



Inclusion: the impact of LEA support and outreach services

Better
education
and care

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Executive summary

1. This report reviews the quality of external special educational needs (SEN) support for schools and provides an analysis of good practice based on visits by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) to six local education authorities (LEAs) and reports from the inspection of schools and LEAs in 2003 and 2004. The report focuses mainly on LEA support services and outreach services from special schools, but refers to other agencies where they work alongside LEA managed provision.
2. Many of the services visited provided useful support to improve the achievement and inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools. However, the quality and quantity of services available to schools were too variable across the country. Pupils with similar levels of need received different levels of support depending on where they lived, which is unacceptable. In part this was because LEAs choose, in consultation with their schools, whether or not funding for support services is delegated to mainstream schools.
3. Where the funds were delegated, schools had the option to buy services or to use the money in other ways. Positively, this increased the flexibility for schools; negatively, it disadvantaged groups of pupils with complex special educational needs who did not have access to specialist support because funds had been used for other purposes. In addition, delegation of funding to schools reduced the LEA's capacity to provide targeted support for school improvement where the standards achieved by pupils with SEN were too low.
4. Since 1999, when additional funds became available from LEAs and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to pilot approaches to outreach support, more schools have begun to develop such services. There was a clear steer nationally that many special schools should develop these, but too little guidance was given as to how the services should be developed or how they could fit into local provision. Properly planned outreach services, therefore, were still at an early stage of development. A few special schools, however, particularly those for pupils with physical and sensory impairments, had well established outreach services.
5. The most effective services worked effectively with school improvement services to target their resources, were planned coherently within an LEA to avoid overlap with other work and had written agreements describing the level of services which should be delivered.
6. The LEAs visited all undertook useful evaluation of their services through seeking the opinions of schools, pupils and parents. However, only one service had agreed clear performance indicators to provide a more

objective analysis. Overall, too little was done to link the progress the pupils made to the work undertaken by support services. No LEAs had robust systems to follow up the progress pupils made after the intensive involvement of support services had ceased.

7. The quality of the staff and their commitment to inclusion were always crucial in delivering an effective service. Most services provided very high quality advice and support based on extensive specialist knowledge otherwise unavailable to the mainstream school. The best support often included coaching for teachers through demonstrating effective strategies.
8. This report concludes that the generic standards proposed by the DfES could provide a useful basis for improving external services further. Annex A includes a contribution to the development of standards for these services. Greater clarity is also required about what services should be available as an entitlement for pupils, regardless of where they live.

Key findings

- ❑ Support and outreach services promoted inclusion and improved the life chances of many vulnerable pupils.
- ❑ In the most effective support services, all staff were thoroughly committed to inclusion and it pervaded all aspects of their work.
- ❑ Support service staff were particularly valued where they brought knowledge and skills usually unavailable in a mainstream school. Specialist teachers were most effective when they demonstrated effective strategies for others to observe.
- ❑ Other outreach and support service staff provided important information and a thorough understanding of particular special needs or disabilities, making a major contribution to pupils' progress.
- ❑ Help was not always available when and where it was needed. Services in some LEAs overlapped, resulting in unnecessary tensions between agencies and inefficient use of resources.
- ❑ Insecure funding arrangements made long-term planning difficult for many services.
- ❑ The delegation of funding for support services had a negative effect on the provision for some pupils with SEN. It diminished the capacity of many LEAs to monitor the progress of pupils with SEN and reduced the range and quantity of specialist staff available to provide advice and support.
- ❑ The best services worked in partnership with LEA school improvement services to analyse data and target their resources where the standards achieved by pupils with SEN were too low.
- ❑ In general, LEAs did not measure the impact of support services on pupils' progress and attainment and they lacked agreed standards against which the performance of staff and the service as a whole could be evaluated. Information was seldom gathered about the progress pupils made after support ceased.

Recommendations

The DfES should:

- consult on generic standards for the delivery of support and outreach services
- consider what steps should be taken to minimise the differences across the country in the services available to schools.

LEAs should:

- minimise the overlap of provision and promote partnership working to ensure that the purpose of their current services is clear

- target resources strategically where the standards achieved by pupils with SEN are unacceptably low
- promote the inclusion of groups of pupils through commissioning specific services to ensure that suitable advice and support are available where and when they are needed
- ensure both special and mainstream schools know what services are being delivered and, where appropriate, how much they cost
- consider, wherever possible, delegating the funding for support services to suitable special schools within a region in order that they can deliver the service to mainstream schools on an outreach basis
- use their powers more effectively to monitor the progress of pupils with SEN to ensure that schools access specialist support for pupils with the most complex needs
- identify long-term funding arrangements which allow services to plan ahead.

