Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Survey on

The Inclusion of Pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Primary and Post-Primary Schools in Northern Ireland

Inspected: June-December 2003

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CONTENTS

A number of quantitative terms are used throughout the report when commenting on aspects of provision for in geography and history. These terms should be interpreted as follows:

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75%-90%	-	most
50%-74%	-	a majority
30%-49%	-	a significant minority
10%-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small number.

PREFACE

Over the 2003-2004 period, the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has been collating evidence, through surveys and working groups, on the challenges facing schools and colleges in meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs. This work is in line with the Department of Education's commitment to promote inclusive practices.

An initial survey, of the Inclusion of Pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Primary and Post-Primary Schools in Northern Ireland, was conducted during May and June 2003. The Inspectors observed individual pupils in 47 schools; they took account of the responses to a self-evaluation questionnaire completed by some 125 schools across the five Education and Library Boards; they consulted parents groups in each Board; they scrutinised documents, including individual education plans; and they interviewed the principals and the special educational needs co-ordinators of the schools visited.

The findings in this report provide informative and evaluative comment on the capacity of schools to meet the needs of pupils with statements of special educational needs, and on the shortcomings of current practices. The report recognises the need for continuous attention to review and development in this area and makes a number of recommendations to effect improvement.

I welcome this report as a significant contribution to schools, Education and Library Boards and to the Department of Education in their pursuit of improvement in the quality of provision, for pupils with statements of special educational needs, in mainstream schools.

Marion I Matchett.

M MATCHETT
Chief Inspector

1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   The focus of this inspection survey is the inclusion of pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. At the time when this survey was carried out, and since, the challenge of inclusion has been recognised in the Programme of Government for Northern Ireland and in legislation, including that relating to Human Rights, Equality and Special Educational Needs and Disability. This report gives the findings of the survey in relation to current practice for pupils with statements of special educational needs in mainstream schools and makes recommendations to promote improvement and encourage schools to develop a whole-school acceptance of including pupils with special educational needs in the work and life of the school.

1.2   The Education (NI) Order 1996 sets out the context for educating pupils with a statement of special educational needs, alongside their peers in a mainstream school. Firstly, the special educational provision should address their particular learning difficulties, as well as facilitating the provision of effective education for the other children with whom they will be educated, while ensuring the efficient use of resources.

2.   THE SURVEY
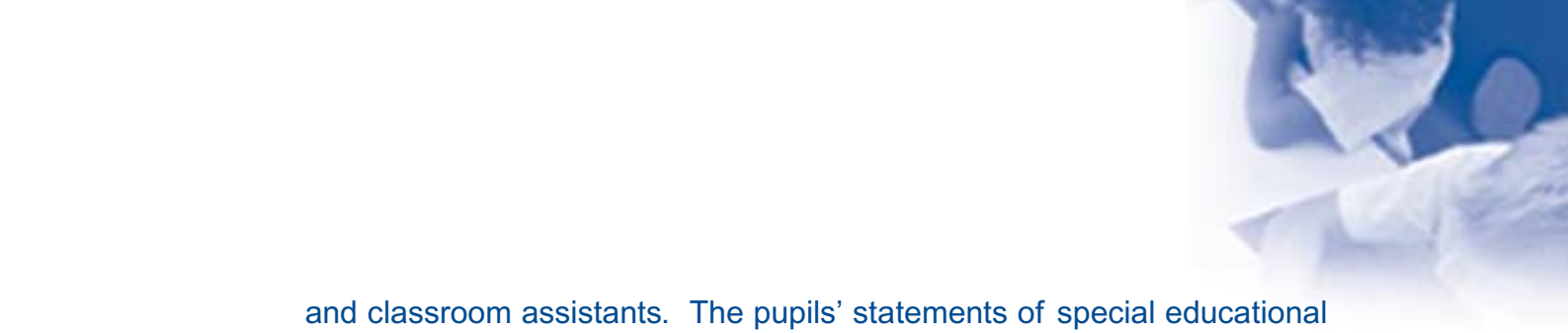
2.1   The survey examines inclusion with regard to the provision for those pupils with a statement of special educational needs who are educated within mainstream educational provision. The aims of the survey are as follows:

- to evaluate the effectiveness of the educational programmes provided;

- to examine the impact of the social inclusion of pupils with statements within mainstream schools;

- to comment on the physical arrangements, within schools, to facilitate inclusion;

- to evaluate the quality and effect of in-service (INSET) courses to enhance the teachers' experience and expertise in special needs;

- to evaluate the effectiveness of classroom assistant support;

- to comment on parents' views of inclusion.

2.2   The survey included visits to 46 schools across the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs); in addition, a total of 191 schools, including those visited, were surveyed by self-evaluative questionnaire. The responses to the questionnaires and the findings of the inspection survey are outlined in this report. The focus of the visits was to evaluate the effectiveness of the educational programme for individual pupils with statements, concentrating mainly on the quality of the education provided, the effectiveness of the teaching strategies and the teacher's understanding of, and response to, the pupil's particular problems. The survey also aimed to evaluate the physical arrangements to facilitate inclusion in the school and the level of social inclusion, including the arrangements to encourage friendships, participation in extra-curricular activities and pastoral arrangements. In addition, the inspectors took account of the INSET provided to improve the teachers' knowledge of particular needs, for example, in relation to Asperger's Syndrome, cerebral palsy, and sensory impairment. A number of other important factors were also considered, including, where available, the school's written guidelines to support inclusion, the organisation and management of inclusion, as it relates to the individual pupil with special needs, and any external support such as speech therapy and outreach support. The survey also focused on the work of the classroom assistants, appointed to support the education of statemented pupils.

2.3   The Inspectorate held meetings with parents, across all five ELBs, to give them an opportunity to share their views on the impact of their child's inclusion in mainstream education. Further evidence included discussions with: ELB officers, principals, senior management in schools, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), teachers

and classroom assistants. The pupils' statements of special educational needs were scrutinised to ascertain identified difficulties and recommended provision. The pupils observed represented a wide variety of identified disabilities, including: physical disability, sensory impairment, autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and specific reading difficulties.

2.4   The inspection team took account of the paper produced by the Regional Strategy Group, September 2002, entitled "The Inclusion of Pupils with Special Educational Needs." Tables are reproduced from this paper, in Appendix 1, to support a number of the findings of this survey.

3.   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3.1   The responses in the schools' self-evaluative questionnaires indicate that the majority of schools consider that they pay due attention to the statementing process and other supportive information. In their view, the schools plan well for, monitor and evaluate the adequacy and quality of provision and make use of the Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS) to enhance their level of knowledge and capacity to address the needs of pupils with learning difficulties.

3.2   The questionnaire evidence also shows that a minority of schools consider they have not developed significantly their interest in, and commitment to, promoting inclusion. In such instances, it is significant that schools provide little guidance to classroom assistants, have concerns about health and safety and accommodation, and have not fulfilled their requirement to include details of their special education provision within their school development planning.

3.3   The findings from this survey largely concur with the responses to the schools' self-evaluative questionnaires. In a majority of the schools visited, the pupils' individual programmes take good account of their special educational needs, as identified in their statements, and of information gained through contacts with the family and other professionals. The pupils, in the majority of cases, are making good progress and there is significant evidence that they benefit from a wide

range of inclusive experiences with their peers, participating in a variety of extra-curricular activities and in-school recreational opportunities.

3.4   In most cases, the pupils were supported by detailed individual education plans (IEPs) and the SENCOs were diligent in sharing information with colleagues and involving them in the process of planning. The IEPs were most effective when they were sharply focused on clearly assessed individual needs. However, in a small minority of schools, the IEPs were less effective, with teachers using vague or general targets, often drawn from a bank of statements provided in information and communication technology (ICT)-based packages.

3.5   In post-primary education, the numbers of teachers, the departmental arrangements, and the more complex management structures, made the inclusion of pupils more difficult to achieve and maintain across the whole school.

