THE COSTS OF INCLUSION

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A study of inclusion policy and practice in English primary, secondary and special schools

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Chapter 1    The Policy Environment

Pupils, no matter their particular needs or learning disabilities, belong together with their same age in the educational mainstream. This was the view of the landmark Warnock Report in 1978. Three years later the Education Act (1981) provided the impetus for the move towards integration of pupils with various forms of ‘learning disability’ into mainstream classrooms. Prior to Warnock pupils had been allocated to one of a series of categories such as ‘maladjusted’, ‘educationally sub-normal’ and other forms of labelling deemed inaccurate and offensive in equal measure.

The assumption underpinning such assessments was that there existed a group of pupils clearly distinguishable from the majority and requiring special help, preferably in special places. This was either provided by a special school or by special ‘remedial’ units within mainstream education. The model was often referred to as the ‘medical approach’ to special needs because of the emphasis on diagnosis and treatment.

Warnock’s finding that ‘one in five’ pupils would experience learning difficulties at some point during their time at school challenged these earlier assumptions. Children with learning difficulties could no longer be regarded to exist within a ‘deficit model’ where experts were required to attempt a diagnosis and then prescribe appropriate treatment. Failure to learn was hereafter to be regarded as an interaction between what the child was able to bring to the classroom and the nature of the instruction provided by the teacher. Teaching such children could then be construed as a task for all teachers and not just experts.

The 1981 Education Act abolished the formal labels of handicap and instead required schools to determine the ‘special educational needs’ of all pupils and provide appropriate forms of instruction, much of it, given the numbers involved and the transient nature of some problems, in mainstream classrooms. The role of the expert within the school shifted. Instead of providing remedial tuition Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) were now mainly to offer advice, support and training to colleagues.

According to Ainscow and Muncey (1989: 13) the notion that ‘one in five’ pupils might at one time or another experience problems with their learning too often was interpreted by schools as meaning that the bottom 20% of pupils had special educational needs of one kind or another. Thus, far from abandoning labelling of a minority of pupils, the practice was extended to justify various forms of setting and banding. As Croll and Moses (1985) demonstrated in relation to primary schools, many of the decisions about a child’s ability to learn were made on the basis of inappropriate classroom behaviour rather than prior academic achievement. The same assumptions at secondary level that anti-social behaviour was necessarily indicative of a learning problem was noted by Giles and Dunlop (1989). In a study of one midland comprehensive school, researchers found a tendency among pastoral staff to make greater use of the learning support resource area as a ‘dumping ground’ for disruptive pupils.

The advent of the National Curriculum, however, emphasised the entitlement of all children to the same broad and balanced curriculum. Under the 1993 Education Act all LEAs were expected to provide such a curriculum for SEN pupils. The 1994
Code of Practice, to which all schools were required to have regard, argued that there was a continuum of needs and provision and, as a consequence, most children should stay in mainstream schools regardless of whether or not there was a statutory assessment or statement. There were now to be four stages of help for SEN children, who would also benefit from an individual education plan (IEP). For three of these stages schools were expected to manage by themselves with the help of external advice when necessary. For more severe cases the LEA and its specialists should be brought in (DfE 1994). A report by Ofsted (1996) found that most schools had set up these systems but that SENCOs were largely drawn from existing staff (and were thus untrained) and that there were considerable problems in adjusting the curriculum to match the needs of these pupils.

According to Tomlinson (2005) however, the market forces approach, which Mrs Thatcher’s government introduced into education, tended to cut across this attempt to develop a more equitable, coherent and humane policy for SEN pupils. Schools concerned with doing well in the exams league table did their best to avoid too many of these students, while other schools, deserted by middle class parents because of their lower league position, took in additional numbers in order to claim the available resources in an effort to balance the budget and retain viable staffing levels (Tomlinson, p 81). It was widely assumed among school staff we interviewed that the desire to place pupils in mainstream classes rather than special schools was driven, in part, by the Treasury’s desire to reduce costs.

1.1 New Labour and Special Needs

New Labour sought to extend the opportunities available for SEN pupils by placing educational provision within a broader social inclusion agenda and in within a framework of its equal rights initiatives for disabled people. These were defined as individuals with a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial or long-term effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The 2001 revised Code of Practice reduced the number of ‘stages’ to three and was followed by the Disability Act, which made discrimination against any disabled student unlawful. The publication, Removing the Barriers to Achievement (DfES 2004), proposed more integration with outside children’s services and argued that as a result of earlier interventions, better teacher training and improved expectations, educational disadvantage would be reduced (p 133).

Tomlinson notes, however, that despite these good intentions, inclusion or integration of children with learning disabilities, still remains a contested concept. There has still been no resolution between distinctions made by Ainscow and Muncey (1989) between pupils who are different from others in mainstream in some physical or mental capacity, as compared to a learning ‘disability’ that is experienced by most children during the course of their school career.

The apparent escalation of children with some form of physical, emotional or intellectual disability is, ironically, due to continuous advances in medical knowledge and accompanying technology which has offered children not only a life (which would have in previous generations been denied them) but also an enhanced quality of life. One consequence, writes Tomlinson (2005:134), is a demand by knowledgeable middle-class parents for special segregated facilities, so reinforcing a view of special needs categorical and, in the process, concentrating limited resources on ‘contemporary’ disabilities such as Autism, ADHD and Dyslexia.
result, according to the Audit Commission (2002)\(^9\) is to divert LEA designated funding, away from pupils with lesser levels of special educational need.

More recently, the Government’s endorsement of a curriculum and pedagogy built around a concept of personalised learning (Milliband\(^{10}\) 2004), is clearly in accord with the more comprehensive notion of special educational needs (on which ‘inclusion’ was originally fashioned). However, while welcoming the potential of this new approach, knowledgeable commentators such as Wedell\(^{11}\) (2005) argue that it will fail to provide a context in which special educational needs can be effectively addressed, while the continued emphasis on the ‘standards agenda’ and the assumption that this is best achieved through whole class teaching is maintained (p.5). Indeed, the new workload agreements with the increase in provision of teaching assistants (TAs) as well as LSAs are, Wedell argues, predicated on the continuation of existing standard class groupings, although it has been widely recognised that the ‘velcro-ing of LSAs to pupils sometimes actually becomes a form of within-class segregation’ (Wedell 2005: 5). Ofsted\(^{12}\) too (2004) has commented that the inflexibility of school and classroom organisation could sometimes be ‘handicaps to effective developments’.

Our earlier studies of workloads at primary and secondary level (Galton\(^{13}\) et al 2002; MacBeath\(^{14}\) et al 2004) had already alerted us to some of the above dilemmas. In particular, these studies identified the pressure on SENCOs and support staff in coping with the special learning needs of pupils against a background of deterioration in classroom behaviour and an increase in anti-school, anti-learning attitudes among pupils in general. It therefore seemed appropriate to conduct a further more detailed investigation of the issues surrounding teachers’ attempts to implement ‘inclusive’ policies while experiencing the pressures which these earlier studies had so graphically documented. Again the National Union of Teachers agreed to commission the project.

1.2 The Warnock Intervention

Since the commissioning of the study, however, there has been a dramatic intervention by Dame Mary Warnock, whose 1978 committee’s recommendations acted as the catalyst for whole school integrated approaches for children with special learning needs. In a recent monograph in the Impact\(^{15}\) series, published by the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, Dame Mary confesses that the original committee made two errors of judgement.

The first error of judgment she argued, lay in seeking to remove the old system of categorising children, carrying the inference that they were in some way different. The removal of such discrete classification was done to meet the claims of the reformists that even in mainstream classrooms ‘there was a seamless continuum of abilities that required all learners to be treated the same’ (Warnock 2005: 17). While the 1978 Committee had chosen to adopt the term ‘Special Educational Needs, or SEN for short, as a generic description of all forms of learning disability, Warnock now concludes that:

the idea of transforming talk of disability into talk of what children need has turned out to be a baneful one. If children’s needs are to be assessed by public discussion and met by public expenditure it is absolutely necessary to have ways of identifying not only what is needed but also why (by virtue of what
condition or disability) it is needed... the failure to distinguish various kinds of need has been disastrous for many children. (ibid 20)

Dame Mary’s case is that the failure of the 1978 Committee to arrive at clearer definitions of need and to specify the requirements of different forms of learning disability, has saved successive Governments from facing up to the true costs of resourcing the shift from special schools to mainstream education. Despite significant increase in government spending on special needs, in most schools is there are now insufficient resources to cope with both range and complexity of special need.

The 1978 Warmock Committee’s second error, ‘possibly the most disastrous legacy’ (p 20) was the advocacy of an ‘integrationist’ approach within the framework laid down by the government of the day. The committee was told they should not count children whose mother tongue was not English or those living in particularly deprived circumstances among those having ‘special needs’. In both cases the reason was that language provision and family support was channelled through the Home Office and the Social Services respectively, and the Department of Education did not wish to be saddled with this expenditure. As a result the committee were not able to stress the links between social deprivation and learning disability, nor to advocate additional resources for schools who found themselves having to cope with a sizeable proportion of such pupils with this double disadvantage.

The 1978 committee did recognise that in shifting the concept of special needs away from the ‘medical’ model it was still necessary to give some protection to pupils with acute learning problems. They therefore recommended that children should receive a statement of special need in order to protect their interests. What was not clear, however, was the criteria for ‘statementing’ pupils who had moved to mainstream education. In practice the number of statements issued during the next decade varied enormously from one LEA to another. As the financial constraints hit LEAs during the 1990s, decisions about who to statement were decided on the basis of resources available rather than need. LEAs acted as both judge and jury in deciding parental appeals against decisions not to provide a statement of needs and, not surprisingly, tended to favour low costs solutions whenever possible. At the same time the deeper issue of statementing as rational form of funding and provision remained unaddressed.

Both the Audit Commission Report (2002) and Ofsted (2004) have confirmed the disparities and confusion in current provision system. They both point to long delays in the statementing procedures with too many parents failing to get their applications for mainstream schooling accepted with wide variations from one local authority to the next. Special Schools, it was claimed, were increasingly uncertain of their role. Ofsted also commented that the decline in classroom discipline, particularly in secondary schools, had led to an increase in the number of untrained classroom assistants whose main task was to contain poor behaviour. The discipline issue, as we discussed in two previous reports on primary and secondary teaching was a growing problem, not a consequence of inclusion policies but creating a classroom environment in which the imperative of control made it more difficult for teachers to attend to individual needs. This means that pupils with special needs did not to benefit from the best teaching.

Further evidence that all was not well with current practice emerged from a survey of SENCOs. This highlighted a shortage of professional support, especially from speech therapists and educational psychologists, and limited training opportunities
due to budgetary cuts as the key factors placing severe constraints on a school's attempts to implement successful inclusion policies (NUT 2003).  

