

Education and Training Inspectorate

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A Survey of Provision for School Leavers in Special Schools for Pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties

2004

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

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

PART 1

A SHORT POSTAL SURVEY OF PROVISION FOR SPECIAL SCHOOL LEAVERS 2003-2004

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1.1 The transition of pupils from special schools to post-school provision represents a significant period of change for both the young leavers and their families. The anxieties of moving from a special school, where the young people feel safe and secure, into a new and unfamiliar setting have long been recognised by schools, adult services, parents and the young people themselves. In most instances, the transfer occurs smoothly and is particularly effective when all concerned have been working together to ensure that the transition period is a well-established process and not a single event.
- 1.1.2 More recently, the problems associated with transition have been heightened by an uncertainty surrounding the availability of post-school placement within the adult health services in some Health Trust areas. In addition, the efforts by the special school sector to broaden the choices for young people, to include: work placement, supported employment, further education (FE) placements and training opportunities, have ensured that some young people and their parents have had to give serious consideration to a wider choice of career options. In such instances, the special schools have had to review their leavers' programme to ensure that the young people have the skills, knowledge and confidence to enter training, employment and adult services and that they will be able to do so with greater independence.

1.1.3 The current situation gives rise to a number of challenges; these have been identified by the Inter-Departmental Transition Group (IDTG) which was established to address the issue of transition and to make recommendations for improvement. These challenges include the need to address the variable practice across the Education and Library Boards (ELBs). The best practice is understood and valued by schools, parents and adult providers; by contrast, other practice is characterised by poor arrangements and a lack of appropriate placements, resulting in anxiety and stress for all concerned. The establishment of the IDTG is timely and appropriate.

1.2 THE POSTAL SURVEY

1.2.1 The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) initiated this short postal survey of all special schools as a preliminary to a more in-depth inspection of Transition at 16 years in the moderate learning difficulty (MLD) sector. This survey collates relevant information to inform Inspectorate advice, based on an analysis of the questionnaire returns from schools, to assist in the promotion of improvement. The postal survey was issued on the 3 October 2003 to all 49 special schools. Of these, the number of schools providing 14-16 years and 14-19 years provision is 41. Returns were received from 36 schools, representing 20 of the 21 severe learning difficulty (SLD) schools, all nine of the MLD schools and three of the five emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) Alternative Education Provision (AEP) schools, all schools catering to physical disability (2), speech and language (1) and visual and hearing impairment (1). The findings of the more in-depth inspection of Transition at 16 years are contained in Part 2 of this report.

1.3 THE KEY FINDINGS

1.3.1 There are, overall, approximately 500 young people leaving the special school sector in 2004. This figure represents some 124 young people leaving SLD schools, 148 leaving the MLD schools, and some 116 leaving the other special schools which includes 19 leaving schools for physically disabled pupils, approximately 85 leaving from EBD provision¹, and 12 leaving Thornfield House/Jordanstown Schools.

1.3.2 The SLD Sector

The findings indicate that there is a leavers' programme in all schools, for 16-19 year old pupils, which is supported by well-established arrangements to assist the planning of future placement. With one exception, the schools offer a range of accreditation courses such as Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), Accreditation of Life and Living (ALL), Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts (RSA), (OCR) and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and explore opportunities across a range of work, training and vocational placements, including catering, and life skills. Where practical, work placement and FE opportunities are included in the Leavers' Programmes and, in a few instances, commendable support is received from careers officers, social workers and voluntary organisations such as Orchardville and Mencap. The responses indicate that successful transition is dependent upon a number of factors; these include:

- the involvement of, and agreed lines of communication among key providers from the point of the transition review;

¹ *Given the difficulties associated with this area, these numbers remain approximate and fluctuate considerably.*

- the comprehensive transition assessment information which is shared among, and considered by the key providers;
- the time and care taken to plan the post-school placements;
- the matching of accreditation to future placement;
- the purposeful involvement of parents at an early stage;
- the good links established with voluntary agencies to support transition;
- the established and formal links with FE/Training agencies;
- the continuous involvement of the Social Services.