3.6   The schools visited used a wide variety of professional advice to inform and support their work at whole-school, departmental, class and individual level. When schools had problems accessing information from other professionals, or had poor co-operation from the parents, the teachers were not well enough informed about individual pupils. As a result, the education programmes tended to be more general and less specifically tailored to the statemented pupils' needs. In addition, where SENCOs were less experienced, or poorly supported or trained, then the sharing of information and the monitoring of programmes were more difficult to achieve.

3.7   In the majority of schools visited, the staff has worked hard to ensure that specialist physical resources and additional human resources, usually classroom assistants, were in place to support inclusion. In the best provision, the physical resources were carefully matched to the pupils' special educational needs, which are assessed by informed and experienced personnel.

3.8   It is significant, that in the majority of the schools visited, good teaching for all of the class met the needs of the statemented pupils. In

the best practice observed, the teachers differentiated their programmes, reflected regularly on their work, and evaluated their teaching approaches on a regular basis. Consequently, they were able to adapt and modify their classroom practice to meet the pupils' special educational needs.

3.9   In a minority of schools, the quality of teaching observed was less effective and teachers failed to involve the statemented pupils sufficiently in the class activities. Some pupils were observed completing repetitive, low-level tasks usually with the support of the classroom assistant and, most often, without any planned interaction with their peers. In these classes, both in primary and post-primary schools, inclusion was simply locational; in these cases, the pupils sat apart from other pupils, completing work set by the teacher, and were usually closely, or overly, shadowed by their classroom assistant. This practice was further compounded when more than one classroom assistant was in the same classroom.

3.10   There was significant evidence of statemented pupils benefiting from social interaction alongside their peers. Most of the parents and teachers interviewed were supportive of the opportunities for the pupil with learning difficulties to be included in school activities which enabled him/her to establish friendships, forge relationships and to develop socialisation skills in a wide variety of contexts.

3.11   All schools were clear that classroom assistants required a planned programme of specialist training, targeted at their specific role with statemented pupils.

3.12   The findings of this inspection survey indicate the need for a fundamental review of in-service, and initial teacher education (ITE), focusing on the extent to which the courses deal with special needs' issues. Such a review should bring forward recommendations related to supporting the increasing needs of teachers in mainstream schools.

3.13   The ELBs should ensure that their efforts to engage parents in the statementing process are continuously reviewed and improved. Consideration should be given to the appointment of a parental advice or
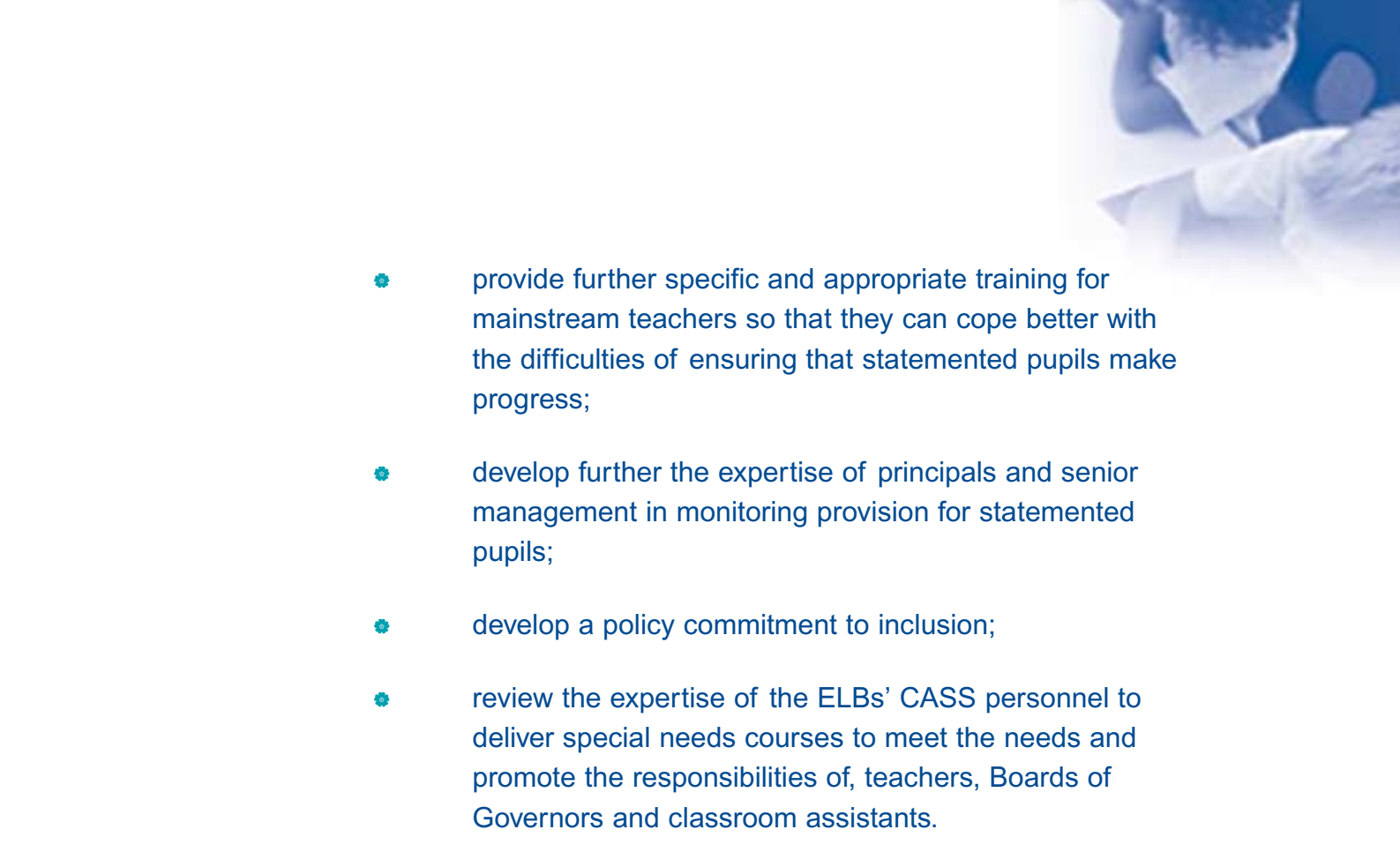
support officer, by each ELB, to enable parents to understand the statementing procedures more easily and to reduce levels of parental stress with the statementing and Annual Review processes.

3.14   There are insufficient training courses aimed at whole-school issues, such as: inclusion, classroom management, resources to facilitate inclusion, ICT, and support for teachers and assistants dealing with particular disabilities. Staff in schools commented on the difference between general information about a particular disability and training in how to meet the needs of a particular pupil with the disability in a classroom or school setting.

3.15   This survey has found substantial evidence of good practice, in schools, in integrating pupils with statements of special educational needs into mainstream classes. It is evident that the majority of such pupils have enriching and rewarding educational experiences while being educated alongside their peers. The majority of schools visited demonstrated considerable commitment to the concept of inclusion and worked hard to ensure that all of the pupils with special needs were given access to a broad and varied curriculum.

3.16   In summary the findings of this inspection survey indicate the need to:

- develop further partnerships among schools, CASS and other professionals;

- develop further partnerships between mainstream schools and special schools/units, so that the expertise of the teachers in special schools might be used to support mainstream teachers to develop appropriate strategies to cater more effectively for pupils with special educational needs;

- provide further training and development on the role of the SENCO;

- provide further training for classroom assistants;

- provide further specific and appropriate training for mainstream teachers so that they can cope better with the difficulties of ensuring that statemented pupils make progress;

- develop further the expertise of principals and senior management in monitoring provision for statemented pupils;

- develop a policy commitment to inclusion;

- review the expertise of the ELBs' CASS personnel to deliver special needs courses to meet the needs and promote the responsibilities of, teachers, Boards of Governors and classroom assistants.