DfES statistics on school exclusions report 10,000 permanent exclusions from primary, secondary and all special schools in 2003/04 representing 0.13% of pupils (13 in every 10,000). In this year there were just over 200,000 pupils who had one or more fixed period exclusion representing 2.6% of the school population. By definition pupils who face school exclusion are not ‘included’ and those who are permanently excluded are most likely to drop out of school altogether and are more likely than their peers to be found amongst the prison population in the future. The predominant reasons for both types of exclusion were persistent disruption, verbal abuse/ threatening behaviour against an adult and physical assault against a pupil. Pupils with statements of SEN, the report found, were almost 4 times more likely to be excluded than the rest of the school population. The rate of exclusion also disproportionately penalises some ethnic groups, for example, the rate for Black Afro-Carribean pupils is twenty times higher than for Chinese or Indian pupils.

Faced with evidence such as this Warnock (2005) concludes that the policy of inclusion and the associated practice of issuing statements needs to be reviewed. She argues (p37) that inclusion should mean that all children ‘should be included under the common educational project, not that they should be included under one roof’, and points to the recent decision to set up specialist SEN schools as one possible way forward.

We do not enter this study either by endorsing or rejecting Baroness Warnock’s critique but it does set the stage for a debate which will undoubtedly rumble on. This study comes, therefore, at an opportune moment, at a time when there is increasing recognition that the moment has arrived for a thorough, detailed and critical review of the existing policy and practice.

Notes and References

Chapter 2    The Present Study

This study arose from two previous investigations into teacher workloads at primary and secondary levels (Galton and MacBeath 2002; MacBeath and Galton 2004). Both of those studies highlighted strains on teachers in coping with increasing demands in tandem with deteriorating discipline, and lack of expertise in dealing with children with special needs. Pressures on staff time and resources were relieved to some extent by the appointment of teaching assistants and other support staff but not without raising other concerns.

One of the main findings of the secondary workload study concerned the disproportionate number of hours worked by middle managers due mainly to time for curriculum planning being taken up with pastoral matters associated with the general decline in school discipline. It was a situation about which Ofsted\(^1\) also recently expressed concern. As Giles and Dunlop (1989: 40) observed, there can never be fixed demarcation lines between academic and pastoral responsibilities. SENCOs will inevitably be drawn into the management of children who present classroom teachers with severe problems of discipline and control. This was not, however, always the case. In the past, support teachers, rather than SENCOs, concentrated mainly on observation of pupils, staff consultations and training and liaison with feeder primary schools (Hockley\(^2\) 1989). In Hockley’s study a teacher who held the post from 1981-84 made it very clear to her colleagues from the outset that she did not regard herself as:

a resource room teacher offering regular part-time tuition; or a crisis teacher responding to crises; or a ‘time out teacher’ supervising the removal of pupils from various classrooms. (p 81)

By the time the workload studies at primary and secondary level were completed there had been a noticeable increase in the use of support staff, very often assuming responsibilities that exceeded their remit or level of relevant expertise. This was confirmed in other classroom based studies\(^3\) that were being undertaken concurrently by some of the research team. The omission of teaching assistants in the previous studies had meant that we did not get a view of developing policy and practice from their perspectives. This present investigation gave us an opportunity to rectify this.

Recommendation to the Government by the PriceWaterhouse Coopers’ study\(^4\) for an increase in support staff was especially relevant for children with special needs where there had been a longstanding use of teaching assistants. However, the proposal raised anxieties among the teaching profession that this would result in untrained staff substituting for teachers in the classroom. Such anxieties have not been allayed but rather exacerbated by practices which are gradually extending the scope of teaching assistants and other support staff.

Exploration of the changing roles of teachers and support staff working in special needs within the present performance dominated culture of schooling became a key theme for the present study. Of particular concern was the impact on pupils experiencing learning difficulties as well as on the nature of teaching and learning more generally. In these circumstances it seemed more appropriate to explore participants’ views in some depth through a series of interviews with key personnel in
a selected number of case schools rather than using questionnaires complemented by interviews as in our two previous studies.

2.1 Selection of our sample schools

In all 20 schools were visited (10 first, middle primary; and 9 secondary and 2 special) from seven different LEAs. LEAs were chosen to represent a range of policies on inclusion though our study did not cover any with the highest numbers of pupils in Special Needs Schools. From those chosen, two were from the 20 LEAs with the lowest proportion of all pupils in special schools and three were from the 20 LEAS with the least numbers of pupils with statements in special schools using the available data in LEA Inclusion Trends\textsuperscript{5} as a source. LEAs were also chosen to represent a reasonable geographical spread and range of type: 1 in Inner London, 1 in Outer London, 1 Metropolitan and 4 County.

Thus in choosing schools a further objective was to provide a mix between rural and urban catchment areas, with the former likely to have mixed and fairly representative intakes whereas, in the latter areas, schools with disadvantaged populations were likely to have higher levels of pupils on the SEN register (see for example Dyson\textsuperscript{6}, 2004). Local authorities were sent a short questionnaire probing the nature of inclusion within the authority, and asking them to nominate up to five schools which they regarded as attempting, in one form or another, to implement a policy of inclusion. For primary schools the highest inclusion ratings were given to schools where pupils on the SEN register were:

- Included in most lessons in homogeneous groups
- Supported mainly by trained teacher or assistant
- Fully integrated into social / cultural activities
- Linked with special schools and / or external support

While the secondary schools were rated highly if they:

- Included SEN pupils in most lessons with specialist help available
- Made a clear distinction between physical, learning and behavioural needs
- Had shared social / cultural activities
- Had close links with special and primary schools catering for special needs’ pupils

In contrast to schools where SEN pupils:

- Had a special curriculum distinct from that of mainstream classes
- Were often placed in on-site units for pupils with physical / learning and / or behavioural needs

Typically in each school between 5 and 10 teachers would be interviewed, likewise 5-10 pupils and up to 8 parents, the SENCO, and the headteacher. Observations in classrooms were ad hoc by invitation but in some cases where there were two researchers in a school or a visit stretched over two days there were extended opportunities for observation in classrooms, gymnasiums, special units and informal discussion in staff rooms and lunch rooms.

Each school was requested to provide a member of the senior management team responsible for overall coordination of the special needs policy, a SENCO, teaching
assistants and a representative sample of teachers from the core and foundation subjects (secondary) and Key stages 1 and 2 (primary); a group of parents, and a group of pupils Year 6 or Year 10. Each school was visited for at least a whole day sometimes with two of the team present. Responding to pressures and other demands, in some cases pupils were not interviewed and in other cases the sample of teachers had to be adjusted either because of unavailability or, in one particular case, because the SENCO was a member of the senior management team with responsibility for coordinating policy. Schools were generally cooperative and did their best to provide substitutes when necessary.

As a check against the extent to which the views expressed by the sample of teachers interviewed were representative of the school as a whole, a short questionnaire based on the interview questions was left with the SENCO or member of the senior management team with an invitation for other members of staff who were not interviewed to fill in and return these in the envelopes provided. In all 110 questionnaires were returned and were used to supplement the data obtained at interview. A copy of the questionnaire is included as an appendix to this report.

Further information was gleaned from the latest Ofsted inspection reports, particularly with regard to the proportions of statemented pupils and the provision of specialist resources such as an autistic unit.

In summary, we deliberately set out to select schools that had made a commitment to implementing a policy of inclusion rather than selecting some schools that were not so involved. Our aim was to review current practice in favourable circumstances and not attempt to portray what was happening across the entire range. Where our research identifies problems and difficulties for children with learning difficulties, these issues are likely to be exacerbated elsewhere within the educational system in schools where inclusion is given a lower priority.

2.2 The context of the Study

As a research team with varied backgrounds and research interests we were acutely aware of the contested language and longstanding debate surrounding special educational needs and inclusion. In seeking to define the parameters of the research and refine the focus we came to question some of the propositions on which the policy of inclusion was based. The more we listened to accounts from pupils, parents, teachers and teaching assistants and the more we observed in classrooms, the more concerned we became about the impact of ill-conceived policy on the potential for meaningful learning.

Our first difficulty was to come to terms with the terminology. We had assumed that the purpose of such titles as Learning Support Assistant, Classroom Assistant, Teaching Assistant or Special Needs Assistant was to differentiate roles, responsibilities and training. This, however, proved not always to be the case. Some schools used the terms interchangeably and some schools referred to LSAs as helpers who worked with particular pupils, tracking them from class to class throughout the school day. In secondary schools TAs tended to be subject based and worked with a particular group of teachers according to a specified timetable. Classroom Assistant was a term more often encountered in primary schools where the helper was usually assigned to a particular teacher and his/her class. There was, however, no consistency in these various designations.
Neither did the different titles differentiate between the amount of training received. Those assigned to supporting children with severe learning difficulties were no more likely to have received training than others performing more general duties. Assistants were often recruited informally; a parent of a pupil, a school secretary, a member of catering staff, or exceptionally an ex-teacher who didn’t want the responsibility of a class and the planning and marking that went with it.

Even more difficulty was encountered with the term, inclusion, itself. For some it is still used interchangeably with the term, integration, which was generally favoured in the aftermath of the 1978 Warnock Committee Report. However, since the 1990s, policy makers by means of various anti-discrimination measures concerning race, gender and disability, have been driven by the desire to make our society as inclusive as possible by widening participation and providing greater accessibility in the areas of education, leisure pursuits and employment. Warnock (2005: 36-38), as we saw in the first chapter on policy, while not questioning the motives of those who seek to create such an inclusive society, sought to distinguish between the physical and emotional participation. She argues that many children with severe learning problems, while undoubtedly a physical presence in mainstream classrooms, do not feel that they are full participants. This may be brought about by the behaviour of other pupils (through various forms of bullying) or by the treatment they receive. They may, for example be excluded from various curriculum activities, and/or arrangements of within-class grouping may restrict their opportunities for interaction with the teacher rather than a classroom helper. Warnock (2005: 38) recommends the definition of inclusion proposed by the National Association of Headteachers in July 2003.