In the best examples noted, there is a well planned programme, early involvement of the Social Services, firm links with adult services, careers services and FE providers, and a strong commitment to support the young person and his/her parents over the transition period. This is the position in most of the schools, but a number of factors, expressed in the schools' returns, constrain the effective operation of the transition process in a minority of the schools. These constraints include:

- a serious lack of adult service placements, compounded by waiting lists;
- inappropriate placements relating to an unsuitably wide age-mix, and poor provision for young people with challenging behaviour;

- poor lines of communication between the schools and the Social Services;
- a serious lack of involvement by the Social Services during the period;
- last minute support by the Social Services in planning the placements;
- parental dissatisfaction with the quality of the adult provision;
- parental concerns regarding the possible loss of benefits;
- curriculum emphasis not sufficiently focused on vocational, life skills and independent travel;
- concern regarding some young people's specialist needs e.g. medical/autism;
- lack of supported accommodation for particular groups of pupils e.g. looked after children;
- lack of co-terminus geographical areas of responsibility of the Health and Social Services Trusts (HSSTs) and the ELBs;
- the heavy academic content of some of the accreditation courses.

In this sector, the evidence indicates that there is a need for a Transition Support Service to create a commonality of approach to Transition planning. There is also the need for a review of post-school adult provision across the HSSTs to

address the current lack of placements. Overall, the survey identifies the need for a Strategic Forum for Transition, involving health and education providers. Such a grouping should be given the responsibility and resources to produce a Transition service level agreement to provide effective guidance to schools and adult providers. Notwithstanding the unique needs of some individual young people for ongoing medical and therapy support across the transition period and into adult services, there is an emerging view among the schools that transition is a process which begins at 14 years and goes beyond the school leaving age.

There is also the need to ensure that the Leavers' Programme is sufficiently practical, inclusive of the post-school activities and the life style of the young people, and has a greater emphasis on travel and vocational independence. The current FE links are satisfactory in the majority of cases, but provision would benefit from a review of the value and outcomes of existing courses developed for this pupil population.

1.3.3 **The MLD Sector**

The transition arrangements in this sector are well established and carefully detailed to provide a range of leavers' opportunities to sample work experience, FE or training placement. In the majority of cases, post-school placements are clearly identified at an early stage. Formal links with the FE sector are apparent and regarded as a main resource for post-school placement. A range of accreditation is offered in the sector including General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) art/design/technology and a strong emphasis on information and communication technology (ICT)

is evident. On a less positive note, the following constraints are noted:

- the absence of sufficient special educational needs (SEN) career input;
- the problems arising from key skills/essential elements of jobskills programmes;
- the problems convincing a small number of parents of the abilities of their children to access and benefit from employment, training and FE;
- the social difficulties of many of the young people and the parental worry of them becoming marginalised from statutory support services;
- worries arising from a concern about benefits, often shown in SLD transfer;
- difficulties experienced by a small number of young people with communication/physical difficulties in accessing work/training placements;
- the inappropriateness of a small number of young people leaving school at 16 when a learning pathway has not been secured or the young person is not sufficiently skilled to take up a placement.

In this sector, it is clear that arrangements are satisfactory in a majority of schools; in the best examples, the Transition process is characterised by effective planning, good links with FE/Training, valued support from the Careers service and underpinned by the willing involvement of parents; it is evident

that there is a strong emphasis on vocational and career skills and work-sampling opportunities. In the vast majority of the responses, however, concern is highlighted about the effective placement of those young people who may fall into the borderline SLD category or for whom post-school placement cannot easily be secured at the age of 16. The evidence suggests that some young people are not able to secure or indeed are not ready to take up post-school placement at this age.

The report on the inspection of MLD leavers' provision (Part 2) gives further details on this issue.

1.3.4 **The Remaining Sectors**

The responses from the remaining seven schools generally reflect the issues already highlighted. However, a number of specific issues emerge which need consideration. In the schools providing for physical disability, the involvement of therapists is more significant and, in one instance, the introduction of a Transition Support Worker, funded by The Cedar Foundation, is a useful exemplar of good practice. A common issue identified is the need for greater access to occupational therapy as a consequence of the increasing numbers of young people with more complex difficulties leaving special schools. Many of these young people experience emotional problems after they begin placement beyond school and need access to counselling services which are not always available.

