden and its minibus available to local mainstream schools and the pupil referral unit. Mainstream pupils have improved opportunities for work experience by working in the special school's car-valeting business, their café and their fair-trade shop.
- 69 One special school has worked with its local college and a comprehensive school to enrich vocational learning for pupils with additional learning needs. This has resulted in two accredited courses in horticulture and electronics.
- 70 Another special school has used 'unlocking the potential' funding to develop a comprehensive resource base for all schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) in the LA. Two special schools and a specialist teaching facility in the same LA have developed libraries and provide DVD clips to illustrate how mainstream staff can engage all pupils in activities and make their practice more inclusive. All schools who take part in the project receive a DVD and a CD with samples of work undertaken, good practice, course notes and background information.

What has worked particularly well?

- 71 Staff are committed to and enthusiastic about the use of the funding. Often it has given them the opportunity either to extend existing work or put longstanding ideas into practice. One respondent wrote that: the unlocking potential grant is, 'probably the best thing that's happened in special education in Wales for a very long time'.
- 72 There is evidence that many of the improvements in relationships and trust between special and mainstream schools are now embedded and permanent. For example, a mainstream school headteacher involved in one of the projects said,
- "the project has ensured that a basic pathway with a successful track record is available to mainstream schools. The improvement in the special school's involvement in the behaviour panels and the input of their expertise and provision options is now permanently in place. Also, the good links set up between educational psychologists, mainstream SENCOs and the behaviour support services will not disappear".*
- 73 There is much anecdotal evidence that this funding is having a very positive impact on individual and groups of pupils' educational and social outcomes in special and mainstream schools. There is increased contact between pupils in mainstream schools and special schools giving individual and groups of mainstream school pupils valuable opportunities to come to a better understanding of disability issues. Many special school pupils have gained wider opportunities to join mainstream classes and meet and work with their mainstream peers and an improved curriculum.
- 74 The funding has helped LAs and most special schools share good practice within their area and develop more inclusive strategies to integrate and keep many pupils in mainstream schools who would otherwise be referred to special schools.
- 75 Special school staff have benefited from the opportunity to share their expertise and this has resulted in feeling part of their local education community and feeling that their work is valued by others. They have also gained curriculum expertise from their stronger links with mainstream colleagues. There is increased collaborative working between schools and local authorities across traditional boundaries.
- 76 Mainstream school staff and parents have benefited from a very wide range of training provided by special school staff and in a few cases this training has been offered to other agencies within the local authority.

What has not worked so well?

- 77 Where there are areas for improvement, they are mainly at a strategic level and linked to the management of funding and its monitoring and evaluation. Although almost all the 18 LAs which responded received regular reports and updates, overall monitoring and evaluation of the projects is not always as rigorous as it should be. However, only a very small minority of projects have not worked as well as they could have done. Where this has been the case, it is because the funding has not been managed or allocated carefully enough in line with the aims and conditions of the grant. One LA has no formal monitoring in place. In two cases the LA did not know how many staff or pupils were involved in the projects.

How the funding is managed and allocated

- 78 Most LAs have linked this funding very carefully to their inclusion strategies. However, the use of this funding is not always clearly tracked within the new children's and young people's plans.
- 79 Control of the funding is too variable, ranging from, in a few cases, the LA maintaining central control to the special school receiving all of the funding. In one authority the management of the funding by three different officers has led to a difficulty in maintaining focus. Another LA did not consult its special schools at all about the use of the funding.
- 80 Where a few special schools have not directly managed or received the funding, they have not felt that they owned or have been involved enough in the project. One project did not include any work with local mainstream schools.
- 81 Two special schools are using the money to benefit only their own pupils within the special school setting. They justify the lack of involvement of mainstream schools by saying that they needed to focus on improving the collaboration between the two special schools. This did nothing new to unlock the potential of the special school for mainstream settings.
- 82 One LA, that has managed the funding centrally, did not have enough confidence in its special schools' ability to develop their own projects and took the view that the schools would not be able to come up with anything new.
- 83 A few special schools are unhappy with the way their LAs allocated the funding as they were not given an opportunity to be part of the pilot. There are a few other special schools, who despite being part of the pilot were not given enough opportunity to be involved in its inception and planning. As a result they have a limited sense of ownership of the project. However, one of these school's LA does recognise that this central control has resulted in the special school not having full ownership of the project that they have been involved in.

Opportunities to share good practice within schools and LAs and across Wales

- 84 There are a few examples of sharing the good practice from the projects. One school has produced a valuable DVD to explain the 'unlocking potential' initiatives to partner schools within the authority.
- 85 There are plans to provide a website for the use of teachers across several LAs in a region to share good practice and ideas. However, these plans have not yet been implemented.
- 86 Special school headteachers, in a recognised network in one area of Wales, have shared their practice with each other. One LA set up an 'unlocking the potential' networking group for LAs to exchange information and share training resources and skills. The all-Wales special school headteachers' group has had presentations about a few of the projects.
- 87 However, overall, too many staff in schools are working in isolation in relation to the use of 'unlocking the potential' funding. Many staff directly involved in this work in their own school are unable to refer to practice elsewhere, either within their own local area or more widely.