Inclusion is the process of maximising the entitlement of all pupils to a broad, relevant and stimulating curriculum, which is delivered in an environment that will have the greatest impact on their learning. All schools whether mainstream or special should reflect a culture in which the institution adapts to meet the needs of its pupils and is provided with the resources to enable this to happen. (NAHT 2003: 1)

The above statement, although it goes some way to defining the central principle of inclusion, is sufficiently broad to meet with little dissent among all interested parties - be they policy makers, practitioners or parents. A more specific formulation of the inclusion principle can be found in a recent policy statement by the largest teacher Union which argues that:

Inclusion is not about placing all disabled children and children with special educational needs in either mainstream schools or special schools, ignoring differences and ‘treating all pupils the same.’ It is about adequate provision to meet each pupil’s needs with the most appropriate provision and reasonable adjustments made to enable each pupil to access fully education and the life of his or her school or college. The provision and adjustments may be different for each pupil. Inclusion is a process focussed on fulfilling each child’s entitlement to high quality education. This is the essence of inclusion. [our italics] (NUT 2006)

However, as we talked with those specialising in inclusive practice and special needs, with LA officials responsible for implementing local policy, and with teachers in schools, there emerged another distinction which we felt to be equally important in the context of the study. For some, the term inclusion was both radical and visionary in that it sought to change the educational system, particularly the curriculum and its pedagogy, so that it could accommodate the needs of every child. For others the
concept of inclusiveness was more closely identified with the older term, integration. Practitioners, in particular, conceived the educational system to be too inflexible to accommodate a broad range of needs, governed by the demands of the National Curriculum, by high stakes testing, parental choice and the strictures of Ofsted. All of these constrained any radical departure from the ‘official’ programme of study and its preferred pedagogy, based largely on whole class instruction. Accordingly, the approach of most schools to inclusion was to seek ways in which the pupil’s individual needs could accommodate to the standard primary or secondary diet, or be adapted so that a child could fit into the system. For example, the demands of high stakes testing in Y6 have led many primary schools with two form entry to create three groups for literacy and numeracy lessons, where one class teacher takes all the pupils predicted to reach a good Level 4 or above, while the other teacher takes the ‘borderline 4s. The remaining pupils, who are likely to include all those on the special needs register, may then be entrusted to the care of the teaching assistant.

In our study, therefore we have tried to penetrate three different worlds of inclusion – what it should be, what it could be and what it actually is.

2.3 The first world of Inclusion

The first world is that of the policy maker. It is a world of fine intentions, but it is one that makes bold claims and with high rhetoric yet fails to follow through the consequences of the initiatives it espouses. Its purposes often conflict and good practice is often blind to context and the day-to-day realities of life in schools and classrooms. When schools are viewed as a microcosm of a truly democratic society they should, in principle, offer equal opportunities to all so that rewarding individuals according to their achievements can be seen as fair and reasonable. However, as Warnock (2005: 41) comments, it cannot be argued a priori that ‘the values within a school must necessarily be identical to the values in a society of adults.’ Furthermore, the failure to include social disadvantage or language deficiencies as components of an individual’s ‘special need’ renders the ideal of ‘equal opportunity’ highly problematic.

In practice, while the raising standards agenda dominates the educational debate, the consequences of failing to make the grade are likely to involve a loss of self-esteem for the pupil; school staff, together with pupils, struggle to achieve some kind of status within what is often an anti-school and anti-learning culture. While some fresh initiatives, for example, the mentoring schemes adopted by many inner city schools, can alleviate certain problems and promote inclusion, others, such as zero-tolerance assertive discipline regimes, can exacerbate the situation leading, initially, to confinement in the referral area and ultimately to suspension and exclusion.

The recent promotion of personalised learning offers a similar mixed bag of outcomes. Under the drive to raise standards, personalised learning may mean little more than increased diagnostic testing, tighter target setting and additional pre- and after-school booster classes. It may also involve a school adopting the principles of the Assessment for Learning in which the emphasis is not so much on the correctness of the answer but on the pupil’s understanding of where he or she went wrong and what steps would need to be taken the next time a similar problem is encountered. Such an approach ought, in principle, to demand a shift in pedagogy, less teacher direction, more self assessment and more peer tutoring and imply a less impatient need to dutifully cover the curriculum, and indeed to cover one’s back.
'Deep learning' (Entwistle, 1987), which is implicit in assessment for learning, sits uneasily with key stage testing on the one hand and, on the other the need to meet the diversity of needs that a genuinely inclusive approach would imply.

2.4 The second world of Inclusion

The second world is the world of aspirational classroom practice. It belongs to those who envisage a real potential of the classroom as learning arena for all. Its proponents argue that the pedagogy employed by the most effective teachers of children with special needs differs little from the research-based frameworks developed for use in mainstream teaching. It implies a reforming agenda which requires changes not only in the way that teachers help children engage with the curriculum but also in the way the curriculum itself is shaped and constructed (Lewis and Norwich 2005). This is a world in which the inclusion of large numbers of SEN pupils in mainstream classrooms is seen not as a problem but as an opportunity – a potential solution to current difficulties that have seen year-by-year dips in the attitudes of pupils in primary and lower secondary school and a decline in levels of discipline (Galton et al 2002). Underpinning this is a view of inclusion as a basic human right by virtue of Article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, interpreted to mean inclusion within a mainstream school, since it is also a right of parents choose a mainstream school for their child. Under the 2002 Special Needs and Disability Act school governors and head teachers may be at risk of prosecution if they refuse a school place to children with special educational needs, even if the school does not have sufficient resources to provide an appropriate curriculum.

It is not unreasonable to claim that existing pedagogy contributes to the present problems of poor motivation and low disposition to learn that is found even among more able pupils. It may also be true that many teachers acknowledge this fact and subscribe to the view that teaching methods need to be revised to allow greater pupil participation and less teacher direction. However it is a mistake to believe that because of the strength of the argument for a radical overhaul of practice that change will necessarily follow. Change has a complex history and an uncertain future. Effective pedagogy may be effective pedagogy no matter the clientele but there is little comfort to be drawn from the parallel debate about class size. It is generally agreed that there is no special method for teaching a small class as against a larger one, but that it is easier to deploy best practice when there are fewer children (Blatchford 2003). Other UK studies suggest that while highly gifted teachers can adapt their practice when given smaller classes, considerable resources must be deployed to retrain competent but less expert practitioners (Hargreaves et al. 1996). However most research studies have failed to identify any major change in teaching style among practitioners when given smaller classes.

The reasons for this state of affairs are numerous but there are two in particular that are relevant to the above debate. First, as Alexander (2000) has demonstrated, teaching is culturally determined:

The mechanisms which shape and control pedagogy are universal (curriculum, assessment, inspection, school organisation and so on). At the top of the system is the regulatory power of government and ministry and at the bottom the regulatory power of classroom discourse (p 562).
However, many of the ‘givens’ which shape the operational characteristics of these mechanisms are legacies of an earlier age. Thus it is that in England:

the nineteenth-century received view of elementary education, which was grounded in the teaching of the 3Rs’ still dominates “the core curriculum” despite the fact that cultural and social plurality of today’s primary classroom is at odds with the main purpose of the elementary curriculum, which was to contain the masses rather than liberate them (p 566).

As a result:

an open child-centred pedagogy may be no freer from these external culturally determined controls than traditional didactic instruction, because both are constrained through the mechanisms of differentiation and assessment (p 562).

The second reason for the conservative nature of pedagogy (Cuban 1984) arises from the fact that teaching takes place both in the heart and the head. It is both a cerebral and an emotional activity. Policy makers and curriculum reformers alike tend to emphasise the former trait at the expense of the latter, believing that convincing teachers of the validity of the arguments will be sufficient to bring about the required changes in practice. In reality it is the heart that more often rules the head.

What often determines the choice of activity (practical activity v worksheet) is not the match between the task and the intended learning outcome (the rational) but the composition of the class and their likely response to a situation which allows pupils a degree of scope and freedom to decide for themselves, to move around the classroom at will (the emotional). The worksheet will, in many circumstances, commend itself as the safest option as it allows the teacher to feel totally in control. The presence, therefore, of three or four potentially disruptive pupils will lead the teacher to reach for another worksheet rather than risk the unpredictability of a practical activity. In a similar manner group work may be abandoned in favour of whole class instruction because, during the former activity, the teacher finds it difficult to determine which pupils are ‘on task’ and which ones are engaging in social ‘chit-chat.’

A further consequence of emotional rather than rational decision making in the classroom is the manner by which these decisions are explained. Rather than admit a fear of losing control during group work (such feelings will likely be suppressed), teachers will often attribute the decision to circumstances beyond their immediate control. Lack of suitable resources, limited classroom space or shortage of time may all be used to justify the choice of teaching method. According to Berliner (1994) only a few teachers had sufficient expertise to be able to reflect on practice in ways that can differentiate between the rational and the emotional. Neither does our present knowledge of professional development allow us to determine the most effective means of converting what Berliner identifies as ‘competent experienced teachers’ (the vast majority) into expert practitioners. Thus those seeking to bring about the second world of aspirational practice within the current policy directions may, in the late Brian Simon’s (1986) words ‘be, in effect, crying for the moon.’

2.5 A Third World View of Inclusion?

So the third view of the world in which we can explore the meaning of inclusion is that of the classroom as it exists today rather than it might exist in the future. The
kind of situation confronting teachers is typified in these four brief vignettes of pupils who were described or observed in the classrooms visited.

Albert does not pick up on social cues and has few social graces. He has a very ironic sense of humour which is often interpreted as rudeness. He reacts very badly when he perceives something to be unfair and any displeasure or punishment he sees as rejection, withdrawing into himself and refusing to communicate. When he understands very clearly what is expected of him he will comply as long as he sees it is a reasonable request. The problem is that he gets into trouble quite a lot because his classmates’ favourite sport is winding him up and then watching the fallout.

Joshua has a very short concentration and short-term memory span which means he gets easily distracted, can be very restless and very little of what he is taught is retained. This is particularly acute at end of terms and coming back to school after holidays. He never remembers to do homework or to bring what he needs for class, and messages home never arrive or are distorted en route. Although notes home are sometimes pinned to homework diaries they never seem to arrive. His mother frequently complains about lack of communication from the school, about stories Joshua has told her about never doing any work. She worries that Joshua is constantly in trouble for his ‘bad’, ‘lazy’ or forgetful behaviour and feels that her son’s needs simply aren’t being met.

Amelia is a keen learner in class. Her teachers describe her as bright, keen to join in, always with her hand up, desperately eager to please. If the teacher doesn’t pick her she gets very disappointed but tries all the harder. But when she is picked she cannot stop talking and tells the teacher everything she knows, whether relevant to the topic or not. She does not like being stopped in mid flow and reacts with confusion. Her interventions tend to cause some hilarity among her classmates as she speaks in a peculiar high pitched and very loud voice. The safest strategy for the teacher is not to invite a contribution from her.

James is the class ‘policeman’. He is acutely aware of right and wrong and frequently reprimands his peers when he disapproves of their behaviour. He is able to work in a group but his classmates get frustrated with his bossiness and sometimes groan when they discover he is to be in their group. Although he takes part in team sports he gets very upset when he perceives people to be breaking the rules and will sometimes stop the game to demand an explanation, or constantly point out things to the referee. He is also very intolerant of teachers who break their promises, are inconsistent or don’t carry out threats. When he points out pupil misbehaviour to the teacher he gets into trouble with his peers for ‘telling tales’.
In the schools visited a large number of teachers had received little, if any, training in preparation for dealing with the kinds of apparent idiosyncrasies that James, Amelia, Albert and Joshua exhibit on a daily basis. As Eliot Eisner (2005:4) arguing for a pedagogy which embraces surprise, discovers outcomes and creates classrooms that are interesting rather than tidy writes:

...decisions about method are not simply decisions about method. They are also political decisions that have to do with who is competent and who is not, who is powerful and who is weak, who is skilled and who is unskilled, who does work that is relevant and who does not.

