

Effective Professional Education and Development for Teachers of Children and Young People with Special Education Needs - Advice to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families

Advice from the General Teaching Council for England (GTC)

Introduction

1. The General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) is the independent professional body for teaching in England. Under the remit conferred by the Teaching and Higher Education Act (1998), the GTCE is required to provide advice to the Secretary of State and others on matters affecting standards of teaching and the quality of learning.
2. In line with this remit GTCE completed a time-limited and focussed project investigating the adequacy of supply of effective, relevant and sustained professional learning and development for teachers working in mainstream schools with children and young people with special educational needs.
3. This project considered current educational research and literature, and examples of effective practice. It was designed to complement the findings from 12 pilot projects designed to improve the knowledge and skills of initial teacher trainees for working with children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) undertaken by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) in 2007. The advice that follows is based on this project and subsequent stakeholder consultations.

Advice

4. The GTCE finds that whilst there is a great and proper emphasis in government thinking on improving the quality of teaching, the national effort to build teacher capacity and expertise in teaching children and young people with SEN has not received proper emphasis in developing the supply of:
 - effective, relevant and sustained professional learning and development opportunities for all teachers of children and young people with special educational needs, whether in mainstream or special schools;
 - newly qualified teachers who have had appropriate and relevant supervised experience of working with and teaching children and young people with special educational needs as part of their initial training; and,

- newly qualified teachers (NQTs) with SEN expertise gained through specialist initial teacher training.
5. It also finds that changes to the types of SEN seen in children and young people within educational settings, including mainstream classes, together with the aim of greater personalisation necessitates teachers, and others involved in teaching, developing new and different knowledge, skills and understandings.
 6. It is, therefore, timely to examine existing provision for the supply of general, specific and specialist expertise within the teaching profession to secure supply and to enable 'in time' access and participation in professional learning and development for all teachers, regardless of work pattern, location, experience, school or setting.

Recommendation

7. Accordingly, the GTCE recommends that priority is given nationally to increasing the capacity and expertise of teachers and others involved with teaching in all schools, both mainstream and special, to work with children and young people with SEN. The GTCE proposes that this can be achieved through the following combination of measures:

Strategies

7.1. Policy development and implementation relating to inclusion are aligned

Government, agencies and other organisations should align policies and drive forward support for the development of inclusive practices and cultures in schools. For example, it is essential that guidance, requirements and regulations relating to *Every Child Matters (ECM)*, funding streams, school resource allocation, accountabilities and any new initiatives, including curriculum, standards, and admissions agendas are perceived to be coherent and aligned to enable schools and teachers to take forward an inclusive culture and associated practices.

7.2. All teacher trainees experience working with SEN children

All teacher trainees experience a placement in specialist and/or mainstream schools where they are supported by those with specialist expertise to teach children with a range of SEN, as part of their training, irrespective of their entry route into teaching.

7.3. 'In time' access to and participation in professional education and development is available to all teachers

The GTCE's policy advice to the Secretary of State in January 2007 recommended that all teachers have access to and participate in effective, relevant and sustained professional development. A focus on the development of knowledge and pedagogical skills for working with children and young people with special educational needs is now a strategic priority for continuing professional development (CPD). 'In time' access to, and participation in, effective, relevant and sustained professional development must, therefore, be

available for all teachers. Strategies to achieve 'in time' access and participation include:

- facilitating access to external specialist professionals and agencies;
- enabling teacher specialists to work outside their own institution and in consolidated programmes; and,
- creating networks of access to key specialist resources and expertise to enable collaboration and coordination within and between schools.

7.4. Specialist expertise in SEN and improved supply is secured

The strategies outlined are premised on appropriate expertise being available within schools, in local authorities, through higher education and other support. This requires careful examination of existing provision and a needs analysis for the development of appropriate professional education and development. The development of such provision is necessary to secure the supply of expertise in SEN to support the development of all teachers.