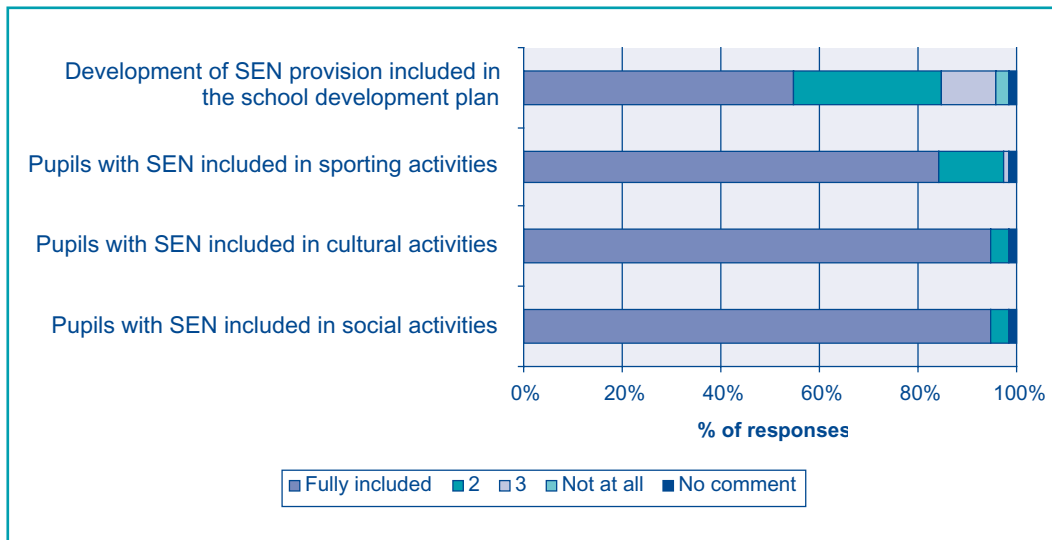## 4.   RESPONSES TO THE SELF-EVALUATIVE QUESTIONNAIRES

4.1   In the questionnaire sent to schools, members of senior management were asked to evaluate provision for the inclusion of pupils with statements of special educational needs within the school. The responses provided a detailed insight into the views of inclusion held by the schools. The findings of the inspection survey largely concur with the responses to the schools' self-evaluative questionnaires.

4.2   The responses to the self-evaluative questionnaires, completed by the schools, state that (see Table 1):

- the development of SEN provision is included in the school development plan in almost 55% of schools;

- almost 100% of schools indicated that pupils were either fully included or included to some degree in sporting activities;

- almost 100% of schools indicated that pupils were either fully included or included to some degree in cultural activities;

- almost 100% of schools indicated that pupils were either fully included or included to some degree in social activities.

Table 1

Development of SEN provision included in the school development plan

Pupils with SEN included in sporting activities

Pupils with SEN included in cultural activities

Pupils with SEN included in social activities

% of responses

■ Fully included ■ 2 □ 3 ■ Not at all ■ No comment

4.3   The responses further indicate (see Table 2) that:

- 66% of schools report that they use the Educational Welfare Service (EWS) to support pupils with statements of SEN and 30% of schools state that they make no use of the EWS for this purpose;

- over 80% of schools report that they use information from the psychology service to inform their understanding of pupils needs;

- nearly 100% of schools report that they use CASS to support the work of SENCOs;

- in total, 71% of schools report that they use CASS to support SEN work for classroom and other assistants and around 9% report extensive use of CASS for this purpose.
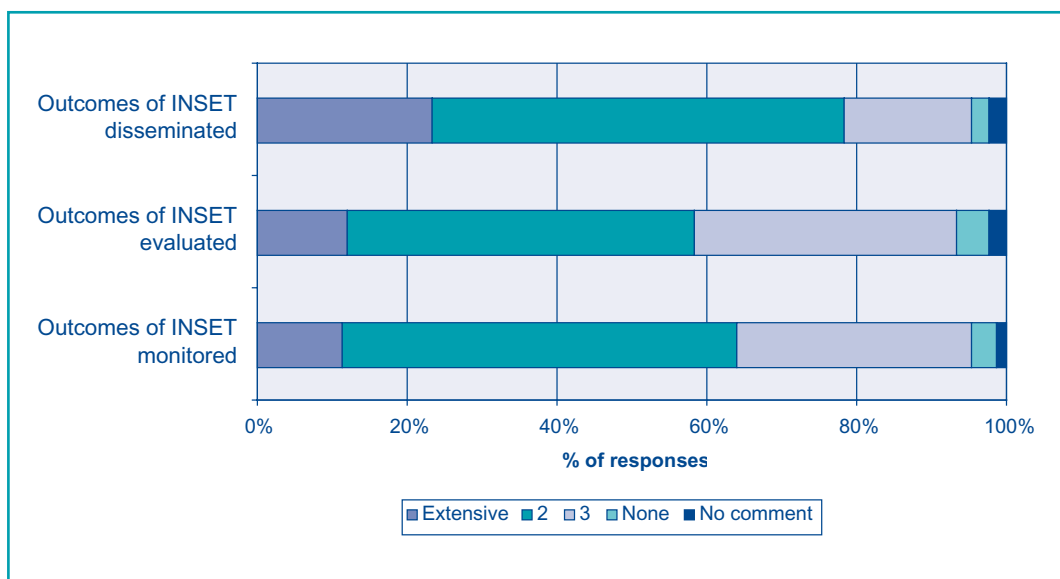
- in total, nearly 90% of schools reported that they use CASS to support SEN work for teachers and around 11% of schools report extensive use of CASS for this purpose.

Table 2
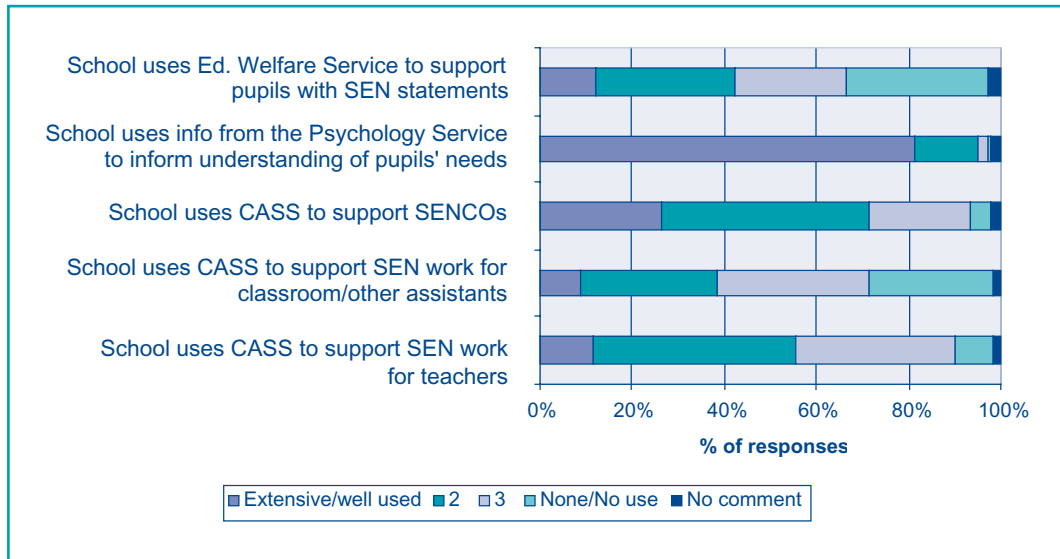
4.4   Nearly 100% of schools report that the outcomes of SEN, INSET are monitored, evaluated and disseminated (see Table 3).

Table 3

4.5   Almost 70% of schools report that inclusion of pupils with SEN has implications for building alterations and improvements and nearly 90% of schools report that the inclusion of pupils with SEN has health and safety implications. (see Table 4).