Monitoring and evaluating the impact of the funding

- 88 The wide range and varied nature of the projects make it hard for LAs and schools to work out how well the projects have impacted on the pupils' progress overall. One LA's 'unlocking the potential' funding project is working on this issue. The project is based in a special school where staff are collecting data for transition purposes to provide the LA with information from the tracking of pupils' progress.
- 89 LAs across Wales have required the projects to provide careful, detailed and regular progress reports and to keep to their original proposals. One LA used an external consultant to evaluate the projects after the first year. Another LA asks mainstream teachers who have received training to report back on the impact the training has had on their school. One LA's special needs manager visits a special school once a fortnight and receives informal feedback.
- 90 Schools that receive 'unlocking the potential' funding in one LA are required to provide full financial reports and evaluations of the projects at the end of the financial year. These reports set out how the funding is spent and the outcomes achieved. They also include feedback from staff, parents and outside agencies. Where applicable, they include information about pupils' progress.

Planning to sustain the benefits of the projects

- 91 Planning for the sustainability of the project work once funding ends is weak. Most of the LAs and schools have not planned their exit strategies or ways to embed successful ways of working into their future work. Many of the project progress reports do not consider how the benefits from the project will be sustained. Almost all LAs and staff know what has worked well and what they wish to sustain, but often they cannot see a viable way forward for project related work without additional funding.

- 92 A few LAs chose the particular projects because they were sustainable and therefore they did not have to develop an exit strategy. However, many LAs and school staff are concerned about the sustainability of what they regard as very valuable and creative solutions to making inclusion work. For example, the difficulties of maintaining additional staff introduced through the funding when funding is short-term and finite.
- 93 Where projects have focused on training for staff and building up a bank of resources, LAs and schools recognise that the good outcomes are very likely to be sustained. One LA commented that the capacity-enhancing projects leave a lasting legacy in the targeted schools although it would be beneficial to roll out the project to further schools. However, where projects depend on the appointment of additional staff, it will be more difficult to sustain progress.
- 94 In order to sustain the benefits from the funding, one LA has set up additional learning needs cluster groups for its special schools, their local secondary school and its feeder primaries.

Related issues

- 95 Two LAs found the bureaucracy surrounding the funding unhelpful. One LA found the incremental allocation of the grant difficult. One LA reported that its special school did not fully understand that the funding is designed to help teachers in mainstream schools meet pupils' additional learning needs by the use of specialists from special schools sharing their expertise with mainstream staff. In this LA, many pupils who were being supported by outreach are now either full or part-time in the special school rather than remaining in mainstream school.
- 96 In a few schools, where staff felt that progress in the projects was limited, they gave the following reasons:
- the extra work from an Estyn inspection, taking place during the pilot;
 - staff absence;
 - the extra time needed for management and administrative work;
 - senior staff not being released to manage, train and motivate staff and organise the services the school could offer; and
 - reluctance on the part of a small number of mainstream primary schools to embrace the inclusion agenda in relation to children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- 97 Staff who planned to further develop the work that the funding introduced them to were disappointed by the ending of the General Teaching Council of Wales funding to teachers in mid-cycle. They had planned to apply to use this funding to enable them to continue the work and in their view this has hampered their plans.

Appendix 1: Case studies illustrating good practice

1 Working with health services and the voluntary sector to set up a pre-school family support service

LA and special school in south east Wales

This LA views the 'outward looking centres of excellence' as a vital part of its achievement and inclusion strategy. The special school works with pupils aged 3-19 who have complex learning needs.

The school and the early years forum, a multi-agency group, identified a gap in provision and worked together with health professionals such as the paediatric dietician and speech and language therapists and the voluntary sector such as the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and The National Deaf Children's Society to set up a family centre for those with early years age children with very complex needs.

The centre provides support and early intervention for very young children with complex needs. They do not necessarily go on to attend the special school's nursery. This centre provides a venue and programmes of activities that are agreed with the parents/carers and carefully designed to support and help them to engage their children. Parents/carers receive valuable one-to-one support and good opportunities to meet and share issues with other families.

This reduces their feelings of isolation and helps them communicate more effectively with their children.

2 Extending and improving the outreach service

LA and special schools in mid Wales

This authority has successfully used 'unlocking the potential' funding to improve the links between special and mainstream schools. They used the expertise of one of the special school headteachers, who used this work to support a master's degree, to lead on the developmental work.

Special school staff attend annual reviews in the mainstream schools, hold discussions with parents and meet with educational psychologists and SENCOs to discuss cases. They help mainstream school staff to plan lessons that meet the needs and abilities of all pupils and invite them to the special schools to see model lessons in action.

