Leadership and Management in Special Schools

Full Report | Summer 2003

A review of literature carried out for NCSL by **Mel Ainscow, Sam Fox** and **Judy Coupe O'Kane** of the University of Manchester

NCSL National College for School Leadership

Contents

1. Introduction

This review of literature was carried out by members of a research team at the University of Manchester, supported by a group of headteachers who work in successful special schools in different parts of the country. It focuses on the challenges and dilemmas facing leaders in special schools during what is a period of considerable change and uncertainty. More specifically the review addresses the question:

What forms of leadership practice can enable special schools to provide high quality education in existing circumstances, whilst at the same time developing new roles in relation to the implementation of the national reform agenda?

The report includes short summaries of relevant texts, useful links to more general leadership literature and a synopsis outlining key themes and areas for further research. The process of carrying out the review has involved a search for forms of rigour that incorporate both researcher and practitioner requirements.

Building on this body of research experience and knowledge, this review sets out to provide:

- a systematic and critical analysis of what is known about leadership and management in special schools
- concise summaries of key texts that will be accessible and relevant to practitioners
- a summary of themes and issues that will be helpful to practitioners
- an account of what further research is needed in order to take thinking and practice forward in the field

2. The Context of the Review

Any consideration of the field of special educational needs generally, and the role of special schools in particular, has to be set within an appreciation of overall trends in education. The 1990s saw considerable efforts in many countries to develop more equitable forms of schooling. The United Nations' strategy 'Education for All' encouraged such initiatives, focusing specifically on the need to reach out to excluded and marginalised groups of learners, not least those with disabilities. Further impetus was encouraged by UNESCO's Salamanca Statement, which argued that the development of mainstream schools with an inclusive orientation is the best means of achieving Education for All (UNESCO, 1994).

As a result of these trends, the field that has been known as special education or, more recently, special needs education, is involved in a period of considerable uncertainty (Mittler, 2000). In particular, the emphasis on inclusive education that is now evident in many countries challenges special needs practitioners to reconsider their own thinking and practice. It has been argued that this context of uncertainty provides the special education field with new opportunities for continuing its historical purpose of representing the interests of those learners who become marginalised within existing educational arrangements (Ainscow, 2002). At the same time, many of the assumptions that have guided the organisation and practices of special education are seen as being no longer relevant to the task, and the field is subject to considerable debate and, indeed, dispute with respect to future directions (Dyson and Millward, 2000).

A brief look at history reminds us that in the 19th century special educators in this country argued for, and helped develop, provision for children and young people who were excluded from educational plans. Only much later did this provision become adopted by national governments and local authorities. It is also worth remembering that it was as recently as 1970 that one group of learners, those categorised as 'having severe learning difficulties', was deemed to be even worthy of education.

Similarly, provision for children experiencing difficulties within mainstream schools grew as a result of a gradual recognition that some pupils were marginalised within and, in some instances, excluded from, existing arrangements for providing education. As this provision developed during the latter part of the 20th century, there was also increased emphasis on notions of integration, as special educators explored ways of supporting previously segregated groups in order that they could find a place in mainstream schools.

It can be argued, therefore, that the current emphasis on inclusive education is but a further step along this historical road. It is, however, a major step, in that the aim is to transform the mainstream in ways that will increase its capacity for responding to all learners. Of course, such a project requires the participation of many stakeholders in ways that challenge much of the status quo in both the special and mainstream sectors.

2.1 Areas of focus

In considering how best to focus the review it was important to recognise the many changes that have already taken place. For example, recent research commissioned by the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education indicated that the national percentage of pupils in special schools had fallen from 1.39 per cent in 1997, to 1.32 per cent in 2001, continuing a trend of nearly 20 years (Norwich, 2002). At the same time, the Norwich study drew attention to considerable variation from LEA to LEA. Those in the field have also noted considerable changes in the characteristics of their pupil populations, such that the traditional system for categorising children is now in doubt. Meanwhile, some special schools have become closely involved in various forms of partnership arrangements with mainstream schools in their local districts (Ainscow et al, 2000).

The review considers the implications of these trends for the future of separate special education provision, focusing in detail on what it means for the work of those who take on leadership and management roles. Within these overall trends, the future of special schools, in both the LEA and independent sectors, is particularly problematic. Do they continue working in much the same way, attempting to provide a distinctive educational experience for groups of children seen as having similar needs? Or should they seek to develop new roles in respect to the inclusion agenda within the mainstream?