Table 4
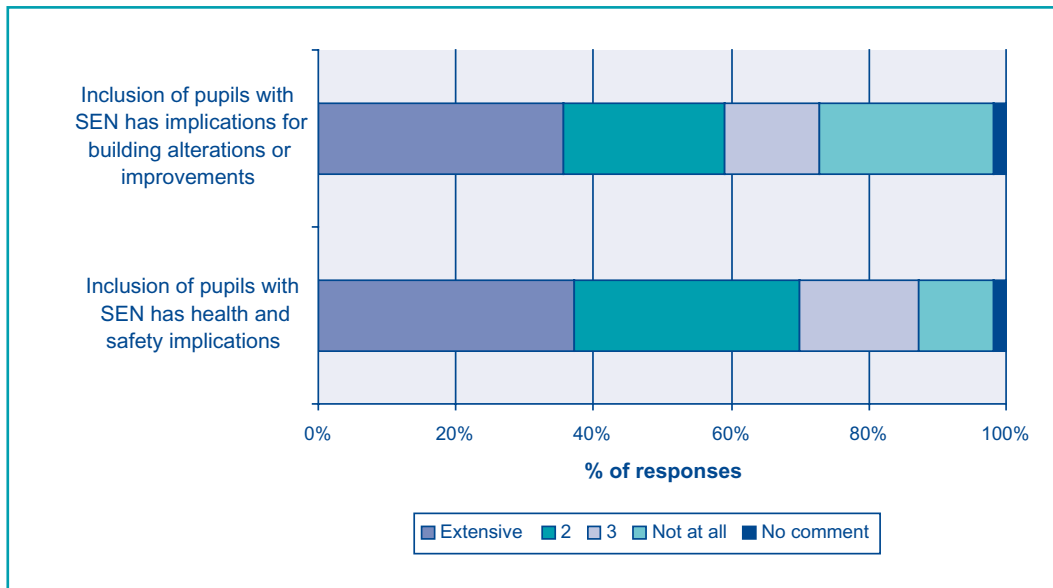
4.6   Table 5 shows that schools report that the monitoring and evaluation of provision is prioritised (61%) across the schools and, in particular, that the work of classroom assistants receives careful attention by senior staff.

Table 5

Monitoring and Evaluation (M and E) of the work of classroom assistants by senior management

Provision of statemented pupils evaluated by senior management

Provision of statemented pupils monitored by senior management

% of responses

- Extensive M and E
- 2
- 3
- No M and E
- No comment
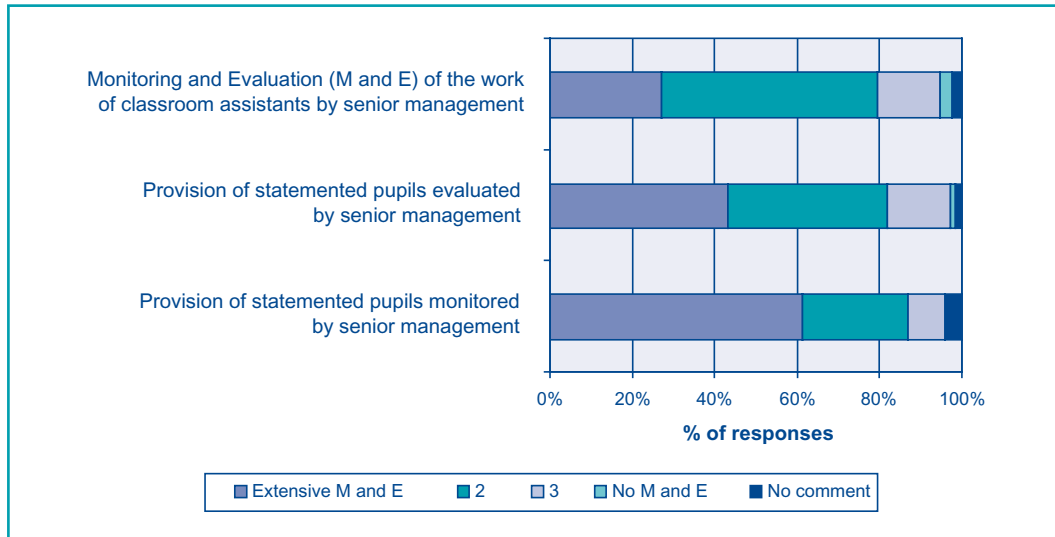
4.7   In 95% of schools, the senior managers report that they are aware of the approach to supporting pupils with statements and 44% report that they closely monitor this support. In 68% of schools, senior managers report that they are very aware of the quality of support for statemented pupils (see Table 6).

Table 6

Senior management aware of the overall approach to supporting pupils with statements and those requiring additional support

Senior management aware of the quality of provision for statemented pupils

% of responses

- Very aware
- 2
- 3
- Not aware
- No comment
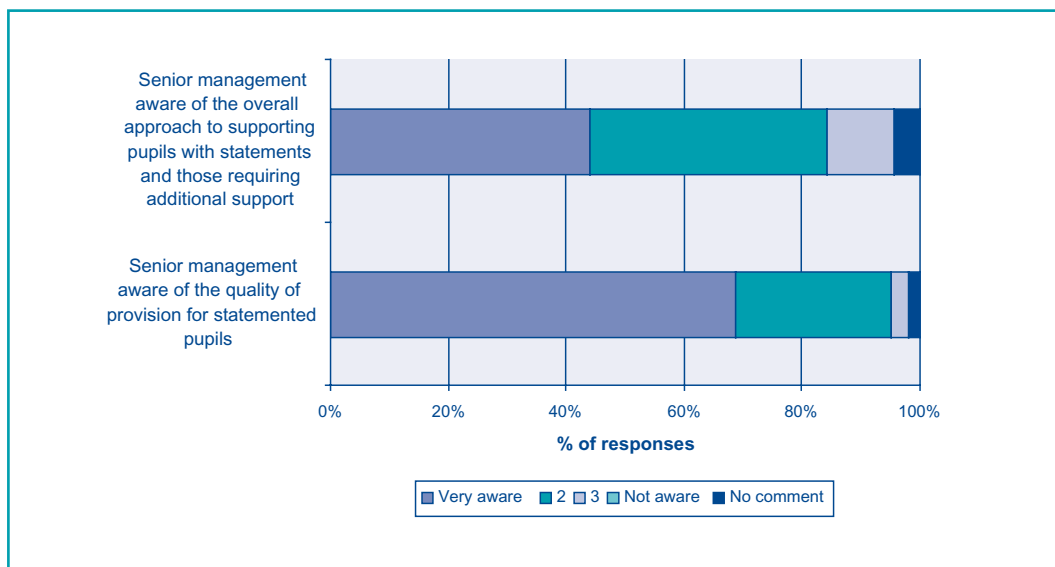
4.8   In summary, the schools' self-evaluative questionnaires indicate that the majority of schools pay due attention to the statementing process and supportive information; in the majority of cases, they state that they plan well for, monitor and evaluate the level and quality of provision and make use of the CASS service to enhance their level of knowledge and capacity to address the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. The responses also show that a minority of schools state that they have not developed significantly their interest in, and commitment to, promoting inclusion. In such instances, it is significant that these schools provide little guidance to classroom assistants, are worried about health and safety and accommodation, and have not fulfilled their requirement to include details of their special education provision within their school development planning. On balance, it is apparent that the requirements of the "statement" provide the stimulus to ensure that individual arrangements are made in all cases. The majority of schools report positively on the development of their arrangements.

4.9   The findings of the questionnaire provide useful and informative data and are used below to provide comparisons with the inspection evidence collated from the school visits.

5.   THE SURVEY FINDINGS

5.1   The Effectiveness of the Educational Programmes

5.1.1   In the majority of the schools visited, the pupils' individual programmes take good account of their special educational needs, as identified in their statements, and of information gained through contacts with the family and other professionals. The pupils, in the majority of cases, are making good progress; there is significant evidence that they benefit from a wide range of inclusive experiences with their peers, participating in an increasing variety of extra-curricular activities and in-school recreational opportunities. In most cases, the schools make good use of ICT to generate IEPs and to share information. The findings indicate that schools are less experienced in using ICT to access the curriculum for pupils through specific keyboards, peripherals or software packages. Where specialist advice from the ELBs is available, it can

make a significant difference to the pupils' ability to participate fully in the educational programmes.