In the speech and language schools, the issue of communication is a factor affecting placement. The use of ICT for communication purposes is recommended. Training, and a willingness by post-school providers to engage with this population, needs to be encouraged and developed.

In the schools for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, the emerging evidence is that many of the young people need a mentor/advocate to support their post-school placement or their further placement in AEP. A job coach, or designated social worker, might be best placed to address this need and to raise awareness, among the providers, of the problems these young people experience in coping with new and formal settings. Such support should also offer the young person time-out assistance to consolidate their coping skills and remain involved with education or work. This population poses unique challenges which can best be addressed by the involvement of a range of professionals including support from psychology, social and adult mental health services. In this situation, consideration of a Transition Support Service should include access to those professionals deemed necessary to support the longer-term needs of this population.

1.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

1.4.1 In summary, the evidence indicates that the transition process in the special school sector has developed successfully as the majority of the young people transfer to adult services, FE, training or to the world of work, with little difficulty. The obvious strengths of the transition process include the strenuous efforts of school staff to ensure effective partnership with post-school providers, the development of a flexible and practical curriculum approach and the opportunities provided for the young people to develop their skills in a range of settings in preparation for future placement. In each of the sectors' responses, it is evident that arrangements support effectively the successful transfer of a majority of the young people. It is, however, clear that a number of factors are inhibiting the development of consistent and best practice across all schools. The Transitions Group

have the opportunity to address this challenge. From an Inspectorate perspective, this short survey provides evidence of the need for change and improvement. The main issues arising are the need to:

- develop a strategic framework and statement of agreement among the key Departments - Department of Education (DE), Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), and Department for Social Development (DSD) - to secure joined up transition arrangements to help ensure, with adequate resources, the smooth transfer of young people from special schools to adult, FE and training services;
- ensure that a Transition Support Service is established and inclusive of all key stakeholders;
- ensure that the specific needs of some young people are recognised and provided for;
- secure enough places within the adult health services to provide for the identified numbers of school leavers;
- review adult centre provision;
- establish, in both the shorter and longer term, a database to inform further and future post-school placement;
- review the curricular and vocational activities of special schools and adult centres, in order to develop a common Transition Programme which reflects the needs of young people of 14-21 years of age;

- ensure that schools, supported by ELBs, establish effective FE/Training partnerships to support the further education of young people into adulthood;
- monitor new Transition arrangements on an ongoing basis.

1.4.2 This postal survey conveys the views of the special schools and is collated, with comment, to inform thinking and support the case for change and improvement.

PART 2

A SURVEY OF PROVISION FOR SCHOOL LEAVERS IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS FOR PUPILS WITH MODERATE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

2.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1.1 In recent years there has been considerable interest among parents, teachers, professionals, voluntary agencies and public representatives in how best to support the transition of young people with special educational needs (SEN) from special schools to the world of training and employment or adult services. In this transition period there is a responsibility on schools, where pupils carry a statement of SEN, to have in place a transition plan which documents how all involved with the young person and their family will help, support, and guide them to make successful choices as they move into training, further education (FE) or work.

2.1.2 In order to provide informed advice on the effectiveness of the process of Transition, the Inspectorate initiated a short postal survey on Transition arrangements in special schools. This short postal survey formed part 1 of this overall report on special school leavers and provides helpful information to assist the planning of part 2, a more in-depth survey of provision for Transition in the moderate learning difficulties (MLD) sector.

2.2 THE SURVEY

2.2.1 In the period from 17 to 21 May 2004, the Inspectorate carried out a survey of provision for school leavers in nine special schools for pupils with MLD. In addition, the evidence from one MLD special school inspected prior to the survey was included. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate provision for school leavers in order to inform Inspectorate advice on this area of work. The main focus of the survey was the quality of teaching and learning, and the extent to which the school leavers' curriculum equips them to make the transition to the next stage of education and training with confidence. There are, overall, some 148 pupils leaving the MLD schools in 2004.