Within the politic of such a system the precondition is for courageous teachers and courageous leaders who are able to expand the repertoire of thinking and practice to the limits of their opportunity structures.

It would seem therefore that our purpose in carrying out this enquiry should be guided by the view expressed by Michael Fullan (1992) advising school leaders that:

There is no point lamenting in the fact that the system is unreasonable and no percentage in waiting around for it to become more reasonable. It won’t… What is needed is to reframe the question. What does a reasonable leader do faced with impossible tasks? (Fullan 1992: 16-18)

Our main purpose therefore is to describe in the following four chapters, as objectively as possible, what within current policy priorities inclusion means to schools, teachers, pupils and parents in the institutions visited and to explore with these various participants how their situation could be improved in the immediate future. Our conclusions and recommendations, what it is possible to achieve within an incompatible and often unreasonable system, are set out in the final chapter.

Notes and References

3 Particularly the 2001-05 study of Group work in KS3 classrooms, part of the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) directed by Professor Galton.
6 Dyson, A (2004) Inclusion and Pupil Achievement, @www.dfes.gov.uk/research
Chapter 3    The Impact on Schools

What has been the impact of inclusion policies at school level? In 2004 Ofsted reported that provision within mainstream schools was highly uneven across the country, varying more than tenfold across LEAs, reflecting a combination of factors, including the historical patterns of provision, local authority policy and ability of schools to cope with the new demands.

David Bell, then Chief Inspector of Schools, launching the Ofsted report in 2002, commented on the variability across the country and the challenges still facing many schools in trying to accommodate the whole range of special needs. He argued: 'There's no point in running away from the fact that schools have difficulties with this. It is the unresolved problem facing inclusion.' His claim that there was still a need for some form of specialist provision was met with criticism by lobbies who have argued for no compromise on the inclusion issue. The Centre for the Study of Inclusive Education (CSEI), for example, is highly critical of Government, local authorities and of schools which they see as resisting fully fledged inclusion, arguing that separate provision in special schools is a violation of children's rights.

CSIE's view is that despite the Government's recently adopted support to remove barriers to participation, the continued financial and philosophical support of special schools means that some students' rights will continue to be violated by exclusion from mainstream schooling. For this reason, CSIE continues to work towards Government gradually phasing out special schools and redirecting resources towards developing fully inclusive mainstream settings. (CSIE, 2005)

Yet, it seems, if that ideal is ever to be achieved, it will require a radical rethink of the nature and structure of schooling, most notably in the secondary sector. Clearly within present parameters of funding and support many schools are not coping with the demands on them. Evidence is found in the 2004 Ofsted report which shows a 10% increase since 2001 in the number of pupils placed in independent special schools by local authorities as a consequence of the difficulties that mainstream schools, and some special schools, had in meeting severe or complex needs. Advances in technology have led to a much higher survival rate of children who would previously not have survived, in particular very premature babies, a large proportion of whom are prone to health and psychological problems in later life.

Many of the pupils were referred for challenging behaviour or because they had been excluded from maintained mainstream and special schools. The proportion of pupils in pupil referral units rose by 25% between 2001 and 2003 while the proportion of pupils placed in special schools has remained more or less the same since 1999. While some special schools have closed, new special schools have opened, sometimes as a result of amalgamations. (Ofsted Report paragraph 14)

Inclusion policies impact in different ways on schools, depending on a range and complexity of factors. There is very little outright resistance in mainstream schools to include a wider range of children but few schools believe it is possible to accommodate all children, at least not without some fundamental changes to school structures and deeply entrenched conventions. Interviews with headteachers and
other schools staff reveal some of the issues schools face in their attempts to be more inclusive. These issues can be grouped around the following themes:

- Resourcing and finance
- Admissions and capacity
- Balance of needs
- Recruitment and retention
- Expertise and professional development

3.1 Resourcing and financing

How do schools manage resources and finances in this changing and unpredictable environment in which money follows, or fails to follow, the child? The evidence from schools is that this is a continuing struggle. ‘Every year we have to fight for that money’, says one headteacher, indicating the need for evidence-based argument, lobbying and creative accounting. This may be in the face of falling rolls across the authority, threatening the positions of LSAs and other staff whose positions depend on numbers.

In order to employ LSAs, schools rely to a large extent on statementing, as in these cases the money follows the child. The 15 hours allowance from the local authority, it was claimed, buys one half of an LSA/TA.

The council have become very clever at it. They only give them 15 hours a week and the school have to provide the rest. If they really want them included then they should provide the resources. (TA primary school)

The complaint that you can’t have inclusion without the resources was a major theme running through virtually all accounts, forcing headteachers to rely on ‘creative accounting’, for example borrowing from other budgets such as from a literacy or numeracy budget or early intervention funding. In one local authority there was ‘Emergency Money’ to cover children during the sometimes protracted statementing process.

We have a local initiative called Kendall Finance Initiative, run by the Heads, and it’s emergency monies for children who are not yet in the assessment stage of being statemented. They come to us and there are major problems. We allocate certain funding to schools for those children. (Headteacher, Primary)

There was, however, a Catch 22. Success with a child could prove counter productive, meaning that funding would then not be forthcoming. So success stories would be told in the informal rather than the formal accounts.

At the review meetings we can’t really hit the high spots, achievement-wise for that child, because then if we did that then they wouldn’t get the input, financially. And that must be awful for the parents. It’s in the informal time that we share the success because we need the money. (Year 1 Teacher)

Local authority systems vary widely and depend in part on the degree of inclusion within the authority. All hold some finance centrally for specific purposes as well as the general budget that goes to schools on a per capita basis. These funding systems are generally opaque and difficult to navigate, especially for parents; and
encourage, what Rouse and colleagues describe as ‘perverse incentives’.¹

The disparity among local authority systems is shown in a study by Cambridge Education Associates in 2003² which explored the complexity of ‘marginal’, ‘matrix’, ‘matched’ and delegated funding and concluded that as yet no local authority had managed to resolve the tension between a necessary degree of complexity and the desire for equitable forms of support targeted on need. They advocate a ‘root and branch’ review, specifically in relation to the Catch 22 of statementing which, they argue, limits the scope for investing in wider preventative support for children with lower levels of need.

As an example one local authority’s schema is illustrated in the following:

At least 5% of Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) is expected to be spent on SEN. AWPU is about £2000 for a primary school pupil and £3000 for a secondary school pupil.

Additional Funds for Additional Educational Needs (AEN) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) is weighted for schools using ‘Bands of Learning Difficulty’. Additional funds are also allocated for commonly occurring (high incidence) Special Educational Needs.

Children with severe and rare (low incidence) SEN get funding through statements from a centrally held fund

3.2 Strategic facilities

Strategic Facilities can be found in authorities where resources have been targeted on schools with a long tradition of good SEN practice. These schools, sometimes described as ‘additional resourced mainstream schools’, then function as magnet schools, attracting extra funds, qualified staff and specialized equipment such as a sensory room, disabled access, physio equipment and changing facilities for example. In rural areas the geographical spread of the various Strategic Facilities can, however, disadvantage some families or incur significant travel time. It may also be seen as letting other schools ‘off the hook’ and also creating a new form of imbalance within schools across a region. A headteacher described the ease with which some schools could refuse children and rely on others to pick up the responsibility.

We suddenly found children that other schools didn’t want and I’m talking about moderate learning difficulties – with probably quite pronounced behavioural needs. People didn’t want them and it’s quite handy for them – Oh let’s push them off to [VP School] (Primary school headteacher)

Elaborating on this theme another headteacher talked about the differential judgments made by fellow heads, accepting only those apparently most easily accommodated, what might be terms the ‘soft end’ of special needs.

Interesting how many schools go for the physical/medical and not the severe learning difficulty – because phys/med can be quite a cut and dry thing – in some ways it’s an easier need to actually meet. (Headteacher)

¹ See Election 2005: Putting Social Care in the Picture, a campaign briefing by McLaughlin, Florian and Rouse.
² Capacity or Creativity: the SEN Inclusion Challenge of 2003
3.3 Nothing fails like success

In many areas the ‘strategic facility’ is less a matter of planning than ad hoc differentiation. Some schools have proved successful in accommodating a range of special needs and then finding themselves becoming a magnet, drawing on a widening catchment as their reputation grows. This may become a virtuous circle of good and improving practice or a vicious circle in which the critical mass of diverse needs becomes hard for staff to handle.

The problem is that we are becoming a victim of our own success. It’s word of mouth and then because we do so well with special needs we create a demand and then this imbalances the proportion of children we’re able to cope with. (Primary school headteacher)

As another headteacher explained, schools that can cope compensate for the lack of expertise elsewhere and in the interests of the child will sometimes intervene to save the potential harm to a pupil by being shuffled around from one school to another.

The local mainstream school really didn’t want him. They didn’t have the expertise. They said that they couldn’t cope. They were then going to place him in another local school, but what had happened in the past is that we had had children directed to us from that school, so we said that it would be unfair for him to fail in two schools. I think that swayed them (the LEA). We just want what is best for the children. (Primary school headteacher)

What these ‘magnet’ schools showed was that wanting what is best for the children is a delicate balance and has to be weighed against what is best for the staff and for the school too. In a London borough secondary school the upper limit is placed at no more than three children with complex needs in any one class. In other schools with similar policies the number may be smaller or greater.

When we set up – what we didn’t want was to be inundated with 4 or 5 children in one year group with severe learning difficulties because that very much skews a small school. We say we would nominally take two children a year. (Primary School SENCO)

While there is evidence that as schools gain experience they can stretch the boundaries of their capacity and expertise, finding they can cope with greater numbers, this was not a view that found widespread sympathy with all teachers. Some pointed to the difference between five children with appropriate support and provision and five children with thirty others demanding attention and a teacher under pressure to cover the curricular ground in a limited time period.

3.4 Managing entry and transitions

Schools have to make critical decisions about admission of children with special needs with consideration of resources, expertise and the balance of needs across the school and within individual classrooms. Many said they had to face the hard decision of saying ‘no’ when they felt a critical balance had been reached.

There has to be the power to say well actually no – this isn’t working. Because once it actually impacts on the education of the other children to such an extent that learning isn’t taking place – then that is when the head has to step in and say this isn’t working – this child can’t be here. (Secondary Headteacher)
This is a fine judgment and one that may be made with, and perhaps sometimes without, a strong and reasoned evidence base. Most typically this referred to complex and profound needs, what one headteacher referred to as ‘the far end’:

The far end of severe learning difficulty – the real far end - verging on the profound and when you have other needs within that – we can’t provide for them. I don’t think we are the right place. (Secondary Headteacher)

As one headteacher commented, you have to be very determined, self-confident and have courage to say ‘no’ either or parents or to the local authority, especially where there is a strong emotional appeal. There may be few other alternatives available and clear evidence that other schools would not be as good for the child. In these circumstances it is extremely difficult for a school to refuse a child in need or to admit that they do not have the capacity or expertise to take on that pupil.