Heads of support and outreach services should:

- develop the capacity to deliver services commissioned by LEAs and other agencies
- work in partnership with other services to target resources efficiently
- monitor the impact of their services during and after their involvement to ensure the pupils make good progress over time
- ensure staff continue to develop their specialist teaching skills in order to coach and support others effectively.

Funding of services

9. Until 2000, support for pupils with SEN was provided almost exclusively by LEA support services but, over the last five years, it has been common for LEAs to delegate much of the funding for these services to mainstream schools. This has had benefits since schools can choose support from a wider range of providers. However, buying in services relies heavily on schools recognising that there are others who could help them support certain pupils more effectively.
10. Where schools were unaware of how to improve their provision, for a number of reasons the delegation of funding has had a detrimental effect for pupils with the most complex needs.
11. First, where LEAs delegated funds for small services, the schools received too little money to buy sufficient support when they needed it. Others received funding even though they might not have any pupils who required support. The funding, though sufficient to run a small central service, when divided between many schools was inadequate to ensure pupils with the most complex needs had access to sufficient specialist advice.
12. Second, where resources had been delegated, the LEAs lacked the capacity to monitor adequately the progress of pupils with the greatest needs or to target resources on helping schools to improve where the standards achieved by pupils with SEN were unacceptably low.
13. Third, in the past, pupils' statements of SEN described their entitlement to specialist support services. Such services monitored the support and ensured each school was aware of the provision it could make. In the LEAs visited, the services usually responded to referrals made by the school and the provision made for pupils depended too heavily on the school's identification of the problems. For example, in one mainstream school, a Year 4 pupil with Down's syndrome was becoming over-reliant on the teaching assistant to communicate for him. He did not have the benefit of additional communication aids because teachers did not realise they were available or understand the difference they might make.
14. Most special school outreach services were relatively new and funded annually. In 2003/04, school inspections identified nine schools which provided outstanding outreach services and of these only five continued to provide the services in 2004/05. In the other four schools, funding had ceased. These short-term funding arrangements were detrimental to pupils and staff and created unnecessary uncertainty. The lack of long-term funding for outreach services undermined their ability to plan strategically.

15. Three of the schools visited had been funded by LEAs over a longer period to provide specialist services. Most were well established and had protocols and structures to work within which were clearly understood. They were part of the overall strategic plan for inclusion within the LEA. For example, in one LEA, a pupil referral unit (PRU) had established an outreach service which was funded from the local mainstream schools' budgets. These arrangements provided long-term sustainability and the service was accountable to headteachers in the area.
16. In two of the schools, a number of places were kept empty and the resources were used instead to provide support to other schools. This was a largely positive initiative. The inclusion of pupils from the special school in local mainstream schools enabled funds to be released to develop outreach services. The most common practice was for an individual teacher to be identified to develop the service. However, in one school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties all the teachers had time to work with pupils in mainstream schools. This ensured that all staff were familiar with current practice in them and the special school provided a very wide range of expertise, depending on the needs of the pupils referred to it.
17. Irrespective of how services are funded, LEAs need to ensure that their development planning includes adequate provision for inclusion. In one LEA, special school outreach work for children with communication disorders was strongly supported by a plan which was agreed jointly with the special and mainstream school headteachers. The plan clearly identified the roles of all those involved in working with pupils who have complex needs. A sign of the LEA's commitment was the long-term funding which enabled the building of expertise and secured the stability of the service.

Planning coherent services

18. In all the LEAs visited, changes in attitudes towards including pupils with SEN in mainstream schools had led to a review of the role of special schools in supporting SEN pupils. There have been a number of new initiatives funded both nationally and regionally, but many have stalled over the last few years because of a lack of regular funding, uncertainty about the role of special schools and unease about the commitment of special schools to the inclusion of their pupils in mainstream schools. The DfES report of the Special Schools Working Group maps out a programme of change for the special school sector, including the development of outreach services.¹ However, it is unclear what this actually means in practice and LEAs have not received enough guidance about how this might be achieved.

¹ *The report of the special schools working group*, DfES, 2003.