2.2.2 A brief summary of significant strengths and areas for improvement was issued to each school selected for the survey; the main findings were collated to contribute to this report.

2.2.3 During the survey, the inspectors discussed the leavers' programme with the Principals, the relevant teacher/s, associated FE staff and members of the DEL careers service. In addition, a number of classes were observed and pupils interviewed. Samples of pupils' work, relevant policies, work experience arrangements, link courses, schemes of work and service level agreements with the careers service were examined to provide evidence to inform the findings of the survey. Further evidence was collated from an evaluation of:

- the quality of guidance interviews;
- the access to careers information, including using ICT facilities;

- the work experience;
- the personal career planning;
- the overall management;
- the external links;
- the careers accommodation;
- the staff qualifications and the in-service arrangements.

2.3 THE KEY FINDINGS

2.3.1 The overall quality of the teaching and learning provided for school leavers in MLD schools varies considerably; it is good in a majority of instances and, on occasions, is of a notably high standard. Where the provision is of good or better quality, there is a significant commitment from the Principal and the careers co-ordinator to provide opportunities for the pupils to develop their employability skills. High priority is given to careers education and guidance within a careers education and guidance programme which has been customised to meet the needs of the pupils and the school. In addition, all of the pupils have access to effective provision and work experience is tailored to allow maximum benefit for the pupils, including those with more severe difficulties. In one school, for example, there is an excellent careers education and guidance programme which provides a wide range of opportunities for the young people to develop the skills needed for employment or further study. The teaching observed was of a high standard and contributed to the success of the leavers' programme. The taught programme included the development of employability skills, citizenship and Personal Social and

Health Education issues. Additional features comprised the wide range of cross-curricular input to the leavers' programme, the strong links with the careers officer, parents, employers and the access to a wide range of careers education and guidance materials and software packages and resource materials. The school had established a dedicated and well-resourced careers facility for pupils.

- 2.3.2 In another example of good practice, the work was guided by a strong policy with clearly stated learning outcomes, including an emphasis on skills for adult life. The pupils were engaged fully in the use of ICT and, during the survey, made a very effective presentation on their Team Enterprise experience.
- 2.3.3 The survey also found a good range of work experience placements appropriate to the needs and interests of the pupils and a system of monitoring the pupils' experiences in the workplace. Of particular note was the introduction of the key stage (KS) 4 flexibility curriculum to help prioritise vocational work, core skills and knowledge.
- 2.3.4 A majority of the schools have strong links with the careers officer and the parents and have developed dedicated accommodation and facilities to provide for careers work. In these schools a range of software packages and resource materials was used widely, in a meaningful context, by the pupils.
- 2.3.5 Another strong feature of the best practice observed was the breadth of opportunities provided for young people to experience the world of work. In addition, effective channels of communication helped to ensure that any problems were dealt with quickly and appropriately.

- 2.3.6 By contrast, in 22% of the schools surveyed, the provision had significant weaknesses. In these schools, the work was not sufficiently focused on the needs of the school leavers; practice tended towards unnecessary repetition of worksheets and commercial ICT packages without any real context. In these schools, the pupils experienced few or no practical opportunities outside the school because of perceived difficulties or constraints.
- 2.3.7 In summary, the evidence suggests that in a majority of schools, the transfer occurs smoothly and, is particularly effective when all concerned have been working together to ensure that the transition period is a well-established process and not a single event. Further, the transition arrangements in this sector are well established and carefully detailed. In a majority of schools, post-school placements are clearly identified at an early stage. Formal links to the FE sector are apparent and regarded as a main resource for post-school placement. A range of accreditation is offered in the sector, including General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) art/design/technology, and a strong emphasis on information and communication technology (ICT) is evident. In all schools, however, the teachers reported that a small cohort of pupils have difficulty making the transition at age 16. In the Western Education and Library Board, specialist provision has been introduced to allow a few pupils to remain in school beyond age 16 to complete their programmes and ensure they can take up FE placements. This practice is not commonplace across the boards and is a source of some confusion. This issue is sufficiently important that the ELBs and DE should address the implications of school based 16+ provision as a core priority within its review of Transition. Indeed, without a resolution of this issue, provision is likely to remain inconsistent across the ELBs and give rise to further confusion.