7.5. Flexible, innovative and creative approaches in teaching are developed

National strategies continue to focus on building systems and capability in schools to make personalised learning, curriculum differentiation and assessment for learning, the norm, in order to meet the needs of all children and young people, including those with special educational needs.

Background to the advice

Why is this a priority?

8. Government policies currently place great emphasis on improving the quality of teaching. However, the Education and Skills Select Committee (ESSC) reported¹ on the lack of opportunities for CPD for all teachers as follows:

"Professional expectations through the General Teaching Requirements are no replacement for training and equipping teachers. Teachers cannot be expected to properly fulfil requirements such as differentiating the curriculum for all children, including those with SEN, without receiving the appropriate training to enable them to do so ... Good quality, appropriate continuing professional development should be made available for all teachers and schools should be resourced to fund them".

9. A significant driver for improvement in teaching and professional practices has arisen from the changes to the types of SEN seen in children and young people within educational settings, including mainstream classes. Teachers face different types of challenge that necessitate learning and developing different knowledge, skills and understandings.
10. Teachers are now expected to provide greater differentiation and personalisation in learning opportunities to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population of

¹ House of Commons Education and Skills Committee; *Special Educational Needs*; Third report of Session 2005-06; HC 478-1

children and young people, including those with special needs within mainstream classrooms and special educational needs settings. For example, more children now present with complex SEN resulting in part from increasing survival rates from premature births².

11. There is also an increasing need for provision for children and young people with SEN within mainstream classrooms.
12. Schools, and consequently teachers, have a clearly defined legal duty, as well as an ethical responsibility to actively promote disability equality and eliminate discrimination, as well as promoting the five ECM outcomes, in order to meet the needs of every learner and improve pupil outcomes.
13. This advice proposes mechanisms for supporting the development of capacity and expertise through initial teacher training (ITT) and CPD for teachers working in mainstream and specialist classrooms to meet the needs of children and young people with SEN.

Why the proposed strategies?

14. An **inclusive ethos** is the essential basis for improving the learning of all children and young people, not just those with special needs and disabilities. As noted by a teacher in one of the schools studied *'You have a positive view that all children can succeed'*. Within such an inclusive context the quality of teaching and learning can be improved, but without these underlying values, efforts to build capacity and expertise for working with children and young people with special educational needs are limited in their impact.
15. The literature also provides evidence that creating an inclusive ethos is more likely where teachers understand and are empathetic to *all* children's and young people's needs, including being able to see a learning task through the eyes of children and young people who have different learning needs.
16. In making inclusion a reality the following features were evident within the schools visited and in the research literature, and these included:
 - specialist knowledge is distributed across the workforce, so that the 'team' rather than an individual is equipped to deal with the range of SEN presenting within that school;
 - effective communication occurs across all staff about the learning needs, behaviour and achievement of all children;
 - flexible and innovative use is made of the workforce, valuing and recognising the diverse and distributed expertise across the whole staff group;
 - leadership is distributed and supports both CPD and SEN work; and,
 - strong leadership from the head and other members of the senior leadership team is evident for both SEN provision and strategic CPD.

² Carpenter, B. and Egerton, J. (Eds.) (2007) *New horizons in special education: evidence-based practice in action*. Worcs: Sunfield Publications. p.3.