Research suggests that, by and large, schools find it difficult to cope with change (Fullan, 1991). In this respect they face a double problem: they cannot remain as they now are if they are to respond to new challenges, but at the same time they also need to maintain some continuity between their present and their previous practices. There is, therefore, a tension between development and maintenance (Hopkins et al, 1994). The problem is that schools tend to generate organisational structures that predispose them towards one or the other. Schools (or parts of schools) at the development extreme may be so over-confident of their innovative capacities that they take on too much too quickly, thus damaging the quality of what already exists. On the other hand, schools at the maintenance extreme may either see little purpose in change or have a poor history of managing innovation.

During times of stability, of course, a tendency to maintenance presents little difficulty. On the other hand, periods of profound change and uncertainty heighten the tensions that are created within maintenance-orientated systems. Our own research indicates that the patterns of organisation and practice within special schools present a particularly extreme version of the maintenance-development dilemma (Ainscow et al, 2000). They are, by their nature, organisations that are particularly focused on doing everything possible to overcome the difficulties of unusual populations of learners. They have a tradition of intensive relationships between adults and children that have a particular focus on individualised approaches to learning. They also tend to have close links with families. In addition, the involvement of relatively large numbers of external support specialists from the education, social service and health departments further consumes planning time (Bowers, 1984). As a result, finding time to plan for change seems to be a particular problem.

In carrying out the review, then, there had to be a particular focus on how leaders can address the unusual management contexts created by this intensive form of the maintenance-development dilemma. With this in mind, therefore, it addresses the following question:

What forms of leadership practice can enable special schools to provide high quality education within existing circumstances, whilst at the same time developing new roles in relation to the implementation of the national reform agenda?

Clearly this question suggests that much of the more general literature on school leadership may be relevant. However, it was the more specific publications about management and leadership in special school contexts that was the main focus of this review.

2.2 Leadership in special schools: a gap in the knowledge

Tomlinson et al (1999) point out that what we know about headship remains partial and that in fact "in terms of research in the UK, we are probably at best only approaching the end of the beginning in our understanding". If this is true for those practising leaders in mainstream provision it is even more so for those in special schools. Rayner and Ribbins (1999) point out that following a sustained search of the literatures of special education and educational management they found very few references to leadership in special schools. Commenting on this situation, Powers et al (2001) note:

> **"This gap in our knowledge is particularly significant at a time when educational restructuring is changing not only the tasks and behaviours of educational professionals but also the conduct of professional relationships."**
>
> **(Powers et al, 2001)**

This gap in relation to leadership and management in special schools is associated not only with a lack of research but with limited professional development opportunities that focus on the particular concerns of practitioners in special education (DfES, 2003). These concerns have to be seen in relation to particular factors that influence practice in the field. These include:

• physical factors, such as size and position away from the children's homes

• changes in the characteristics of the pupil population attending

• the impact of the LEA on special school leadership

• partnerships with social services and health

• curriculum development in relation to mainstream

• the emphasis on close relations between children and adults

• planning systems that focus on the perceived needs of individual pupils

• team work in which teachers and support staff work closely

• the involvement of external support staff from different services

• close links with parents and families

Note also has to be taken of the diversity of types of special schools that exist. This includes differences in relation to size and categories of pupil and age groups served. Some special schools also provide residential education of various forms. Consequently, their staffing profiles include employees with professional backgrounds from outside of education. We must also remember that a significant proportion of special schools are located in the independent sector.

3. The Methodology

The review examines the content and recommendations of recent texts from literature focusing specifically on management and leadership issues in relation to special schools. The sources used included: theoretical contributions, empirical studies, policy documents and accounts written by or about practitioners. They are all British, although some reference is made to more general texts from North America and other English speaking countries in section 4 of this report.

In analysing any literature on leadership practice it is, in our view, essential to pay attention to the importance of context. Leadership takes different forms in different places, not least because of the way it reflects local history, conditions and, indeed, legislation. In carrying out the review, we have, therefore, tried to avoid the danger of assuming that findings and ideas can be combined and generalised. Rather, we treat each source individually, seeking to make clear something of the context from which it emerges. For us, the power of this process is that it enables comparisons and contrasts to be made, in ways that can be used by readers to reflect upon their own thinking and practice, not least by making the familiar unfamiliar.

With this in mind we have used as our guide a series of issues that, in our experience, represent important challenges currently being faced by special school leaders in England. These are to do with what forms of leadership practice can:

*   influence values, beliefs and norms within a school
*   foster practices that respond positively to pupil diversity through collaborative problem-solving
*   lead to the development of inclusive partnerships with mainstream schools
*   create purposeful links with local communities
*   lead to sustainable school improvement
*   create the conditions within which staff members will respond positively to change

3.1 Procedures

In carrying out the review the team consulted specialist library catalogues, bibliographical databases and various relevant online sources. The British Education Index and ERIC were also searched. In addition, use was made of certain other systematic literature reviews on aspects of educational management and leadership carried out by teams at the University of Manchester, such as the recent EPPI review on inclusion (Dyson, Howes and Roberts, 2002). A number of researchers in other universities who have an interest in the themes of the review were consulted and they were helpful in finalising the sources that were included.