3.5 Isolation, containment or support?

There is scant evidence of young people with special needs coping successfully within mainstream classrooms without some form of withdrawal, individualised or group support at certain times in the day. Most secondary schools and even some junior / middle schools have some form of special unit. In the course of this study we encountered Learning Support Units, Seclusion or Isolation units, Pupil Services Centres, all serving the function of support, and/or containment and/or isolation.

The lowest common denominator was ‘isolation’, a place to send children who were disruptive, ‘so that teachers can get on with teaching’. In two high schools visited there were Isolation Units for bad behaviour, explicitly set up as an alternative to exclusion. Since their inception the number of exclusions in both schools had gone down. In many cases it was special needs young people who ended up in these units and the expedient response to ‘bad behaviour’ did not necessarily discriminate among causal factors such as routine ‘naughtiness’ or a cry for help.

Different kinds of units for dealing with more low level disruption and poor behaviour exist in many schools, usually staffed by TAs who may simply oversee young people filling out worksheets on their own, often engaged in the kind of tedious tasks that had sparked their behavioural protest in the first instance. In another school visited the unit for sanctions was complemented by a ‘Pupil Support Hatch’ where young people could go with low level ‘niggly’ problems to get sorted out by a support worker before they escalated to exclusion issues – a recognition that minor incidents and problems can escalate out of control if not dealt with quickly.

A visit to special units in the schools often suggested more of a containment function, with TAs keeping young people engaged or amused with games, drawing, colouring in or worksheets designed to provide a differentiated version of class work. What was sometimes found in such units was an attempt at some form of counselling and ‘talking through’ the problems that had resulted in the pupil being placed there. In only a few schools did we find a systematic and structured programme designed to meet individual learning needs by a flexible approach to differentiated provision.

In a Middle school a Learning Support Unit was given the acronym of the The SHIP Helping Individual Pupils. Under the motif The storm has passed and the future looks brighter one of its primary aims is also to reduce exclusion. It is a colourful,
bright, well-resourced room in the middle of the school, not stuck out on a limb, as in some cases signaling its status as peripheral to the central business of the school.

In the morning the Unit is staffed by a high level TA and second TA who offers literacy and numeracy support with a maximum of eight children. As some of these children have been statemented there may also on occasions be other ISTAs in the room too. Most children attend two mornings every week (for example Mondays and Wednesdays or Tuesdays and Thursdays with Fridays as the planning day. In the afternoon children can invite in a friend from mainstream as a ‘reward’. In these sessions the focus is on behaviour and discussion of issues such as ‘bullying’. Each session ends with a craft activity and then “snack and chat” to evaluate the sessions and to develop social and language skills.

Children are identified for The SHIP by their class teacher and a referral form. The TAs make two observations of the child in the class using a form that documents behaviour, social interactions with other pupils, attitudes and concentration. The aim is to have a 6-8 week intervention and if there is enough improvement the child returns to the class in perhaps a full-time capacity. While TAs support small groups within the class the children who qualify for the SHIP are those who do not respond in small groups and lack the concentration or skills to cope with mainstream classroom setting on any extended basis. Even the SHIP, however, cannot accommodate all SEN children, particularly children at the more serious end of the autistic spectrum.

TAs talked of a ‘difficult balancing act’ in the use of special provision given the wide range of referrals. For example if any child is excluded for a fixed-term they will come back to The SHIP first before being integrated into mainstream. The SHIP also has children who are emotionally damaged and on the Child Protection Register, while others still are there for behavioural problems. The policy of only taking children who can benefit has become more difficult to implement as potential demand and capacity are difficult to align.

Special units within the mainstream can be a useful halfway house and allow staff a breathing space for teachers in mainstream classrooms but they raise deeper issues of purpose and quality of provision that is genuinely learning-centred and what can genuinely be offered by way of a fulfilling educational alternative to the classroom.

### 3.6 Learning Mentors

In one area, previously an Education Action Zone, additional disadvantaged funding is used to appoint a number of learning mentors who are not part of any school staff but visit schools in each cluster. Line managed by the Lead Behaviour Professional for the school cluster their role is negotiated with the individual school. In middle schools most of the learning mentor’s work is on a one-to-one basis or with pairs of pupils working on peer relations. Not being on the staff and visiting the school on a more ad hoc basis however did not allow mentors the continuity of support they would have liked. As one mentor said,

> For me to have an impact I need to build up a relationship and that’s difficult.

How the school supported these mentors and integrated them into its strategic approaches to inclusion was an issue which required effective and proactive leadership but this was not consistently evident throughout schools in the area.
3.7 Deployment of staff

During 2005 senior leaders were preoccupied with Workforce Reform involving major restructuring of staff roles. This had major relevance for inclusion policy and practice, requiring decisions as to teaching, pastoral and support roles. How could stretched resources be deployed to best meet the range of needs of children and young people? How much responsibility could be given to less qualified staff who would increasingly play a significant role in needs assessment, provision and support for learning?

A TA in a secondary school described her role as teaching mainstream classes French but not being paid commensurately with the extra responsibility, while a TA colleague who taught Health and Social Care classes at KS4 level was also being paid as a TA. The TA who taught French admitted that she had a problem with who was immediately responsible for her:

I look at the need rather than the direct line manager but it does make it hard for your own [career] development. Because you are divided between so many people and have an input with a lot of different people, when it comes to your needs it is very difficult for one person to define what you need because they don’t see you a lot.

These members of staff with levels of expertise but no formal teaching qualifications were being used to fill teaching posts where there were shortages and without any incentives, rewards, pay structures or career progression. In an area with a long history of deprivation headteachers said that they relied increasingly heavily on support staff but, not only were they short of qualified teachers, they had also exhausted the supply of suitably qualified TAs in their area.

Undue responsibility and poor pay was also a gender issue, as most TAs in all phases are female. A secondary headteacher commented on the lack of positive male role models for troubled young boys. Counselling was often left to TAs as teachers were too busy to attend to pastoral needs. There were few examples of career structures for TAs but in one school the Senior TA was part of the SMT and in this schools TAs were more recognised in their own right and asked for their contribution to planning and development. These TAs who were used within the Borough, and nationally for training in other schools, came back ‘horrified’ about the position and functions of support staff in most other schools they visited. For example, in one school two TAs in the special support unit essentially ‘policed’ young people as physical attacks were increasingly commonplace. As the SENCO commented on the role of TAs:

The staff – we get attacked: there have been physical attacks - kicks and things like that. You have to be pretty tough to work here.

3.8 A question of expertise

School staff frequently referred to inclusion being ‘on the cheap’ as schools lacked the resources to attract quality experienced staff with the relevant balance of expertise.
Then the next big thing we did was when we took on (the SENCO) who is so knowledgeable. I tried being SENCO for a while – and my word that is such a hard role. For a strategic facility you need an expert. (Head)

The whole funding thing is not great. For inclusion to really work it has to be better funded. You've got to have the quality staff in schools to get the continuum and the behaviour support things – because I guess of all the needs behaviour is the hardest one. If you've got someone hiding under a table, kicking off, swearing – well that just takes everything apart. (Head)

Developing expertise from within takes time and schools might be described as ‘self taught’ or ‘learning by doing’

We built up our strategies for class teaching especially when we had maybe quite a percentage with severe needs – how did we manage in class – the resources in class. Our expertise is quite considerable now. (Head)

There is the acknowledgement here of the wealth of experience of all members of the team – you have to share it. Key appointments are crucial. (Primary school head)

3.9 The paradoxes of pastoral care

As schools widen their intake and as teachers meet more disturbed and damaged children the need for pastoral care increases commensurately. This becomes particularly acute in disadvantaged communities where the issues are compounded by poverty, violent communities and turbulent domestic circumstances. Yet schools were struggling with workforce re-modelling in which financial incentives are more linked to ‘raising standards’. In consequence in one high school a TA had taken over the role of Head of Year, while in other schools the pastoral role of form teachers was being taken by support staff rather than teachers. A Head of Year who applauded the positive attributes that a high level TA brought to the job, also argued for teachers retaining their pastoral role.

You need the authority of being a teacher for certain discipline issues and sometimes parents want to see a teacher.

And again:

I think the pastoral side is an extension of teaching. Pupils with academic problems tend to have pastoral problems as well. The pastoral side will never disappear from teaching because if a child has a problem you need to sit down and talk to them otherwise they will start disrupting your lesson. You’re not robotic you can’t ignore things going on which affect your teaching. There will always be a need for teachers to be involved with a pastoral role whatever you call it. (Head of Year, secondary school)

It was frequently argued by teachers that behavioural incidents could only be understood in the context of teaching and learning, particularly if that behaviour appeared out of character. Very typically disruptive behaviour was frustration with the learning task or with the social context of the learning. It was also claimed that it was easier as a teacher to discuss incidents with other teachers than to simply delegate a problem to a teaching assistant.
Although, therefore, most experts make a clear distinction between behavioural and other forms of special needs, if only because the former by definition are likely to be more challenging, classroom teachers and TAs did not necessarily differentiate between needs in the same way during interviews. As the above quotations demonstrate, teachers were more inclined than in the past to give pupils the benefit of the doubt and to attribute unacceptable behaviour to frustrations over learning, whether due to a specific disorder or, more generally, the consequence of various forms of social deprivation.

Thus a Deputy Head of Year argued that students he taught in his year group were better behaved because the school policy has allowed him to have more dealings with them and built a teaching/learning relationship in which pastoral care was implicit and ongoing.

### 3.10 Border crossing: working with other agencies

Expertise may not exist within the school but this can be less problematic when there is strong support outside the school from other children and family agencies. In theory the move at local authority level to children and family services should provide greater expert support for schools. There were examples of social workers, speech and language therapists, teachers and TAs working together to identify needs to and to identify strategies to support children, agree targets and monitor progress in learning. While these collaborative efforts could pay off handsomely for individual children they did rely on a happy combination of expertise, teamwork and a considerable investment of time. However, effective practice such as this was more the exception than the rule. Stretched resources, combined with a growing diversity of needs, meant that there were long queues and hiatuses in finding the appropriate support for children and families. Educational psychologists and physiotherapists, for example, could simply not keep up with demands.

> We could wait a year and more for a child to see an ed psych, even children crying out for support or statementing. There is just not the resource. So we battle on. With increasing frustration it has to be said. (Year 5 teacher)

> Some children should have weekly physiotherapy and sometimes we don’t see them [physiotherapists] for weeks. (Middle school headteacher)

Class teachers were often disappointed and even offended not to have the opportunity to directly discuss individual children in their class with educational psychologists during their assessment visits, especially when they were the ones required to work extra hours to make sure all the paperwork was complete and as they knew the child best; TAs were even surprised by the question as to whether they had any direct input and whether they were ever included in these discussions. Pressure of time often meant that outside professionals did not even get to speak to key staff who worked every day with the children they had come to assess.