5.1.2   In most cases, the pupils are supported by detailed IEPs and the SENCOs are diligent in sharing information with and involving colleagues in the process of planning. The IEPs are most effective when they are focused sharply on clearly assessed individual needs. However, in a small number of schools, they are less effective with teachers using vague or general targets, often drawn from a bank of statements provided in ICT-based packages. In addition, where the schools prioritise the pupils' socialisation needs, as is more commonplace in the primary sector, the pupils' self-esteem remains high and they are more socially integrated as part of the group. The provision in post-primary schools requires teamwork, training and co-ordination, as in the primary sector. However, given the context of post-primary education, the numbers of teachers, departmental arrangements, and more complex management structures, inclusion is more difficult to achieve and maintain across the whole school, particularly when social inclusion is not the central focus of the pupils' programme. The status and experience of the SENCO are significant factors affecting the overall experience for individual pupils, and in securing the pupils' greater inclusion in the range of school activities. The evidence would indicate clearly the need for schools to plan more purposefully to ensure that the pupils' social needs are recognised and responded to, within the overall education planning.

5.1.3   In the majority of schools visited, the staff have worked hard to ensure that specialist physical resources and additional human resources, usually classroom assistants, are in place to support inclusion. In the best provision, the physical resources are carefully matched to the pupils' special educational needs, which are assessed by informed and experienced personnel. In one example, the pupil's physical disability prevented her from producing well-presented, legible handwriting; after assessment by the ELB's support service for special needs assistive technology, she was provided with a laptop computer, which greatly enhanced the quality of presentation of her class notebooks and projects.

5.1.4   In most schools, the classroom assistants provide crucial support for inclusion and make a significant contribution to the pupils' ability to participate fully in the lessons and to make progress. In the best practice observed, the assistants were well informed, encouraged to show initiative and were knowledgeable about the pupils' needs. Where classroom assistants worked well a number of factors were present. These factors included:

- a strong sense of teamwork;

- clear direction and training from the teacher;

- focus on promoting the pupil's ability to work independently;

- time set aside for discussion and evaluation of the pupil's progress and further planning;

- the good initiative of the assistant.

These factors were not found to be commonplace across the schools. Some schools failed to use their classroom assistants effectively. In one school, the number of classroom assistants has risen from one to 12 in just over a year. All are deployed to support pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and behavioural difficulties. In some instances, the classroom assistants need more meaningful guidance on their role, to help ensure their effectiveness.

5.1.5   The findings revealed that, where possible, the principal deploys an experienced teacher to work with a statemented pupil. This is more common when the pupil has challenging behaviours related to autism. It is significant that, in the majority of the schools visited, good teaching for all of the class met the needs of the statemented pupils. Those teachers who differentiate their programmes, reflect regularly on their work, and evaluate their teaching approaches on a regular basis, are able to adapt and modify their classroom practice to meet special needs. Arrangements to facilitate the effective transition from pre-school to

primary school vary; the findings indicate the need for clearer guidance from the ELBs to facilitate school admission for children with special needs.

5.1.6   The funding for classroom assistants is provided from central ELB funds, but funding for teaching hours is not and, as the numbers of statemented children increase in individual schools, this has implications for the school's delegated budget. As a consequence, schools are often not able to afford to pay for sufficient teaching hours to meet the individual needs of their pupils and depend more on the use of classroom assistants.

5.1.7   In a minority of schools, the quality of teaching observed was less effective; this was often characterised by teachers failing to involve sufficiently the statemented pupils in the class activities. In these situations, some children were observed completing repetitive, low-level tasks usually with the support of the classroom assistant and, most often, without any planned interaction with their peers. In these classes, both in primary and post-primary schools, inclusion was simply locational; the pupils sat apart from other pupils, completing work set by the teacher, and were closely shadowed by their classroom assistant. The pupils had little or no contact with their peers during lessons, nor did they tend to participate or communicate with others when the teachers sub-divided the pupils into groups to complete a task. In a significant minority of the lessons observed, the class teacher had little or no contact with the statemented pupil. This practice does little to ensure effective inclusion and challenges the validity of the responses to the self-evaluation questionnaire which stated that monitoring and evaluation is well established in the majority of schools. There is a need for schools to indicate clearly the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation against a set of indicators indicating best inclusive practice.

5.2   Social Inclusion

5.2.1   There is significant evidence, from the survey, of statemented pupils benefiting from social interaction alongside their peers. Most of the parents and teachers interviewed were aware of the opportunities for
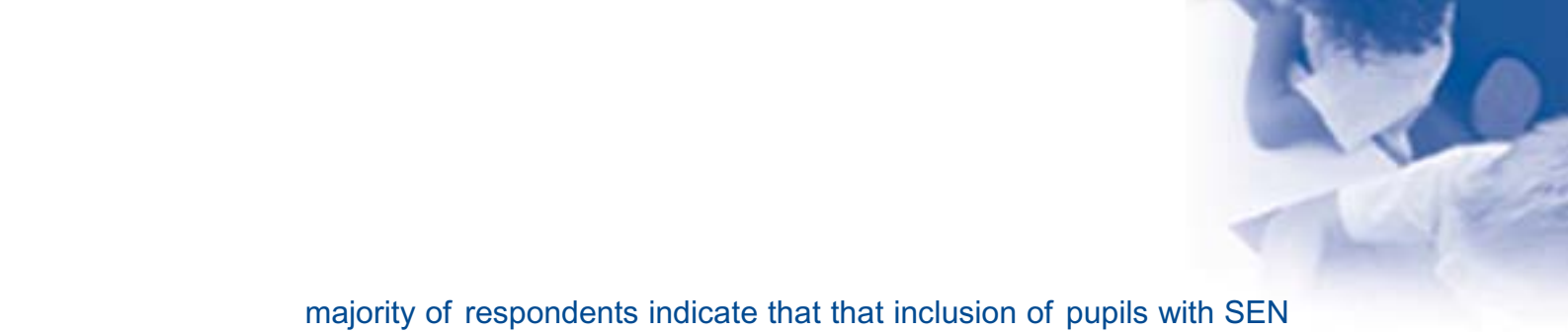
the pupil with learning difficulties to be included in activities which enabled him/her to establish friendships, forge relationships with adults and to develop socialisation skills in a wide variety of contexts. It was also noted that most teachers were sensitive to the difficulties the pupils encountered, in keeping up with their peers, in learning activities. There were numerous examples of teachers adapting programmes to match the cognitive needs of the statemented pupil within the overall curriculum programme for the pupil's peers.

5.2.2. It is also evident, from a minority of the school visits, that some pupils develop their social skills, but make little academic progress. For these pupils, the schools find it difficult to provide suitably differentiated programmes. In some cases, the practice of withdrawing them from class, or of placing them with pupils in a younger class, mitigates against the development of social interaction with their peers. In a small number of cases, the schools have developed a "buddy" system, where the pupil with learning difficulties has a designated pupil of his/her own age to encourage inclusion into the full range of class activities. Many of the schools report the positive impact of having a statemented pupil in their class, thus giving the other pupils an insight into disability, and an awareness of their responsibility to act supportively.

5.2.3 The evidence from the survey suggests that the post-primary schools find it much more difficult to include statemented pupils as fully in school activities as in the primary sector. The widening maturation gap between pupils with learning difficulties and their peers in post-primary education and the different structure of the school day, make social interaction problematic for many pupils who rely on the support of a classroom assistant or other help to negotiate the school day successfully.