This expansion of the service has resulted in a greater numbers of pupils with additional learning needs receiving support within their mainstream school and a wider range of support being offered. The project has also developed regular involvement between a range of staff including health professionals and social services.

3 Working with staff in resource bases attached to mainstream schools to improve their practice

LA and special school for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties in south west Wales

The focus of this project is on helping staff in mainstream primary and secondary school resource bases to use specific examples of quality inclusive practice in their own settings. Special school staff coach mainstream staff and model good practice used, alongside the videoing of sessions and a focus on observing pupil responses. The project also works on ways of measuring pupil progress, which are adopted by participant schools.

The special school staff provide practical courses which result in schools developing resources, for example sensory sacks, and having the skills to continue developments creatively back at their bases.

The special school acts as a facilitator for teachers in the LA to gain a graduate diploma in teaching pupils with severe learning and profound and multiple learning difficulties. The special school has developed a comprehensive resource lending library.

Staff in the special school have gained an immense pride in their work and can now place their work in a broader context. Pupils in the resource bases have benefited from the increased knowledge skills and understanding of the staff who work with them.

4 Working to improve curriculum and enrichment opportunities for pupils at risk of exclusion

LA and special school in north east Wales

This project works with professionals from a range of agencies such as the local college and the youth offending team to provide a good range of options for primary and secondary age pupils who find it difficult to make progress and who are at risk of exclusion from their mainstream school.

The special school member of staff who co-ordinates the project sits on the LA behaviour panels and gives immediate support when there is a crisis and pupils are about to lose their mainstream school place. This support is well matched to meet the needs of the individual pupil. For example, they can attend the special school for a short period while staff work with them to help them learn to manage their behaviour or they can receive one-to-one support in their mainstream school.

The special school has developed a curriculum enrichment programme which offers mainstream pupils, who are not engaged, the chance to attend a local college and gain entry level qualifications.

Primary school pupils have good opportunities to attend the special school and work in the school's faith garden. The special school and mainstream staff have worked together to produce resources, and materials, this includes a workbook in Welsh.

The special school staff 'now feel valued and part of a wide spectrum of resources available within the local authority'. Primary pupils have gained wider curriculum opportunities and pupils who are not engaged have gained an opportunity to make a fresh start and gain accreditation.

5 Empowering staff in mainstream setting to effectively manage and provide for their students with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)

LA and special school in south east Wales

The focus of this project is to improve the capacity of mainstream school staff to provide for pupils with ASD. The special school has worked very closely with the LA to set up an outreach service to provide advice and guidance to mainstream settings and the families of pupils with ASD.

The staff team includes a teacher in charge, a teaching assistant, a communication support assistant and a home support Worker. The service aims to provide a joined up multi-agency approach to managing the more challenging aspects of ASD and give these pupils greater understanding and consistency in all aspects of their lives.

Mainstream school staff have received a flexible range of training carefully designed to fit in with their schedules. This training includes twilight sessions for teaching staff, short afternoon sessions for midday supervisors and administrative staff and whole day sessions for schools committed to becoming ASD friendly environments.

Professionals from all agencies across the authority are able to make referrals to the service. The service's staff have worked with the disability sports team to raise their awareness of these young people's needs. They also provide 'surgery' sessions for social service staff so that they can offer these young people an improved service. Intensive home support is given to parents/carers for a few weeks so that they can then manage particularly challenging behaviour without the support of professionals.

Schools have reported very positive outcomes in relation to pupils' progress, learning skills and behaviour. Staff in mainstream schools are now more positive about working with pupils with ASD, and the parents feel more supported.

Glossary

Additional learning needs (ALN)

This term covers a very wide range of needs. We use the term ALN in relation to learners who have needs besides those of most of their classmates, for a number of different reasons, including learners who:

- have special educational needs (SEN), as defined within the SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002);
- are disabled, as defined within the Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- have medical needs;
- have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD);
- are more able and talented than their classmates; and
- are learning English as an additional language.

Autistic spectrum disorders (ASD)

The term Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is used to describe the group of pervasive developmental disorders characterised by difficulties in social interaction and communication and by a restricted range of repetitive behaviour and interests.

INSTEP

A system of assessment and tracking the progress of pupils working at below level 1 of the National Curriculum that is based on National Curriculum P scales

Makaton

This is a system of communication that uses a vocabulary of 'key word' manual signs and gestures to support speech, as well as graphic symbols to support the written word. It is used by and with people who have communication, language or learning difficulties.

PECS

The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is a form of augmentative and alternative communication. It is typically used as an aid in communication for children with autism and other special needs.

SENCO

Special educational needs co-ordinator; a teacher who co-ordinates the work of a school to support pupils with special educational needs

The remit survey team

Claire Yardley HMI	Lead inspector
Mike Munting HMI	Survey team member
Gwen Davies AI	Survey team member
Iwan Roberts AI	Survey team member