17. The inclusive school ethos is therefore central to building support, trust and capacity for all staff, teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff to contribute to and develop appropriately differentiated curriculum and pedagogy to meet the specific needs of all children and young people, including those with special educational needs.
18. However, barriers do exist that work against development of an inclusive ethos. For example, where there is a limited concept of achievement, collaboration is not supported, information exchange is limited and where the willingness to take risks and use creative approaches to teaching is limited by concerns about external accountabilities such as school and college achievement and attainment tables.
19. Practitioners suggest it is more important to emphasise the values of, principles for and approaches to inclusion in the early stages of professional learning. However, at present, exposure to inclusive settings during ITT is piecemeal and not consistent across all provision.
20. Given an inclusive culture and ethos, ITT experiences of SEN can be successful. Practitioners suggest that initial teacher trainees should develop an understanding of, and gain some experience of, inclusive settings. As one teacher said, '*....you learn best in a context specific way*'.
21. Practitioners argue that providing appropriate and differentiated learning opportunities for children and young people with SEN is best learnt through access to specific knowledge, developing expertise in practice and through experience. Although the inclusion of detailed information on particular types of common special educational needs is relevant in ITT, better outcomes for trainees can be achieved when knowledge and associated skills for SEN are developed in context. Such opportunities for developing specific knowledge and skills are very limited within a one year programme of ITT.
22. All teacher trainees should experience a placement in specialist and/or mainstream schools where they are supervised by teachers with expertise in SEN and where they can teach children with a range of SEN, as part of their professional formation and irrespective of their entry route into teaching.
23. Practitioners also identified several generic skills that NQTs should have learnt during training and that are particularly important to developing inclusive practices. These include being able to use and interpret student data, working effectively with other adults and taking a holistic approach to the learning of each child or young person.
24. The literature and practitioners commenting on school capacity, teachers' capabilities and needs for professional education and development for SEN in mainstream schools state that **all staff** (teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff) work together to personalise learning for **all** children and young people.
25. Expertise is more likely to be distributed across all staff, teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff. This is further supported through effective communication where all are made aware of specific needs; collaborate in developing plans for learning, implementing these through appropriate strategies with effective systems for

monitoring outcomes. Delivery of the curriculum is team-based, where others, including teaching assistants, provided some teaching, guidance and instruction.

26. Effective practices in schools were focussed on providing 'in time' (not 'just in case') access to, and participation in, effective, relevant and continuing professional learning and development that focuses on the development of knowledge and pedagogical skills for working with all children and young people, including those with special educational needs. Access and opportunities to engage in CPD must be available to all staff.
27. The processes suggested for building capability in SEN through professional learning and development are closely aligned with what we know characterises effective CPD. For example, by working collaboratively in teams and across schools practitioners are able to share expertise and also help develop new approaches to meet specific needs as they arise. Similarly observation, co-coaching, as well as access to specialist expertise and support enable the wider distribution of knowledge and expertise that is relevant to all practitioners to meet the needs of all children and young people.
28. The evidence base shows that specialist expertise can be located within the school, other settings, the local authority or by accessing knowledge and expertise within higher education and medical settings. However, at present, communication and the transfer of knowledge and expertise between medicine, neuroscience and education are limited. Further consideration needs to be given to the possible flow of information between medicine and education, and to consider how and in what form this information could be best used.
29. The loss of specialist ITT provision for those working with children and young people with SEN has resulted in a loss of specialist expertise to the system. The preparation of specialists in SEN through initial teacher training programmes needs to be reconsidered, in order to secure supply, build capacity and develop expertise within mainstream schools.
30. Other opportunities for building specialist expertise should also be investigated, for example, qualifications in SEN in addition to those currently available in the areas of sensory impairment.
31. Schools are independently developing ways of using staff with specific expertise on a local basis. Practitioners identify that there is innovation at the school level, and they see themselves as leading the way, but what is lacking is the 'big picture' from national agencies, particularly the National Strategies. This is seen to be especially acute where services and expertise in special educational needs are lacking at the level of the local authorities.
32. Developing excellent teaching strategies for an inclusive classroom is seen as being at the heart of professional learning and development for building expertise in SEN. In the schools visited there were examples of adaptive practice, and increased risk-taking by teachers and others. This was particularly strong at Key Stage 4. Strategies in the literature designed to foster inclusion include fluid pupil grouping, cooperative teaching and learning, individualised planning, collaborative problem-solving and other differentiated approaches.

33. Teachers who are confident and trusted to develop their teaching practices are able to experiment and innovate and thus meet the needs of all children and young people more effectively, provided they have access to the necessary specialist expertise.
34. Thus, it is important that the national strategies focus on building systems and capacity in schools to make flexible, innovative and creative approaches to personalised learning, curriculum differentiation and assessment for learning the norm, in order to meet the needs of all children and young people, including those with SEN.

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