19. In most LEAs, support and outreach services had developed in an ad hoc fashion. As a result, there were significant overlaps in some services and tensions developed between LEAs and special schools. For example, in one LEA four separate service providers supported pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties (EBSO). The educational psychology service, the behaviour support service, an outreach service from a local EBSO special school and an outreach service from a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) had all been involved in supporting a teacher who was struggling with a very difficult pupil. In one school the behaviour support team advised a teacher that she should not physically move a pupil out of the classroom. The special school outreach teacher showed her basic restraint and handling strategies which contradicted guidance from the LEA support services. This created obvious tensions between staff and considerable confusion for the school.
20. Special schools were unclear whether the provision of outreach services was intended to help schools include more effectively the pupils already based in mainstream schools, or whether the intention was to reduce the numbers of pupils in special schools.
21. This confusion led to a range of difficulties. For example, in one special school an outreach teacher was working with four pupils from a mainstream school who were taught at the special school for one morning a week. By the end of the term, two of the four pupils were placed full time in the special school. This example reflects the view that the provision of outreach services can be a way of securing the survival of special schools. Ofsted reported in a recent publication, *SEN and disability: towards inclusive schools*, that special schools are often not in favour of inclusion; for example, one headteacher expressed a view that the development of outreach services could ensure their schools remained full.²
22. The outreach services visited for this survey tended to depend in part on the expertise available at the time rather than on a strategic review of the needs in any one area and how these needs might be met. This lack of strategic planning was common and services available in any one area varied considerably. Different groups of pupils with similar needs received different levels of support depending on where they lived, which was unacceptable.
23. However, in one LEA, good commissioning arrangements between special schools and services had been established with clear written agreements setting out the expectations in relation to the outcomes for the pupils and schools.

² *SEN and disability: towards inclusive schools* (HMI 2276), Ofsted, 2004.

Case study

The allocation of support from outreach services offered by the special schools in a large city was managed through the LEA's multi-agency 'provider panels' which met regularly to determine provision for pupils. There was one panel for each key stage. This system prevented mainstream schools approaching the special schools directly and ensured a more equitable allocation of these resources. Each allocation of support was reviewed by the panel after six months and a decision taken whether to cease or continue the support. One LEA officer had responsibility for commissioning outreach services and monitoring the effectiveness of support provided. She held regular meetings with the headteachers of schools offering outreach support to discuss caseloads. The LEA required each school offering outreach to sign up to a partnership agreement, which clarified the protocols for joint working, such as referral and monitoring arrangements. Schools had some autonomy in what they delivered and how they delivered it, but the process ensured accountability, flexibility and equity.

24. Services which were planned strategically to focus on a particular group of learners often led to significant improvements in the pupils' achievement. For example, in one LEA the behaviour and learning support services, school improvement advisers and consultants, and educational psychologists worked together to develop a strategy to improve the provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties. A programme of training and coaching was developed and a pilot project was carefully evaluated. The evaluation showed considerable gains in learning for the pupils involved and, as a result, the programme was extended across the LEA.
25. A lack of coherent planning across an area had a significant effect on the confidence of parents and on parental choice. Schools and parents valued highly those services that responded quickly to requests for support. Services' ability to provide a speedy response depended in part on the quality of the referral system. The best systems ensured that the person who made the referral was aware of the criteria used to allocate support as well as how and when they would receive a response to their request for help. Outreach services from special schools tended to respond to all requests for support and, while schools and parents valued this, services were often unable to prioritise their time and efforts. Their work lacked the impact it might have had if strategic planning had ensured groups of pupils with similar needs received appropriate support.
26. Provision for children was most effective where service managers found ways to break down barriers between different types of provision and where liaison was effective across a wide range of different professionals. For example, in one early years' support service, health and social workers

and teachers met regularly to discuss and solve problems, helping to promote a strong team spirit.

27. As services grow they will require more sophisticated referral and assessment processes. For example, this might be done in liaison with the LEA by using performance data to identify and prioritise groups of underachieving pupils or individual schools where lower attaining pupils or those with SEN do not do as well as they should. However, such use of information about pupils' progress to target the resources of SEN support and outreach services was rare.

Evaluating the impact of services on children and young people

28. Most services engaged in some level of self-evaluation. Commonly they undertook regular surveys of schools to ask their views; occasionally, these surveys included the views of parents and pupils. However, few LEAs rigorously evaluated the impact of their support services on pupils' progress and attainment and there was a lack of common standards against which to do so. In addition, few services were aware of the longer term impact of their work. Follow up visits to schools rarely took place and staff were unaware of difficulties when pupils who had received support moved to other classes or schools.
29. A few services, however, set clear performance criteria which they evaluated systematically.

