

Lamb Inquiry

Special educational needs and parental confidence

The Lamb Inquiry was established as part of the Government's response to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee Report *Special Educational Needs: Assessment and Funding*. The Lamb Inquiry, under the chairmanship of Brian Lamb, the Chair of the Special Educational Consortium, will investigate a range of ways in which parental confidence in the SEN assessment process might be improved.

To advise him, Brian Lamb has brought together a diverse group of expert advisers and a broader reference group of professionals and parents. These two groups represent extensive networks and bring a wide range of experience to the process of evidence gathering.

The Lamb Inquiry has been asked to:

- consider a range of ways in which parental confidence in the SEN assessment process might be increased;
- commission and evaluate innovative projects in these areas;
- draw on the evidence of other work currently commissioned by the Department;
- take into account the evidence of the submissions to the two Select Committee Reports in 2006 and 2007.

The Inquiry started its work in March 2008 and will report in June 2008 on the commissioning of innovative projects and initial areas of focus for the Inquiry. The projects and a concurrent evaluation will run for the school year September 2008 – July 2009.

Brian Lamb will report in September 2009. The findings of the Inquiry will be available to the Ofsted SEN survey of 2009/10 and will help to inform national developments.

Background to the Inquiry

In October 2007, the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee published *Special Educational Needs: Assessment and Funding*. The Report identified parental confidence in the special educational needs (SEN) assessment system as a key issue in making provision for children with SEN. The Government shares the Committee's desire to improve parental confidence and, in the Children's Plan, set out an ambitious package of measures supported by £18m of additional investment over the three years from 2008-2011. This package will improve the skills of the workforce in meeting children's special educational needs and focus on outcomes achieved.

This year new, specially developed SEN and disability units for primary undergraduate teacher training courses will be rolled out. These will be followed by units for secondary and PGCE courses in 2009. The Government is developing the skills of the early years and schools workforce through the Inclusion Development Programme and promoting specialist training through the work of three Trusts dealing with communication, autism and dyslexia. In addition, the Government is learning about the progress of children with SEN through the Making Good Progress pilots and will be improving data to support progression.

Building on this, in its response to the Committee's Report (HC 298, published 4 February 2008) the Government committed to setting up a group of expert advisers, under the chairmanship of Brian Lamb, the Chair of the Special Educational Consortium,

to advise on the most effective ways of increasing parental confidence in the SEN assessment process.

Terms of Reference

In formulating their advice, the Inquiry will:

- consider whether increasing parental confidence could be best achieved by:
 - making the provision of educational psychology advice “arm’s length” from local authorities;
 - sharing best practice in developing good relationships between the authority and parents, through effective Parent Partnership Services and other local mechanisms;
 - effective practice by schools and local authorities in meeting the needs of children at School Action Plus;
 - developing the ‘team around the child’ approach in the school stages;
 - other innovative proposals;
- commission and evaluate innovative projects, in the areas identified, that can demonstrate the impact on parental confidence of a particular approach;
- draw on the evidence of other work currently commissioned by the Department;
- take into account the evidence of the submissions to the two Select Committee Reports in 2006 and 2007.

Expert Advisers Group

- Nick Armstrong, Matrix Chambers
- Virginia Bovell, parent, adviser to TreeHouse and trustee of the National Autistic Society
- Colin Diamond, Director of Children and Young People’s Services for North Somerset Council
- Dr Fiona Hammans, Principal of Banbury School, Oxfordshire
- Brian Lamb (Chair), Chair of the Special Educational Consortium and Director of Communications at RNID
- Professor Ann Lewis, Birmingham University
- Jane McConnell, parent, legal adviser to the Independent Panel for Special Education Advice (IPSEA) and the Down’s Syndrome Association

Reference Group

On the Reference Group are representatives of networks of:

- teachers
- parent partnership services
- educational psychologists
- head teachers
- institutes of higher education
- training organisations
- governors
- voluntary organisations
- parents
- occupational therapists
- directors of children’s services
- support services
- SENCOs
- local authority SEN officers

Work in Related Areas

In responding to the Select Committee report, the Government also undertook to commission work in related areas. The Lamb Inquiry will take full account of the evidence from these other pieces of work:

- research on parents' experience of the SEN provision, statutory assessment, the issuing of a statement and appeal to the Tribunal;
- research into local variation in the identification of and provision for children with special educational needs;
- work being carried out by the Department with the Audit Commission and the National Strategies supporting schools in planning the use of SEN resources and evaluating the impact on outcomes for children and young people;
- Department guidance to local authorities on the role of educational psychologists in SEN assessments and the importance of Educational Psychologists exercising their professional judgement freely;
- the Bercow review of services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.

Innovative projects

The innovative projects provide opportunities for local authorities, working with partners, to explore ways of increasing parental confidence in the SEN assessment process.

Projects are in one or more of the areas set out in the terms of reference (above) or other relevant areas that authorities proposed. Projects had to be submitted by the local authority working in partnership with others, for example: schools, parents, voluntary organisations, professional associations, health agencies, parent partnership services.

Whilst projects may not be costly to implement, a modest amount of funding has been made available to support the selected projects: between £10k and £40k per project. In addition support for the implementation of the projects is available from the National Strategies SEN Adviser team.

Projects run for the school year September 2008 to July 2009. They will be monitored and evaluated to pick up any changes in parental confidence and, where possible, other benefits. Parents must be involved in this process. In some cases this involves taking baseline measures in July 2008.

Local authorities had to provide evidence of good capacity in SEN, for example a recent Joint Area Review or annual performance data. Those involved in innovative projects had to be willing to share information as the projects progress.

In addition to the criteria set out above, projects were selected to provide a geographical spread and a mix of type of local authority: metropolitan boroughs, county councils, London authorities, unitary authorities.

The selection of projects was organised in two stages: an initial expression of interest followed by the submission of a more detailed bid. Over 50 expressions of interest were received and local authorities were invited to submit more detailed bids in respect of 18 projects. The final 8 projects were selected from these 18.

8 projects selected

8 projects were selected with the following focus:

Wolverhampton	Team around the Child
Durham	Parent partnership, School Action Plus and provision management
North Tyneside	Delegated budgets (working with Sunderland)
Blackburn with Darwen	School Action Plus
Newham	School Action Plus
Kent	Parent partnership
Portsmouth	Parent partnership, LA decision-making
Oxfordshire	Parent partnership, School Action Plus, school funding

Evidence for the Inquiry

The Inquiry is collecting evidence from a wide range of sources:

- the innovative projects
- other work currently commissioned by the Department
- evidence submitted to the Select Committee that informed both the recent reports from the Committee, 2006 and 2007
- evidence from the Reference Group and the extensive networks that they represent:
 - research, not necessarily focused on parental confidence but which may nonetheless provide important insights into the issues
 - surveys of parents' views
 - evaluations of services and projects
 - evidence which may not, on its own, have national significance, but which may, when set alongside other evidence, contribute to our understanding of the issues

Contact information

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