### 3.11 When inspectors call

Inspection plays a big part in a how a school responds to, and manages, inclusion but teachers frequently found inspection not well attuned to the needs of children or the challenges schools were facing in trying to meet those needs.
Our last inspection we felt was very driven by SATs scores and I didn’t feel that our inspectors had a very clear view of the level of severity of the children that we are dealing with. I mean we have children with severe learning difficulties getting level two – that is fantastic.’ (Primary school SENCO)

The reference to ‘sleepless nights’ and ‘nightmares’ were references to the conflict between pursuing an inclusive agenda while at the same time trying to meet statistical targets and normative comparisons.

A lot of our data is fairly skewed. Last year two children just didn’t do their SATs in Year 6, they couldn’t, so I don’t compare well with similar schools. And sometimes getting that through Ofsted is a nightmare – they didn’t understand. I spent a lot of time crunching the data – showing that learning had moved on. (Primary school headteacher)

I think the Head is strong but I do think she has sleepless nights about it because she knows that when the inspectors come in all they are interested in are the statistics and the levels and it is hard for her to fight for those children. We’re quite lucky that quite a few of the specials are disapplied from the statistics so it doesn’t effect us that way. (Reception Teacher)

A primary school head described the recent Ofsted as ‘awful’, claiming that the inspection team had conspicuously failed to understand the nature and range of needs in the school. Another primary head described a lesson given by her ‘most brilliant teacher’ which was judged by Ofsted only as ‘satisfactory’ because of the pace was ‘not snappy enough’, whereas in fact the teacher was trying to calibrate the pace to meet the differing needs of the pupils– ‘a learning pace rather than a teacher’s pace’.

On the other hand Ofsted protocols or lack of requisite expertise within the inspection team could overlook poor practice and give a school a clean bill of health.

I would be reluctant to say this more publicly but there are some pretty ropey pratice here which the Ofsted lot just didn’t or couldn’t see. You’d need a pretty perceptive team or a long term stay in the school to pick these things up (Year 6 teacher)

3.12 Making it work

Inclusion was seen to work when a number of essential conditions were met. Enthusiasm and commitment of staff are an ingredient, necessary, but insufficient, without the breadth and depth of expertise and the balance of teamwork across a staff.

I think it works here because we are all so positive about it. We have a very enthusiastic and supportive head and we also have [the SENCO] – and what would we do without her. It also works because we’ve got a very experienced core of learning support assistants – and that is the crux of the matter. And they all have different strengths and different expertise – and I think they are the schools most valuable resource. (Reception Teacher)

Making it work, however, meant going beyond integration to inclusion, the difference between making a placement and giving support on the one hand and, on the other, offering a quality of care involving the restructuring of the curriculum and classroom organisation. In the literature (Warnock for example, 1978) the distinction is made
between provision and process, the latter an ongoing, sensitive and responsive attention to planning and provision.

Inclusion, as distinct from integration means a continuing attempt to find the right balance of opportunity. As this primary headteacher describes it, it involves looking out for alliances and partnerships with other schools, with local primaries, with special schools and secondary schools not only to capitalise on expertise but to find the optimum combination of learning opportunities for a child.

In terms of inclusion – there is still quite a way to go. We have moved from talking about integrating children to including children so what comes after that? I’d like to get more partnerships with special schools because I think that’s an area that’s ready for development. Now we’ve got special school colleagues who we can work with really well. We’ve also got to work with the secondary school – because what’s the point in offering really inclusive practice – if then it stops. (Primary Headteacher)

Many schools had a policy of cover staff being employed on a full-time basis to fill in as needed. These supply staff would fill an essentially custodial role giving students worksheets to keep them occupied. Other schools, however, have used insurance policies to hire experienced supply teachers on a more ad hoc basis so that without incurring extra expense students’ needs could be more adequately met. In these schools it was much less a question of filling the gaps by using less qualified or unqualified staff, but thinking strategically about how, within multiple constraints, to keep the needs of children and young people to the fore.

The contentious issues around inclusion will only be partially resolved, however, without accountability and improvement measures which go beyond the simplistic GCSE and SATs data applied indiscriminately to all children. Development of alternative forms of assessment which take account of pupils attaining below level 1 will be an important step forward in giving a more fine-grained picture of school achievement and reduce the perverse incentives which penalise goodwill, commitment and ethical decision-making.

Notes and References

17 Ofsted (2004) Special education needs and disability: towards inclusive schools
18 Speech by David Bell, June 26th, 2002 preceding the publication of the annual Ofsted report
Chapter 4  The Impact on Teachers

The continuing trend to greater inclusion within mainstream classrooms has been welcomed in principle by teachers. It is widely agreed by teachers in our sample that exclusion of certain children from the main stream of school social and academic life can not only harm them but also render them invisible to other children who are deprived of important facets of a social and political education. However, the realities of inclusive practice took very different and often take highly problematic forms. The issues confronting school staff are, in summary:

- The nature of special needs which demand a more differentiated form of provision than containment with the mainstream classroom
- The decision-making process whereby pupils are allocated to a school and to a teacher without adequate consultation and planning
- The lack of expertise to deal with certain kinds of behavioural and learning needs
- The nature and quality of support available
- The impact on the balance of the teacher’s work
- The impact on all children’s learning

These issues do not stand in isolation from the policy context in which they are located. Nor do they play out in similar ways in different neighbourhoods, highly disparate socio-economic areas, local authorities with varied policies, or in small and large primary and secondary schools located in rural areas or clustered together in inner cities or suburbs. In other words, the issues are context sensitive and return insistently to issues of resourcing and expertise.

Resourcing and expertise, key elements in the equation have, therefore, to be seen in conjunction with the curriculum and testing drivers of teachers’ time and motivation. As Florian and Rouse have argued, it is the tensions between the two agendas – standards and needs - and the pressure exerted on teachers to meet curriculum targets, that play a part in shaping attitudes to special needs, not only those of school staff but of parents and pupils too.

… the inclusive movement needs to take a realistic look at the way in which schools have been placed in the unenviable position of needing to consider the effect upon published standards of welcoming low-achieving children.” (Feiler and Gibson 1999 p.149).

In addressing these themes this section draws on evidence from headteachers, teachers, LSAs and pupils as to the changes in patterns of classroom management and teaching, changes in priorities, preparation, deployment of time and collaborative work with parents, LSAs and external agencies.

4.1 The balance of teachers’ work

Increasing the range of needs and abilities within the ‘mainstream’ classroom without addressing curriculum, testing and ‘standards’-driven accountability, has had a major
impact on the nature and balance of teachers’ work. Within these policy parameters attempts to meet complex individual needs with a weather eye on overall standards, can upset the balance and flow of teaching and learning. A primary teacher referring to an autistic pupil said, ‘My main focus for each day was him’. How to deal with this one child had, for her, become a constant preoccupation in the planning and in anticipation of the day ahead. She did not say this to blame the child or devalue the potential benefits to him of being in the company of his peers, but because the lack of support was beginning to drain the energy and motivation she had once brought to her teaching.

This was to prove a consistent theme in interviews and in written comments from school staff. Teachers and TAs who spoke about serious dislocation of teaching were not referring to special needs in general but to specific kinds of behaviour that were particularly disruptive, not only disturbing to others but causing teachers to worry about the child putting herself at risk.

The thing that I can’t handle and just have no clue what to do with is the self harm, sometimes serious, like kids obsessively banging their head on the desk or on the wall. I find it deeply distressing (Yr 3 Teacher)

In discussion among a group of primary teachers they talked about an autistic boy who has just come in from nursery, describing him as ‘physical’, a reference to aggressive behaviour such as biting or kicking. They had worked hard to accommodate that behaviour but confessed to a lack of knowledge about autism, feeling both helpless and deskillled. There was only one teacher in the school trained in ‘positive handling’ and every time a child needed to be restrained this teacher had to go out of the class, leaving the Teaching Assistant with the rest of the pupils. In this case the TA had quit her job as she was unprepared to take the whole class. This group of teachers, highly committed and keen to do their best for a large number of children with special needs, said that is had ‘taken its toll on staff’ and some had left, unable to deal with the pressures of curriculum and testing on the one hand and the demands of ‘difficult’ children on the other. The open plan design also meant that disruption extended more widely than just one class.

These may be examples of more extreme cases but reflect concerns expressed by the National Autistic Society (NAS). Their 2002 survey Inclusion and autism: is it working? found that children with autism and Asperger syndrome were on average 20 times more likely to be excluded from school than their peers. One in five (21%) were excluded at least once, compared with an estimated 1.2% of the total pupil population. The situation was worse still for more able children with autism. 29% have been excluded from school at one time or another. The study also found that three quarters of schools were dissatisfied with the extent of training in autism. Commenting on these findings, Adviser to the NAS, Mike Collins said:

Parents of children in autism-specific units and schools where exclusions rarely arise - are twice as likely to be satisfied with provision than those whose children attend mainstream or special education needs’ schools. Autism is a complex condition, with children having difficulties relating to people and communicating their needs. Parents are telling us that everyone involved in the day-to-day running of schools needs specific training to recognise and support their children.
This is not to argue that there is not a place for autistic children within the mainstream, indeed there were examples of autistic children doing very well by virtue of their ability to focus exclusively to the task at hand and sensitive handling by teachers. Inclusion of particular kinds of needs does, however, have to address the ability of the school to provide the right environment and support for learning. In the absence of these conditions, as one teacher admitted:

We don’t do anything about their learning but at least we can help them to feel accepted by their peers.

It was, as another teacher put it, ‘inclusion without education’.

4.2 Children on the borderline

It is more dramatic cases that grab the headlines and can easily misrepresent the larger issues. However, the issues are often to be seen in the less manifest cases where children’s learning is short-changed and teachers struggle to meet their needs. These are children on the borderline, sometimes quiet and withdrawn, sometimes demanding, not statemented or necessarily waiting for statementing. These children have not qualified for the support of an LSA and it was these children who could sometimes prove the most difficult for teachers to deal with.

The children who are diagnosed or have been specified as needing a Strategic Facility, then they get their hours and their time but those children who don’t quite make the bracket, they have a need but they don’t have a strong enough need, they are the ones that really have to watch out or they just slip through the net. (Year 1 Teacher)

It is in this borderland that children could ‘slip through’ causing no overt problems and easy to ignore in favour of attending to more demanding forms of behaviour. Others of those ‘borderline’ children could express their need or disaffection through disruptive behaviour which could escalate when there was a potent mix of children with behavioural special needs along with others to whom the wider levels of tolerance gave license to act up, especially during the temporary distraction of the teacher.

Where it doesn’t help is where you have a child that has behavioral difficulties and you have a mainstream child who also has behavioural difficulties and they play off one another, they copy, they learn tricks off each other, and then you have negative behaviours that you need to break – that’s probably where it’s not quite so easy. (Year 1 Teacher)

A primary teacher exemplified this issue ‘in extremis’ with the case of a child with Tourette’s Syndrome whose uncontrollable interruptions had a knock-on effect with other children who took this both as a welcome distraction and an occasion for mischief.