Case study

The following success criteria were established at the start of an early years' transition project:

- *80% of children supported to remain in mainstream provision at the end of Year R*
- *the needs of 60% of the children to be met by the school at the Early Years Action level of the Code of Practice*
- *at least 60% of the children to be above the lower quartile in their personal and social development when Foundation Stage assessments are carried out at the end of Year R.*

These were the outcomes at the end of the first year of the project:

- *all children remained in mainstream provision*
- *of the 32 children who started the project on Early Years Action Plus all but one required less support at the end of the Reception year. Seven required support at Early Years Action, but 24 required only monitoring to check they were making satisfactory progress*
- *95% of the children were assessed as working within or beyond the Early Learning Goals.*

30. Too few services evaluated their work in order to make the most effective use of their time and focus strategically across an LEA. LEA and outreach services were most effective where inclusion and the provision for pupils with SEN were at the heart of school improvement. In the one example where there was effective sharing of data between the school improvement service, SEN support services and health services, the LEA was able to target resources to schools with the greatest needs.

Case study

The LEA introduced systems to ensure the performance of schools was well known to all officers. Twice a year a desk evaluation involving colleagues from across service areas was carried out on each school. Comprehensive performance data showing achievement, attendance and exclusions were combined with local professional intelligence held by school improvement officers, specialist support staff and speech therapists, to evaluate the quality of a school's current provision. The LEA also evaluated the quality of each school's SEN policy against agreed standards. Specific targeted support for those schools in greatest need was identified, such as early involvement in national initiatives or local projects targeted to raise achievement: for example, those for behaviour and attendance or Reading Recovery programmes. Members of the SEN support service, educational psychology service or speech and language therapy service then worked with identified teachers and tracked progress with continuing evaluation of impact.

The quality of the professional intelligence was promoted through good quality documentation that supported school self-review and evaluation of SEN provision. The outcomes of self-evaluation were discussed as part of the school improvement officers' discussions with each school. School improvement officers were confident in challenging schools and had ready access to specialist advice within the SEN support service. The process led to a graduated level of support and monitoring, based on accurate and reliable evidence.

31. In all but one LEA visited, there were isolated pockets of information which were rarely pulled together to inform decision making. Evaluation tended to focus too much on provision rather than outcomes. The evaluation of special school outreach services was particularly weak since they had very limited access to LEA-wide data and most of the services were relatively new.
32. Good performance management, which links educational and social outcomes, leads to improvements in services. Managing the performance of staff who work peripatetically is particularly challenging. A few services found ways of identifying specific performance indicators to deal with this and included these in service agreements with the schools concerned.

33. Some services had recently started to think about the five outcomes for children in *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*.³ It is too soon to judge the impact of these developments, but most services were already giving more attention to seeking the views of pupils. For example, a behavioural support service working with Year 8 classes in a secondary school developed a very successful peer mediation programme as a result of discussions with pupils about bullying and relationships within their class.

The expertise of staff

34. The effectiveness of all support services depends crucially on the specialist expertise of the staff. Teachers and other professionals need to demonstrate high levels of credibility with their colleagues in the mainstream school. Recipients often regarded outreach services from special schools and PRUs as particularly effective because staff were currently practising classroom teachers. They often used their own classrooms as coaching settings and their advice was rooted in practical experience. Teachers and other staff visited to observe similar pupils to their own being taught in different ways. They also benefited from access to a different range of resources.

Case study

A group of special schools in one LEA used the Standards Fund to set up outreach services. The teachers were highly regarded because they had very good classroom skills and the ability to communicate their knowledge to promote inclusion. One teacher was asked to support a pupil with Down's syndrome who was struggling with classroom routines in the mainstream school. The class teacher was able to visit the outreach teacher's own class and observe similar pupils. She took that experience back to her own school and was able to share her new understanding with the rest of the staff.

35. Other services established their credibility in similar ways. For example, in another LEA, support staff worked alongside the mainstream teacher modelling a wide range of strategies used with similar pupils in different settings.
36. Support and outreach staff were most effective when they created a climate which enabled senior managers and teachers to plan strategically for whole school development. This was well illustrated by the following case study.

³ *Every Child Matters Change for Children* Ref. 1110-2004, DfES, 2004.

Case study

A very successful outreach activity involved an Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) from a special school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. She worked with pupils and teachers in a large secondary school which was about to have resourced provision for autism. The high level of expertise, flexibility in approach, and excellent teaching and training skills positively influenced the whole staff's understanding of these pupils' needs. As a result, a high level of trust developed and she was able to influence decisions which had a positive impact on the quality of provision for a wider range of pupils.

37. The activities which had the greatest impact included:
- support to assess pupils' needs
 - team teaching and mentoring
 - observations and feedback to teachers and other support staff
 - the identification of appropriate resources
 - time for teachers to reflect on their teaching, share their concerns and plan more successfully for individual pupils
 - demonstration lessons with sufficient time to discuss teaching approaches and resources.

Whole-school training on specific teaching strategies was also very effective, particularly when it was followed by opportunities to observe staff using the strategies to ensure they were able to implement the training effectively.