2.3.8 A number of constraints, identified by the schools in the postal survey, are confirmed in this survey. The need for more special needs careers input in some locations; the problems of key skills/essential elements of jobskills; the problem convincing some parents of the abilities of the young people to access and benefit from employment, training and FE; the social difficulties of many of the young people and the possibility of them becoming marginalised from statutory services; concern about benefits, often shown in SLD transfer; physical difficulties to access work/training placements.

2.3.9 This survey identifies another significant issue in regard to the placements identified for the young people who may fall into the borderline SLD category or for whom post-school placement cannot be secured at the 16 year juncture. The current practice is to transfer the young people to the SLD sector. This arrangement is unsatisfactory and should be re-considered.

2.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

2.4.1 This survey finds much to commend the current arrangements supporting pupils during the transition period in the MLD schools. The main strengths include the priority given to planning and developing effective procedures and options for the leavers groups. The Leavers' Programmes, in the majority of instances, are of good quality and clearly enable the pupils to progress towards post-school placement. Sampling of differing courses, practical experiences and ongoing evaluation are aspects of the best practices observed. The survey also finds areas which need improvement; these largely relate to the need for consistency of provision and to raising the standards of provision, in a minority of instances.

2.4.2 One of the key findings relates to the issue of transfer at age 16 for a minority of pupils who clearly would benefit from a further year in the MLD school. This survey highlights this issue as a priority which needs to be addressed with some urgency. As identified in the postal survey, there are some key indicators to ensure that the need for some pupils to remain in school does not necessarily signal a raising of the school leaving age, rather a partnership arrangement to support the transition period for some pupils and ensure that it is based on agreed and sensible criteria.

2.4.3 To ensure that the possibility of remaining at school serves the identified needs of each pupil, it should be clear that:

- it is of benefit to the young person to remain in school;
- an agreed post-school pathway has been agreed and approved by the ELB;
- a formal partnership has been established among schools, post-school providers, parents and the young people themselves;
- there is comprehensive evidence to suggest that every effort to prepare the young person for post-school placement has been explored and recorded in an Individual Transition Pathway;
- the young person is not held back for reasons of lack of available placement or resources or maturity.

- 2.4.4 There is a need to review the appropriateness of the Jobskills programme in its current format for those young people who have learning difficulties.
- 2.4.5 The issue of SLD placement at age 16 should not be a placement option and consideration should be given at the transition stage (i.e. 14 years) to effect the transfer of young people whose needs will best be met in the SLD sector.
- 2.4.6 There is a need to clarify the distinction between pre- and post-transition stages to ensure that young people understand and accept the increasing challenges of Transition and entry into adult life, including living alone and independently, holding work and accessing leisure and vocational opportunities.
- 2.4.7 In conclusion, the evidence indicates that the transition period in the MLD school sector has developed with success, as the majority of young people transfer to FE, Training, the world of work, or other schools with little difficulty. Arrangements have developed and are understood by all involved with the process. The obvious strengths of the system are the strenuous efforts of individual schools to ensure effective partnerships with post-school providers and the recognition of the need to promote a flexible and practical curriculum approach based on the need to provide a wider choice of placement, and opportunities for the young people to explore and develop their skills in a range of settings. It is evident that, in a majority of schools, arrangements in place support the successful transfer of young people. It is clear, however, that a number of factors are inhibiting the development of best practice across all schools. This survey provides evidence from inspection of the need for change and improvement at a number of levels.

APPENDIX

SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING IN THE SURVEY

Beechlawn Special School

Belmont House Special School

Cedar Lodge Special School

Dunfane Special School

Erne Special School

Heatherbank Special School

Limegrove Special School

Longstone Special School

Park Education Resource Centre

Rosstulla Special School

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