4.3 Stretching the boundaries, creating new norms

The issue of new norms and extended permissiveness in the classroom is reiterated by a Head of Department in a secondary school who provided the following write-in comment to the questionnaire:
The attempt to include children with behavioural problems can seriously impede learning. I spend too much time as a ‘child minder’ and not a teacher and it can create a culture whereby many unacceptable behaviours are seen as ok. (HOD History).

The gradual establishment of a new norm is described in both positive and negative terms depending on a number of inter-related factors. Children can get used to extreme behaviour and learn to ignore it. Learning to live with, and to understand, differing forms of behaviour as an expression of underlying needs is a significant aspect of social education. It may be regarded as a singular strength of inclusion policies.

The year I had an autistic child – there was a lot of disruption – screaming. The other children just ignored it. They knew him from reception – so that may make a difference. When he was having a ‘do’ – the other children would just work around it. (Yr 2 Teacher)

Not all classrooms, however, are so accommodating. For some pupils and teachers such extreme forms of acting out proved both stressful and inimical to their concentration and focus on learning. One primary teacher argued that it takes considerable time and a particular combination of circumstances for pupils to get used to unconventional and extreme forms of behaviour.

Children with severe learning difficulties further up the school can be a problem. The other children in school have been aware of them since they came but my class come in and they don’t know that M is flailing everywhere and that’s quite an issue. They need to get used to those children.

For new members of staff it could also take time to get used to teaching environment in which there is a constant low level of idiosyncratic behaviour.

I had to get used to it when I first came here to teach – I could never teach a lesson in silence. There was always noise – someone over there reading – someone there whistling or humming and for the other kids to just switch off from it. And that's what we have to do. (Yr 2 Teacher)

For some teachers it was a step too far and they left to find jobs in other schools or in some cases quit teaching altogether.

4.4 Picking up the pieces: issues of cover and supply

The behavioural and learning problems were exacerbated when a teacher was off ill and a supply teacher had to cover the class without the knowledge, expertise or support.

I think it is hard because we do have a complex system and a stranger can’t be expected to walk into school and know when is the point to withdraw a child or what a child’s favourite activity is that will calm them down. It’s just an incredibly hard situation. (Reception Teacher)

If at times anyone is absent through illness and we perhaps have a supply who is sent to us, then that is when we could have problems. They might not be quite as skilled as our own staff and they don’t know the child so then sometimes it is difficult in the class. And that's mainly at carpet time, directed
teaching time to the class and perhaps that person might not know the best strategy. (Year 1 Teacher)

This had repercussions on teachers who described having to ‘pick up the pieces’ after a period of inadequate cover. In some cases teachers’ concerns caused them to return too soon after an illness or made them reluctant to ‘sell children short’ by taking time off. Speaking of her staff a primary head described teachers ‘as their own worst enemy’ because of ‘always putting the child before themselves’. A teacher spoke of the guilt she felt at letting children down.

I think, it’s a funny thing to say, I think they (SEN children) add guilt to my job. I go home sometimes and feel I haven’t done a good job because I haven’t given them enough time and I think it’s because the progress they make is so slow that you can think that you’re failing. (Reception Teacher)

A very experienced primary school teacher, who constantly strived to frame the issues in positive terms, spoke emotionally about the sense of guilt and failure.

We were doing something in Maths last week and they still hadn’t got it and I felt a failure in myself. I got so emotional and I said to my TA because I was close to tears “I’ve got to go out of the classroom”. I felt it was something I was failing in – I couldn’t cope with it any more.

For teachers ‘muddling through’ without expert support, having to carry the burden of responsibility for children’s welfare could weigh heavily. Despite the high level of commitment to these children the benefits had to be weighed against the cumulative stress.

It makes the job more stressful on some days and in all honesty if someone offered me a class of eleven in a small rural class with no special needs, I probably wouldn’t say no! (Reception Teacher)

Success with challenging behaviour and complex needs is a long term investment and highly gratifying when it finally pays off, However, as a special needs assistant pointed out, you may have to go through ‘hell’ to get there.

He stayed in the school for three years and we saw him change – it was just hell for the first year.

4.5 The fractured school day

In a secondary school the issues may be similar but play out very differently due to a very different set of constraints from primaries. One of the problems is highlighted by a History teacher who, with one or two periods in the week in which to get know students and meet curricular targets, is not given the time to get know all his students, trying to manage settling in and moving on again with maximum efficiency at each brief encounter with his class.

There are thirty plus of them in very class and I see them twice a week and I have to be honest, with seven different classes, that’s over two hundred kids, even three months into the term I still don’t know all of their names but I do get to know the SEN kids very quickly as they take up most of my attention. It seems like hardly have they all settled in and quietened down and dealt with all the cries for help it is time to do all the winding up and leaving again. Some of these SEN kids are just bewildered by it all and just shuffle off to the next crazy episode.
A group of seven secondary school teachers, who refused to be recorded on tape, were unanimous in complaint that current policy made it impossible for them to deal with the range of needs and abilities within the short and fractured compass of time afforded them in the school day. They argued that it was ‘not doing these young people the least bit of good to be in a secondary school, struggling to cope with subjects that made no sense to them, not only disruptive but occupying a disproportionate amount of the teachers’ time’. ‘We are sacrificing the needs of the majority for this very small minority’, said one departmental head who claimed that the impact on standards and morale in his department had been severely and adversely affected. Another added, ‘For all the head’s good intentions the policy simply isn’t working. It is simply ill conceived and badly thought out government policy’. These comments were made in a school which had very positive inclusion policies, had a Learning Needs Zone, and in which staff worked hard at primary-secondary liaison and offered a choice of curricular pathways agreed in discussion with parents and students themselves.

4.6 Home from school

While there were substantial effects on the balance of work within the school, there were also repercussions on the balance of teachers’ and LSAs’ time outside of school. Consistently in interviews and in questionnaire responses teachers and LSAs highlighted the lack of time available for preparing plans and materials, setting their concerns within the Government’s drive to promote ‘personalised learning’ in which personalisation was apparently not individualisation but then what was it?, they inquired. Teachers’ approach to differentiation tended, in practice, to be individualised, particularly by reference to children with special needs.

You differentiate for all children in your class but for some SEN pupils I have to undertake totally diverse planning in order for the child to achieve so that individual resources need to be created to support learning. (Year 6 teacher)

As many as half the pupils in a class could require individual planning for teaching and assessment, it was claimed.

Each child has an individual plan and needs an individual assessment and often specific teaching materials. They may need to be taught as a small group or individually over and above normal teaching time, specifically in ‘generic’ literacy and numeracy plans. I have 10 such children in my class of 29 with only a part-time LSA to help. (Year 1 and 2 mixed class teacher)

In a first school where pupils had been ability grouped into mixed-age classes one teacher had 25 IEPs to consider (and write) out of a class of 30, including one statemented autistic child while a colleague in the same year group had none. This is a micro level example of the pressures created when the ‘principle of natural proportion’ is breached.

4.7 Extreme measures

For many children with specific medical needs a mainstream classroom was the best place to be, as their needs could be accommodated with appropriate information, care and resourcing. Indeed for many of these children special schools would not
have been in their interest. However, we also found many extreme cases where medical conditions put huge strains on teachers and teaching assistants, for example, requirement for constant vigilance to ensure administration of tracheotomy at regular intervals, coping with incontinence and frequent nappy changing or clearing up after accidents. This was not only ‘above and beyond the call of duty’ but made for a constant level of strain on the classroom teacher and a heightened sense of responsibility. As one primary teacher commented:

Our planning takes so much longer – teachers have to ensure that there are always two people there at all times in case a child require medical intervention, such as sucking out the tube or for a child who blacks out. [Jill wears a nappy and blacks out, Alistair requires suction for his tracheotomy tube].

These are, again, relatively rare scenarios and more familiar to teachers in special schools, but even in that context a special school Deputy Head said that teachers or TAs could not, and should not, be required to take on such responsibilities, and that all too often schools rely on the goodwill of staff and their instinctive sense of care for children. He described this as both unfair and exploitative. As one primary teacher commented ‘We can accommodate some medical problems – but some are so severe you can’t access the curriculum. It’s more like nursing rather than education’. It was accompanied by a heartfelt plea for appropriately trained medical staff.

In the absence of such expert resources a primary teacher described having to use a walkie talkie so that she was always on call to support other teachers if her expertise was required. It did mean constant interruption to her own class teaching.

A first school Headteacher recognised the changing demands on her:

I’m trained in terms of education but my remit has widened to social, health …
The responsibilities on a school are ever-increasing - there are so many agenda items foisted on schools

These examples, while at the extreme end of the continuum, raise questions as to the role of teachers and TAs as carers as well as pedagogues. To what extent is it reasonable for nursery, infant or primary school staff to provide such service for the ‘whole child’, or should they, as most teachers have argued, be able to call on specialist support of ancillary staff? And to what extent do those same principles apply in the secondary school context?

As children get older their problems change. The children who are in programmes for raising self-esteem in the early years often become the same children who present behavioural issues later on if the intervention is too late or unsuccessful. In secondary schools it is pupils with complex needs and particularly with mental health issues that are not being catered for. In one area visited, a mental health assessment could not be carried out, it was said, until the child reached Year 5 even though there was a strong case for needing one much earlier. The mental health problems referred to by schools included attempted suicides, schizophrenics and children who self-harm. An assistant head in a secondary school cited an example of a pupil ‘whirling like a dervish in a busy road’ oblivious to the traffic, he said, there was no-one to phone to get help:

In an ideal world we should be in a child and community psychiatric team; we haven’t got anyone.
School staff spoke of the ‘awful realities’ of some young people’s lives, ‘beyond imagination’ and for whom school was the only safe place. Staff often had to assume counseling and social welfare roles without the proper training or knowledge of where these young people could be getting the right kind of professional help. The headteacher in one secondary school recounted an example of a girl who had been raped by her brother and then her stepfather; and another of a boy who had arrived home to find his parent overdosed on the floor with a hypodermic needle in his groin. The school has to support these children as best it could as well as trying to get on with the job of teaching and ‘raising standards’.

4.8 Context matters

The resilience of school staff to deal with special needs is highly dependent on the context in which those issues play out. In a context where there are supportive parents and a critical mass of well-adjusted children the ability to cope with children who act out their frustrations is very different from schools in highly disadvantaged areas where a large percentage, even a majority of pupils have high levels of need. In one primary school, serving a particularly notorious housing scheme, teachers had to deal not only with frequent confrontation with children but sometimes with their parents too.

A SENCO also described the very deprived area described some of those ‘awful realities:

If you look at the class make-up now there are very few from what we would call ‘stable families’. We’ve got some children who know someone who has been murdered. We’ve got children whose fathers or brothers or sisters are in prison, we’ve got boys who were at our school a few years ago with ASBOs. It is a really bad area. One of our TAs lives down the road – she won’t go out at night, it’s not safe. We feed from two [First] schools and there’s a big gang war between them. There have been fights that the police have been called to, knives have been used between the gangs. There is a pupil who would have been in Year 6 who was involved in those; we had another pupil with a firearm.