5.3   Physical Arrangements

5.3.1   In the majority of schools visited, there are few difficulties noted, in relation to the quality of accommodation provided, to facilitate the inclusion of pupils with specific difficulties with mobility. This contrasts markedly with the responses to the questionnaire (Table 4) where the

majority of respondents indicate that that inclusion of pupils with SEN has health and safety issues for the schools. The findings are that, where pupils with visual or physical impairment are enrolled, the schools have access to classroom assistant support to supervise and support them in the playground and to ensure safe passage from class to class. In a number of cases, the ELBs have provided structural alterations, such as ramps and chair lifts, to enable pupils to access facilities safely and, in these examples, appropriate account has been taken of the physical needs of pupils through, for example, provision of toilets for the disabled. Nevertheless, many principals expressed their fears about the difficulties of including pupils with medical and other related needs in buildings not specifically designed for their use. The staff reports that, in some cases, classroom space is not specifically designed to accommodate a wheelchair, nor is specialist furniture available to ensure access to practical activities. The evidence from the school visits, suggests the need for ELBs to audit the schools to establish a database of information about the capacity of schools to accommodate pupils with special educational needs and physical disabilities in particular. Such a database should inform effective planning to ensure that, over a period of time, all schools, irrespective of their special needs intake, have the capacity to anticipate and meet the needs of the vast majority of pupils.

5.4   Use of Professional Advice: In-service Training

5.4.1   The schools visited use a wide variety of professional advice to inform and support their work at whole-school, department, class and individual level. The main providers of support are the CASS, the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and, less often, the EWS. In the best examples, staff benefit greatly from information and training which help them to understand better the pupils' needs and the implications for teaching and learning and classroom management. However, the survey reveals that CASS is, in some instances, unable to provide relevant in-service training related to the specific needs of schools, including training related to addressing the significant learning difficulties of pupils. In a minority of schools, where only general advice and information are given, support tends to be less effective.

5.4.2   All of the schools are clear that classroom assistants require a planned programme of specialist training, targeted at their specific role with statemented pupils. In the best examples, the assistants are kept well informed by the teachers and have a shared understanding of the pupils' needs, and how they are to be met in the classroom and during the school day. There were a few examples observed where classroom assistants had written guidance about their duties, in relation to the statemented pupil, and specific written information about the pupil's needs. The assistants consider this guidance to be helpful in carrying out their work. In one school, typical of the best practice observed, good advice, from the psychology service and the autism advisory service, enabled the staff to plan more appropriately to address the pupils' needs and to ensure his effective inclusion in the different subject areas. Patience and understanding were characteristic of the approaches used in a number of the lessons observed.

5.4.3   In contrast, when schools have problems accessing information from other professionals or receive poor co-operation from parents, the teachers are not well enough informed about individual pupils and programmes tend to be more general and less specifically tailored to the statemented pupils' needs. In addition, when SENCOs are less experienced, or poorly supported or trained, then the sharing of information and monitoring of programmes is more difficult to achieve.

5.4.4   Almost all the teachers visited have received no formal training or relevant school-based INSET. In some of the schools, however, the principal facilitates relevant training to raise the profile of special needs and to improve the quality of skill and knowledge among the staff. In one such school, the vice-principal organised and presented a course on autism for the subject teachers. In another post-primary, the SENCO used a day in September to brief teachers and classroom assistants on individual pupils. In most of the schools surveyed, however, neither the SENCO nor the main teachers had received specific INSET relating to the pupils' diagnosed conditions. Some teachers have availed of award bearing in-service courses, such as advanced diplomas or masters degrees, with SEN as the focus. Where appropriate, short courses were

available, the schools reported good dissemination of materials and outcomes as illustrated (Table 3). The evidence indicates the need for a fundamental review of INSET and ITE, to ascertain the level of, and extent of the special education aspects to the courses and to make recommendations which might support the increasing needs of teachers in mainstream schools. Many of the teachers visited are dealing with more than one statemented pupil in a class, usually there are several pupils at stages 1-3 of the Code of Practice. In such cases, the teachers found the work more stressful and time consuming. Insufficient advice and support are available to assist the management of schools to promote teaching and learning in classes with significant numbers of pupils with differing learning difficulties.

5.5   The Work of the Classroom Assistants

5.5.1   Classroom assistant training is a concern mentioned by all schools and, while acknowledging the recent moves by ELBs to provide a structure for developing training for classroom assistants, it is clear that specialist training is needed for assistants appointed to provide specific support for individual pupils. Information and advice is available when requested from, for example, advisory officers responsible for ASD and from specialist support such as advisory teachers for sensory impairment. However, many classroom assistants are also involved in activities relating to classroom practice, ICT and the production of specialist resources for the classroom, and reported that training for these areas is often not available to them. In a minority of schools, the pupils were overly reliant on the classroom assistants who were unsure of their precise role. The findings indicate the need for training to help schools develop practical advice and a clear policy for the role of the classroom assistant. Considerable emphasis needs to be placed on developing strategies to encourage the statemented pupils to learn independently as part of the class without obtrusive support. Currently, this has important implications for classroom organisation, interpersonal skills and communication with pupils.

5.5.2   The classroom assistants interviewed, with one exception, have not attended INSET outside their school. The majority of them have not received detailed advice about their role. In most cases, the assistants have no written job description relevant to their duties in schools, and few have written guidance from their class teacher about the nature and extent of their responsibilities. One classroom assistant was taking a distance learning course for classroom assistants with a university in England. Most classroom assistants depend on the support and advice of the class teacher; this does not ensure either consistency of practice or provide a cohesive system of skilling classroom assistants to take responsibility for the different aspects of classroom activity. Given the importance of the classroom assistant role, in support of the pupils' learning, their job description, responsibilities and training needs should be reviewed.

5.6   Outcomes of the Meetings with Parents

5.6.1   The Inspectorate held meetings with parents in each of the five ELBs to ascertain their views about the effectiveness of their child's mainstream school placement and the impact that statementing had on the quality of the education provided. The parents' views can be summarised as follows:

- many parents expressed concern about the statementing process, about the lack of information available from the ELBs and about the length of time between initial referral and the completed statement; some talked about the "six months wasted" in their child's education due to the delay;

- all parents agreed that the statement was necessary to secure the additional help their child needed; few were aware that some ELBs initiate additional help as soon as statutory assessment begins;

- almost all of the parents were fully in support of their child's inclusion in mainstream schools; they praised the

dedication and commitment of the teachers and placed great importance on their child's acquisition of social skills, and acceptance by the wider school community, as a priority over academic attainment;

- many parents felt that the transfer from primary to post-primary schools, for children with SEN, was a particularly daunting time. A number commented that there was inadequate support available to their children to help ease this difficult transition;

- a significant majority of parents felt that communication with the ELBs' officers was difficult; many talked of being passed "from pillar to post" as they sought information and others spoke of being in touch with the ELB on a weekly basis, in order to get up-to-date information.

Example of parental views:

▶ *'couldn't someone have phoned us and told us the form was wrong'*

▶ *'less strong parent would have given up'*

▶ *'pressure on parent could make them throw in towel'*

▶ *'feels like a battle from the moment you fill in first form'*

▶ *'we're strong-willed and able to talk – what about parents who are less well educated or having learning difficulties themselves?*

5.6.2   While it is difficult to generalise from the views of the sample of parents interviewed as part of this survey, it is clear that the concerns raised are nonetheless significant. They highlight the need for ELBs to ensure that their efforts to engage parents in the statementing process are frequently reviewed and improvements made. The Western Education and Library Board has appointed an assistant education officer (AEO) with responsibility for developing inclusion. This has been received warmly by parents.

There is a clear need to involve all of the parents of children with SEN more fully in the process. A number of suggestions for consideration arose from the meetings with parents; these include:

the appointment of a parental advice or support officer to help parents to understand the statementing procedures more easily, and to reduce levels of parental stress related to the statementing and Annual Review processes;

the Transition Review for statemented pupils, currently held in the first term of year 7, should be held in the second term of year 6 to facilitate the acquisition of detailed information on suitable post-primary provision and to enable the parents to make informed judgements about their child's post-primary placement.