38. Although this report focuses mainly on the provision of teaching services to schools, some of the provision included professionals from many disciplines. A number of behaviour support services included social workers and therapists, and one special school involved their occupational and speech therapists in their provision for mainstream schools. Although this was not common, it was effective.
39. The staff in outreach services developed their own skills and understanding by working with professionals in other schools and agencies. For example, an early years' service worked with a Sure Start project to provide support for children as they transferred to full-time education. The headteacher of a nursery school nominated two of the school's nursery nurses for secondment as outreach workers. For both it proved to be a steep learning curve, but they returned to their school having improved their confidence and range of experience and were able to share their new skills with other staff.
40. Most services visited ensured a high level of expertise by encouraging staff to obtain nationally recognised qualifications in specific types of need. One LEA developed an accredited course in consultancy skills. The continuing training of staff teams was crucial to maintaining a successful service.

Case study

One service for pupils with sensory impairment placed a strong emphasis on ensuring that the teachers had mandatory qualifications and that all staff had the skills necessary to do the job effectively. Annual performance reviews enabled training needs to be identified accurately and there were regular in-service training days to keep teachers and support workers up to date with developments. There was also good support for assistants when they joined the service. They followed an internal induction programme which included training from the educational audiologist attached to the service and opportunities to shadow more experienced workers.

41. One special school had also developed a good resource base which the local mainstream schools found helpful. They used it as a training venue, but also took the opportunity to display subject materials suitable for pupils with a wide range of ability. They provided drop-in facilities for staff to discuss curriculum matters and individual pupils.

Notes

The DfES, as part of its strategy *Removing Barriers to Achievement* intends to develop minimum standards for external support services.⁴ In addition, it has made a commitment to develop the role of special schools to include the provision of outreach support to mainstream schools, where appropriate. This report describes the characteristics of the most effective support and is intended to contribute to the development of the standards to be published.

Schools use a wide range of external services to help them promote the inclusion of pupils with SEN. These services include those managed by LEAs, for example outreach services from mainstream and special schools and PRUs; those delivered through voluntary organisations; therapeutic services run by health trusts; and some provision made by social services departments.

For this survey, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) analysed 30 reports on LEAs which were inspected between April 2003 and April 2004 and visited six of them. They interviewed key officers and members of support and outreach services, and inspected provision for pupils receiving support in mainstream schools. Additionally, they scrutinised the inspection reports of 65 maintained special schools catering for a range of needs which were inspected in 2003/04. They also visited five schools and one PRU in other LEAs whose Section 10 inspection reports identified particularly good practice.

⁴ *Removing barriers to achievement: the government's strategy for SEN*. Ref. DfES/0117/2004, DfES, 2004.

Further information

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Annex

Evaluating support and outreach services

The following standards have been adapted from those used on the survey visits. They are intended to contribute to the development of standards for these services with a strong focus on strengthening inclusion.

1. The service has a clear purpose which takes into account other provision in the area and the needs of particular schools and pupils.

Supporting criteria:

- services are commissioned to undertake specific types of work by the LEA; expectations are clear and include arrangements for transparent communication, access to services, response times and accountability
- written agreements are in place about what services are provided to all those involved.

2. The service has suitable staff to deliver a high quality service.

Supporting criteria.

Teachers and other staff:

- have high levels of specialist knowledge not available in the school
- understand the nature of pupils' difficulties and are able to provide new insights to overcome difficulties
- understand the school systems that best promote the achievement and inclusion of pupils with SEN
- have a good understanding of the curriculum modifications and adaptations that secure broad, balanced and relevant opportunities for pupils with SEN
- promote strategies which can be used in mainstream classrooms
- have an understanding of pupils' learning styles and how they can be accommodated in the school
- have good interpersonal skills and can promote change within a school.

3. Services are led and managed to promote change within schools.

Supporting criteria:

- principles of inclusion are embedded in working practices
- funding arrangements ensure that services can plan over at least a three year period
- the management of the service gathers information systematically about the outcomes for pupils, including their achievement, learning, participation and enjoyment

- information is used to target their resources efficiently in line with strategic priorities identified in the LEA's long-term plans and they evaluate the impact of their work
- the progress of particular groups of pupils continues to be monitored after support is finished, especially at important transition times between classes and schools.

4. Pupils and parents are fully involved in the development of services.

Supporting criteria:

- pupils' and parents' views are sought in evaluating the service and when changes are proposed
- representatives of parents are involved in providing advice to service managers
- parents and pupils are aware of the purposes of the service
- parents and pupils receive a swift response to concerns.