While this is the stuff of lurid headlines it can also be an expression of the law of ‘unnatural proportion’ in which social, economic and housing policies ‘ghettoise’ parents and children (often not ‘families’ in the archetypal sense), concentrating and compounding the effects of poverty and the associated health and welfare issues that go with it. For schools located in these communities, also on the edge of the social and educational mainstream, inclusion issues play out quite differently. These are schools struggling with inclusion writ large within a context of socio-economic exclusion. Where ‘special needs’ and individual needs meet may be hard to discern, and where the roots of ‘extreme’ behaviour are complex and multi-layered.

4.9 Parents and partnerships

Partnership with parents is a key ingredient in supporting children’s learning and the ability to cope with the social and emotional passage between home and school. In general, contact with parents was handled by SENCOs and parents’ evenings were, for many, the only source of contact. Many teachers had not met with the parents before taking the child into their class. Additional contacts were typically concerned with behavioural rather than learning-related issues. More consultation with parents was often seen not as a means of decreasing workload and classroom problems but
rather as an additional source of stress. Where teachers did have a closer relationship with parents this involved a lot of extra time, not only in face-to-face meetings but in telephoning, writing reports and liaising with psychological and social services. While such responsibilities often fell to a SENCO, a senior member of staff, or someone with a specific remit, typically parents wanted direct contact with the teacher.

Teachers benefited from parental advice as well as offering counsel on how to support learning and manage behaviour in the home environment. However, advising a parent on how to cope with Down’s children, children on the Asperger’s spectrum or with ADHD or complex learning needs, was an intimidating prospect for teachers who confessed to being out of their depth yet wanting to help parents often in distress and lacking in information or initiative as to where to turn for expert help. In areas with good strategic facilities, with collaborative working relationships, with special schools or with an accessible local authority, teachers could get support, but as we discovered, pressures on other agencies’ attempts at communication could be more frustrating than helpful. The commitment to keep children within the mainstream, seeking appropriate support, brought with it a huge investment of time and energy.

A lot of time and effort went into keeping him in school ….We put in the time, the effort, the pastoral care ...You’d work with the parents’ social workers. You’d worked your socks off to keep them in mainstream school. (Year 5 teacher)

4.10 Issues of expertise and professional development

There is a significant lack of expertise and professional development in meeting a wide spectrum of needs. The importance of professional development, and lack of it, was consistently raised by teachers, heads and TAs as a critical issue if inclusion policies were to have any prospect of success. School staff were too often left to fall back on common sense or ‘instinct’.

There is very little specialist training. You do what you can instinctively but very often that isn’t good enough. It's no good enough for the assistant because they feel inadequate and it’s not good enough for the child. (TA primary school)

As another Teaching Assistant put it:

In every other work place you get training before you go on the shop floor but in schools it doesn’t work like that. It's hands on with no training. (TA primary school).

A reason given for the lack of opportunity was the knock-on effects of leaving the classroom. In the case of one-to-one supervision a TA explained why she had never had the opportunity for training:

In my last school I didn’t go on any training courses because there was no one to cover me. You were with that child and that was it.

A primary teacher talked about positive handling and the training they received which, she said, was totally inappropriate to most of situations they encountered. A training session with much theory and practising of moves with compliant adults was not transferable to the wildly out of control child, biting and kicking and causing a danger to himself and to staff. The spontaneity and volatility of these situations,
sometimes with no other support available, did not, as staff said, usually follow text book rules.

In relation to the use of a tracheotomy tube, described above, medical training was not provided. As a teacher explained, ‘The parents showed staff how it was done. We got training in that because it didn’t cost anything.’ While providing a useful point of contact and transfer of knowledge between home and school, reliance on parents is both professionally unacceptable and could be potentially dangerous.

The lack of specialist expertise and professional development emerged as a constant strand in virtually every written or verbal comment from teachers and LSAs. We are reminded of a policy change under the Thatcher government when Kenneth Baker as Secretary of State for Education instructed University Education Departments to close down courses for graduates specifically trained to support children with learning difficulties on the grounds that every would-be teacher had to train in one of the core or foundation subjects in the new National Curriculum. Ministry officials argued that it was more appropriate to gain expertise in aspects of teaching children with special needs after a suitable induction period of teaching ‘normal classes’ by means of an in-service diploma or Masters’ qualification. However, while the proportion of children requiring specialised support has increased, the specialist knowledge and qualifications have not kept pace.

4.11 The expanding role of LSAs

Learning support assistants (LSAs) go by a variety of names but are generally referred to as TAs or Teaching Assistants. The role they play in supporting the inclusion agenda varies widely from local authority to local authority and from school to school, but in whatever capacity they operate they are indispensable to making inclusion work. At the same time this is problematic as they are frequently given, or assume, responsibilities which exceed their expertise. This can often be put down to goodwill on their part, their concern for children in their care, but it is a responsibility assumed in default of better resourcing and other systemic issues which starve schools of requisite professional expertise and expect inclusion to be delivered on the cheap.

Very typically an LSA will work on a one-to-one basis with a child. This can play a critical role in allowing teachers to attend to the rest of the class, releasing them from dealing intensively to that child’s needs. In a number of schools in which we questioned teachers about individual children we were referred to the LSA as these teachers had very little contact with, or knowledge of, the children in question. This was because teachers did not have time to prepare sufficient materials which might be more appropriate to the child in question (and so decrease behaviour problems), nor did they have time for consultation with LSAs which would have allowed them to prepare materials under teachers’ direction. However, teachers themselves often lacked the requisite expertise to be able to provide professional advice to their LSA, so reinforcing the situation in which the teacher dealt with mainstream pupils while the LSA attended as best s/he could with the needs of the ‘special’ pupils.

Using SENCOs to promote and coordinate the production of such resources did not appear a viable solution either as their roles appeared to be largely administrative, consisting of coordinating arrangements for deploying support staff, meeting with individual teachers, pupils and parents and liaising with outside professional bodies. Part of their reluctance to develop a curriculum coordinator role may also lie in their
background. A minority of SENCOs in this study had a qualification in some aspect of supporting children with special learning needs. Because such posts are viewed, particularly in secondary schools, as carrying a high administrative burden they are often offered to staff whose qualifications are in areas which carry less ‘academic prestige’.

Working with pupils on a one-to-one basis could build an intense relationship between that key worker and the child. If the child became too disruptive or the class activity was judged not be appropriate the TA (or SNA) would withdraw the child into the corridor, the SEN Unit or to a different area of the class. So the sense of isolation for SNAs and the child were further reinforced.

In some areas there appeared to be an informal hierarchy among support staff. In one local authority Teaching Assistants were seen to have higher status than Special Needs’ Support Assistants because they worked more closely with class teachers – even though the latter are more qualified.

We are on a limb. The teaching assistants are seen to teach the children. We are seen to look after the children. But if you’re talking about peer skills and qualifications we are higher than they are. (Special Needs Support Assistant)

The position of Special Needs’ Assistants was often very insecure. Dependent on SEN funding (through the numbers of statements) they could be directly employed by the Authority rather than the school and as a consequence they often felt isolated and disempowered in terms of resources in the school and their own lack of any job security. Not feeling part of the school community leaves these assistants on the periphery and excluded from the mainstream themselves:

A deputy head in a special school described TAs as ‘mums’, not in a dismissive way but with deep respect for the caring and mothering role they played. Yet, with all the goodwill and unpaid extra time they put into the job they could not offer the high level of specialist expertise required to support complex learning needs. Often their ‘mothering’ could be overprotective, creating dependency rather than independence, as it took acute judgment and experience to know when to challenge and encourage risk taking. Heads often spoke in glowing terms of TAs who had a natural instinct for working with young people but TAs themselves were the first to admit that they were carers rather than pedagogues. While there were instances of very expert TAs who bought with them a background of work in health, social services or education these were more the exception than the rule. There were mothers (and very occasionally fathers) of children with special needs and while this could be very valuable it could also be problematic. First hand knowledge of a Down’s or autistic child could, on the one hand, inform and guide teachers’ practice but could also mislead, either because the experience of individual cases was not generalisable or because the parent in question did not have the breadth of expertise in the education of their own child.

A number of schools referred to the inconsistencies and paradoxes in TA support. Children with a high degree of medical need would be given a TA on a one-to-one basis although they often coped better academically than other children in the class. A special school deputy head cited the case of a boy who had gone to on to FE College accompanied closely by his TA. Although physically impaired and partially sighted he frequently managed to lose his TA because he was able to cope independently and enjoyed the freedom.
It was common to find LSAs taking responsibility for differentiating the curriculum. This typically took place voluntarily and in their own time. In some schools an LSA in charge of a child would take home the lesson planned for the following day and devise a simplified version of the lesson. While applauding the commitment and generosity of these members of staff, two examples illustrate a problem lying more deeply a) in the need for professional expertise and b) the inadequacy of the curriculum itself.

a) The class were doing a lesson on mapping. The LSA felt that this would be too difficult for the child so she constructed a large scale map of the school and the surrounding area as basis for a one-to-one conversation and investigation with the child. The problem was however that the child had no concept of mapping.

b) The class were doing a lesson on Boudica. Realising that the objectives for the class were far too demanding for the child in her care the LSA made the objective for the lesson for the child to simply know who Boudica was. While the objective might have been obtainable in some form, its purpose and relevance for a child with complex needs would, she acknowledged, be hard to justify.

As well as coming in early or using their own lunchtimes, in some cases LSAs were given time during the school day for planning and preparation and sometimes working together to generate ideas.

Sally and I have half past two to quarter past three on a Wednesday. We have it together because we work with the same children. We do have to prepare quite a bit. I mean we do use lunchtimes and things and come in early to do that. He needs a lot of visual stuff preparing on the computer and we just generally discuss what's happening. There is usually something that we have to make. (SEN Support Assistant)

While such planning was, in some instances, informed by consultation with the class teacher, teachers’ heavy workload meant that it was often left to LSAs to manage differentiation of learning on their own. ‘Regular informal meetings would be so beneficial’ said one TA, adding, ‘Every TA in every school would say that they don’t have enough time to meet with teachers. (TA primary school)

The 2002 Annual Ofsted report contained this statement:

….pupils with SEN depended on teaching assistants to break the tasks down further so that they could participate. In these lessons the focus of the teachers’ planning was on how the pupils with SEN could be kept engaged, rather than on what the pupils needed to learn next. There was not enough stress on how to improve their understanding and skills. This was a common reason why a significant number of pupils with SEN made too little progress, despite good teaching for the majority of the class. (paragraph 72)

With direct reference to the Ofsted findings a secondary head commented:

One reason for this is the inexorable pressure of the curriculum, examination/SATs requirements and league tables which demand that mainstream teachers drive forward in a way that may not be conducive to good inclusive practice.