5.6.3   The findings of the inspection survey indicate that statementing equates with access to additional resources, and is regarded by parents and schools alike as the statutory means of ensuring that they secure additional provision. This way of working is detrimental to the promotion of inclusive practice.

5.7   The Schools' Provision for Special Needs in General

5.7.1   Overall, the evidence indicates that individual pupils with statements tend to have a positive experience in those mainstream schools where there is a whole-school commitment to provide well for the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs. This sense of commitment and teamwork underpins effective provision and is central to the success of mainstream placement of pupils with learning difficulties. In practice, in those schools where the inspectors found good practice, inclusion was the core element of planning. The provision of a written inclusion policy should help to support this work and should also provide a benchmark for schools wishing to improve their special educational provision. The best practice indicators, summarised overleaf, go some way to offering benchmark criteria which could inform policy development.

Best Practice Indicators

The school is committed to meeting the needs of all pupils and has given special needs high priority in the school.

The SENCO has a high status and relevant experience.

Good links have been established with the ELB advisory officers for special needs and with other Board special needs services.

Good leadership at all levels encourages and supports teachers and classroom assistants to value inclusion as a challenge which has a positive outcome for all pupils.

Parental partnerships are established, effective and welcomed by parents and staff.

5.7.2   The teachers and classroom assistants regard relevant and continuous training as their most important priority. While more general courses on the Code of Practice and IEPs have been helpful, there has been an insufficient number of courses aimed at whole-school issues, such as: promoting, inclusion, classroom management, managing resources to facilitate inclusion, using ICT, and accessing support for teachers and assistants dealing with particular disabilities. Staff in schools commented on the difference between general information about a particular disability and training in how to meet the needs of a particular pupil with that disability in a classroom or school setting. Some teachers and assistants valued the support and information they received at conferences, such as the National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN), as helpful exemplars of good practice Many of these staff felt that this type of professional development should be provided regularly by CASS as part of an extended menu of staff development courses offered to schools.

6. CONCLUSION AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

6.1   This survey has found substantial evidence of good practice in schools in integrating pupils with a statement of special educational needs into mainstream classes. It is evident that the majority of such pupils have enriching and rewarding educational experiences while being educated along side their peers. The majority of schools visited demonstrate considerable commitment to the concept of inclusion and work hard to ensure that all of the pupils with special needs are given access to a broad and varied curriculum. There is also evidence, however, of a number of issues to be addressed if the needs of all are to be met consistently. These include:

- the need to develop further partnerships among schools, CASS and other professionals;

- the need to develop further partnerships between mainstream schools and the special schools/units in their local area, so that the special schools' expertise can be used to support mainstream teachers;

- the need for appropriate training opportunities for SENCOs to help them understand fully and develop their role;

- the need for a range of appropriate training opportunities for classroom assistants;

- the need to develop specific and appropriate training for mainstream teachers so that they can cope better with the difficulties of ensuring that statemented pupils experience success and make progress;

- the need for principals and senior management teams (SMT) to develop further their expertise in monitoring provision for statemented pupils;

- the need for better use of ICT to support learning, teaching and communication.

6.2   Throughout the survey, the need for a policy commitment to inclusion has been highlighted; such a development is crucial to the overall promotion of better practices across schools, when including pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms.

7.   RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   Schools should review the status of the SENCO. This survey has demonstrated the crucial part the SENCO plays in developing the quality of educational programmes designed to be inclusive. Where the SENCO has a high profile in the school and, in particular, is a member of the SMT, he/she is more able to support and lead the provision for pupils with special educational needs.

7.2.   ELBs should develop, as a priority, training programmes for both teachers and classroom assistants to improve their knowledge and expertise of working with pupils with learning difficulties.

7.3   The role of the special school, in providing support and advice to mainstream schools, needs to be enhanced significantly. It will be important to ensure that specialist advice is more widely available as more pupils with physical disabilities integrate into mainstream classes. There will be a need for continuing and improving outreach advice from teachers in special schools, and from relevant therapists, to support teachers and classroom assistants and to make sure they are aware of the range of specialist equipment and adaptations.

7.4.   ELBs should review the expertise of their CASS personnel to deliver special educational needs training to meet the extensive needs and responsibilities of teachers, Boards of Governors and classroom assistants. This will be needed to support the inclusion of increasing numbers of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schools, particularly at post-primary level.

7.5   The Curriculum Advisory Support Service should form links with, and draw expertise from, the special school sector, specialist advisory services and the psychology service to help them support schools which are experiencing the increasing impact of inclusion.

7.6.   The appointment of a parental advice or support officer, with appropriate and relevant experience, to be responsible for liaising with parents and supporting them through the statementing and the annual review processes, should be given immediate consideration.

THE INCLUSION OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

(Source: Regional Strategy Group - September 2002)

Table 1 - Pupils at Stage 5 of the Code of Practice in October 2000

(pupils at Stage 5 CoP have Statements of Special Educational Needs)

Board	School population	Total number of statements	% of school population with statements
BELB	65,204	1,500	2.30%
NEELB	74,855	1,480	1.98%
SEELB	66,695	2,793	4.19%
SELB	75,814	1,811	2.39%
WELB	64,099	1,610	2.51%
Total	**346,667**	**9,194**	**2.65% (average)**

Table 2 - Placement of pupils at Stage 5 of the Code of Practice at October 2000

(Pupils at Stage 5 CoP have Statements of Special Educational Needs)

Board	Total number of statements	Number of Stage 5 pupils in mainstream	% of total number of Stage 5 pupils in mainstream	Number of Stage 5 pupils in units	% of total number of Stage 5 pupils in units attached to mainstream	Number of Stage 5 pupils in special schools	% of total number of Stage 5 pupils in special schools
BELB	1,500	391	26.06	90	6	1,019	67.93
NEELB	1,480	491	33.17	264	17.83	725	48.98
SEELB	2,793*	992	35.51	477	17.07	1,273	45.57
SELB	1,811	698	38.54	718	39.64	395	21.81
WELB	1,610*	775	48.13	57	3.5	763	47.39
All Boards	**9,194**	**3,352**	**36.45**	**1,611**	**17.52**	**4,180**	**45.46**

*Note: *These figures are inclusive of pupils with statements who have placements in settings other than those mentioned above eg EOTAS, Home Tuition and placements outside Northern Ireland. (This is the reason why some of the percentages do not to add up to 100%).*

SCHOOLS VISITED DURING THE SURVEY

1.   **SELB**

   Primary Schools

   Maralin Primary School, Craigavon
   Portadown Primary School
   Iveagh Primary School, Rathfriland
   Holy Trinity Primary School, Cookstown

   Secondary Schools

   Cookstown High School
   Banbridge Academy
   St Marys's Junior High School, Lurgan, Craigavon
   Banbridge High School

2.   **WELB**

   Secondary Schools

   Enniskillen High School
   Strabane High School
   Sacred Heart College, Omagh
   St Patricks High School, Dungiven
   Clondermott High School, Londonderry

   Primary Schools

   Ballykelly Primary School, Limavady
   Omagh Integrated Primary School
   Sion Mills Primary School, Strabane
   Enniskillen Integrated Primary School
   Lisnagelvin Primary School, Londonderry

3. NEELB

Primary Schools

Abbot's Cross Primary School, Newtownabbey
Ballykeel Primary School, Ballymena
Ballysally Primary School, Coleraine
Crossroads Primary School, Kilrea
Mount St Michael's Primary School, Randalstown

Secondary Schools

Ballee Community High School, Ballymena
Ballyclare Secondary School
Ballymoney High School
Cross and Passion High School, Ballycastle
Dalriada Grammar School, Ballymoney
Larne High School
Slemish Integrated College, Ballymena

4. SEELB

Primary Schools

Kilmaine Primary School, Bangor
Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School, Ballinderry, Lisburn
Belvoir Park Primary School, Belfast
All Children's Primary School, Newcastle

Secondary Schools

Fort Hill Integrated College, Lisburn
Bangor Academy
St Colman's Secondary School, Ballynahinch
Saintfield High School

5.   BELB

Primary Schools

Lowood Primary School, Belfast
Cranmore Primary School, Belfast
Vere Foster Primary School, Belfast
Strandtown Primary School, Belfast
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Belfast

Secondary Schools

Hazelwood Integrated College, Newtownabbey
Ashfield Boys' High School, Belfast
Balmoral High School, Belfast

SCHOOLS INCLUDED IN INCLUSION QUESTIONNAIRE

Abbey Primary School, Newtownards

Abbott's Cross Primary School, Newtownabbey

Academy Primary School, Ballynahinch

All Children's Integrated Primary School, Newcastle

All Saint's Primary School, Ballymena

All Saints Primary School, Omagh

Aquina's Diocesan Grammar School, Belfast

Artigarvan Primary School, Strabane

Ashfield Boys' School, Belfast

Assumption Grammar School, Antrim

Ballee Community High School, Ballymena

Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School, Lisburn

Ballycastle High School

Ballyclare Secondary School

Ballykeel Primary School, Ballymena

Ballykelly Primary School, Limavady

Ballymacrickett Primary School, Crumlin

Ballymagee Primary School, Bangor

Ballymoney High School

Ballyoran Primary School, Craigavon

Ballysally Primary School, Coleraine

Balmoral High School, Belfast

Banbridge Academy

Banbridge High School

Bangor Academy

Bangor Central Primary School

Belfast Royal Academy

Belvoir Park Primary School, Belfast

Bocombra Primary School, Craigavon

Braid Primary School, Ballymena

Braniel Nursery School, Belfast

Brownlow College, Craigavon

Buick Memorial Primary School, Ballymena

Bushmills Primary School

Carrick Primary School, Newry

Carrickfergus Central Primary School

Carrickfergus College

Cavehill Primary School, Belfast

Christian Brothers' Abbey Primary School, Armagh

Clondermot High School, Londonderry

Cloughogue Primary School, Newry

Convent of Mercy, Downpatrick

Cookstown High School

Corran Integrated Primary School, Larne

Craigback Primary School, Eglinton, Londonderry

Cranmore Integrated Primary School, Belfast

Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle

Dalriada Grammar School, Ballymoney

Down High School, Downpatrick

Dromore Primary School, Omagh

Drumachose Primary School, Limavady

Drumcree College, Craigavon

Duke of Westminster High School, Kesh, Enniskillen

Dungannon Primary School

Dunmurry High School

Ebrington Primary School, Waterside, Londonderry

Enniskillen High School

Enniskillen Integrated Primary School

Enniskillen Model Primary School

Enniskillen Nursery School

Euston Street Primary School, Belfast

Faughan Valley High School, Cross, Londonderry

Glengormley High School, Newtownabbey

Glenlola Collegiate, Bangor

Good Shepherd Primary School, Waterside, Londonderry

Grosvenor Grammar School, Belfast

Hazelwood College, Newtownabbey

Holy Child Primary School, Belfast

Holy Family Primary School, Shantallow, Londonderry

Holy Trinity College, Cookstown

Holy Trinity Primary School, Cookstown

Holy Trinity Primary School, Enniskillen

Holy Trinity, Lisburn

Integrated College Dungannon

Iveagh Primary School, Newry

Kilmaine Primary School, Bangor

Knockbreda Nursery School, Belfast

La Salle Boys' School, Belfast

Larne High School

Lisbellaw Primary School, Enniskillen

Lismore Comprehensive School, Craigavon

Lisnagarvey High School, Lisburn

Lisnagelvin Primary School, Londonderry

Londonderry Model Primary School

Loreto Convent Primary School, Omagh

Lowwood Primary School, Belfast

Malone College, Belfast

Maralin Village Primary School, Craigavon

Massereene Community College, Antrim

Methodist College, Belfast

Millington Primary School, Craigavon

Millstrand Integrated Primary School, Portrush

Mount St Catherine's Primary School, Armagh

New Bridge Integrated College, Banbridge

Newbuildings Primary School, Londonderry

Newry High School

North Coast Integrated College, Coleraine

Oakgrove Integrated Primary School, Londonderry

Omagh County Primary School

Omagh High School

Omagh Integrated Primary School

Omagh Integrated Primary School

Orritor Primary School, Cookstown

Our Lady of Mercy, Belfast

Pond Park Nursery School, Lisburn

Portadown Integrated Primary School

Portadown Integrated Primary School

Primate Dixon Primary School, Coalisland, Dungannon

Rainey Endowed Grammar School, Magherafelt

Rathenraw Integrated Primary School, Antrim

Sacred Heart College, Omagh

Sacred Heart Primary School, Dungannon

Saintfield High School, Ballynahinch

Sion Mills Primary School, Strabane

St Aloysius' High School, Ballymena

St Anne's Primary School, Belfast

St Brendan's Primary School, Craigavon

St Brigid's College, Carnhill, Londonderry

St Brigid's Primary School, Augher

St Brigid's Primary School, Cranagh, Omagh

St Ciaran's High School, Dungannon

St Colman's Abbey Primary School, Newry

St Colman's High School, Ballynahinch

St Colman's High School, Strabane

St Colman's Primary School, Lisburn

St Colmcille's High School, Downpatrick

St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick

St Columba's College, Newtownards

St Columba's Primary School, Garvagh, Coleraine

St Columban's College, Newry

St Columbkille's Primary School, Carrickmore, Omagh

St Comgall's Primary School, Bangor

St Conor's Primary School, Omagh

St Conor's Primary School, Omagh

St Eugene's High School, Castlederg

St Genevieve's High School, Belfast

St Jarlath's Primary School, Dungannon

St Joseph's Boys' High School, Newry

St Joseph's Grammar School, Dungannon

St Joseph's High School, Coalisland, Dungannon

St Joseph's High School, Newry

St Joseph's Primary School, Downpatrick

St Joseph's Primary School, Drumquin, Omagh

St Joseph's Primary School, Newry

St Kieran's Primary School, Belfast

St Macnissi's Grammar School, Ballymena

St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan

St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor

St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewellan

St Malachy's Primary School, Newry

St Mark's High School, Newry

St Mary's College, Brollagh, Enniskillen

St Mary's College, Londonderry

St Mary's Girls' High School, Craigavon

St Mary's High School, Limavady

St Mary's Primary School, Armagh

St Mary's Primary School, Claudy, Londonderry

St Mary's Primary School, Mullymesker, Enniskillen

St Mary's Primary School, Stewartstown, Dungannon

St Matthew's Primary School, Limavady

St Michael's College, Enniskillen

St Michael's Primary School, Newry

St Olcan's High School, Randalstown, Antrim

St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Belfast

St Patrick's and St Brigid's College, Claudy, Londonderry

St Patrick's Boys' Academy, Dungannon

St Patrick's College, Dungannon

St Patrick's College, Maghera

St Patrick's Primary School Loup, Magherafelt

St Patrick's Primary School, Armagh

St Patrick's Primary School, Castlederg

St Patrick's Primary School, Dungannon

St Patrick's Primary School, Dungannon

St Patrick's Primary School, Newtownstewart, Omagh

St Paul's High School, Bessbrook, Newry

St Paul's Primary School Slievemore, Galliagh, Londonderry
St Rose's High School, Belfast
St Therese's Primary School, Belfast
Star of the Sea, Belfast
Strabane High School
Strabane Primary School
Strandtown Primary School, Belfast
Stranmillis Primary School, Belfast
Suffolk Primary School, Belfast
Tandragee Junior High School, Craigavon
Tannaghmore Primary School, Craigavon
Termoncanice Primary School, Limavady
Trillick Primary School, Omagh
Ulidia Integrated College, Carrickfergus
Vere Foster, Belfast
Windmill Integrated Primary School, Dungannon