The main focus was on sources that directly addressed leadership issues in British special schools. Given the rapid changes in the field it was decided to concentrate on publications that have appeared since 1997. However, reference was also made to earlier sources that seemed to be still of relevance. In addition, connections were made with more general literature on leadership and management in educational and other organisational contexts.

The survey of available literature in relation to the agenda of this review revealed that there is a paucity of recent and relevant sources. Furthermore, some publications proved to be so slight in their content that it was decided that they should be excluded. This is an important finding, the implications of which are addressed in section 5 of this report.

The review of each text was carried out by at least two members of staff at the University of Manchester and provides a brief summary of the content of the text, focusing specifically on key arguments, and some indication of possible implications. Some of the groundwork, such as the creation of preliminary lists of sources, had already been done as part of the existing Manchester research programme, including other relevant literature reviews currently being undertaken on behalf of EPPI and NCSL. The reviews and the discussion of themes were then subject to critique by a reference group made up of members of the Specialist Colleges Trust Special Schools Network. Through these various processes the review has involved a form of rigour that incorporates both researcher and practitioner requirements.

4. Reviews of Recent Literature

Allan, J. and S. Brown (2001) "Special Schools and Inclusion". *Educational Review*, **Vol. 53, No.2, pp.199-207**

Key Themes:

Ways in which the culture and practices of special schools have undergone reform:

- Accepting and adapting to new policy initiatives

- Improving links with mainstream schools

- Second-guessing critics: the 'dependency question'

- Projecting a positive image to parents and others

This paper examines the culture and practices of special schools from the perspective of headteachers and pupils. The authors explain that even where there was some apparent support for special schools, the lack of knowledge about them was problematic and one headteacher commented: "It's still seen as the quiet little backwater of no-hopers." The headteachers report on the impact of recent reforms within their schools, partly in response to policy initiatives such as the National Curriculum and devolved school management, and partly in an effort to secure their own future. The authors state that special schools:

> **"…have been forced to experience their own exclusionary medicine by those whose ultimate goal is to remove them from the education system but this appears not to be based on an understanding of their cultures and practices."**

The heads spoke positively of the new curriculum initiatives viewing them as a mechanism for inclusion and feeling a part of the real world. They also represented a door into mainstream for special school staff giving them a common language with which to communicate with mainstream colleagues. Curriculum development work associated with national programmes had helped special school headteachers to improve their relationships with mainstream colleagues and to surprise them with their competence.

The schools involved in the research have undergone a transformation towards inclusive cultures and practices, and in their capacity to respond to diversity. This has implications for leadership practice in special schools - as special heads seek to promote partnerships with mainstream schools and to ensure that such links are meaningful and continuous. It needs to be a two-way process.

Atfield, R and C. Williams (2003) "Leadership and Inclusion: A special schools perspective". *British Journal of Special Education*, Volume 30, Number 1, pp.28-33.

Key themes:

Issues facing special school headteachers:

- The skills and qualities needed for effective leadership in this sector
- The role of special schools in inclusion
- Future developments
- Emerging issues addressed inclusion, the contribution that special schools and their headteachers can make, networking and managing change in a special school context

School leaders were brought together at a NCSL seminar and were provided with the opportunity to learn from and with each other, to bring together research and best practice. The seminar focused on the contributions that leaders in special schools make to the development of inclusive practices. The dialogue between school leaders and academics focused on the issues and challenges facing practitioners.

The paper explains that the discussions focused on the idea of school culture as a real issue to be addressed for developing change and developing learning communities. In this respect, leadership is seen as the key factor. Teamwork, creation of a vision, accountability, influence and distributed leadership are all seen as important to successful change management and to the leadership needed to enable special schools to develop new roles. Developments in links between special and mainstream schools "occurred at the discretion of individual schools based upon inter-school relations and goodwill". There is now an increase in the number of special schools providing outreach services. It was argued that the concept of 'moving schools' (see Ainscow 1999) outlines how the agendas of inclusion and school improvement can be linked in order to develop provision.

The amount of reorganisation going on places special school heads in a different situation from that of their mainstream colleagues. Nevertheless, heads of special schools showed "high levels of personal commitment, hope and optimism". LEAs are taking the inclusion issue forward in a variety of ways and this invariably involves feelings of uncertainty for staff, pupils and parents. There also seems to be an absence of a clear context for planning since the future of special provision is so uncertain. Specialist provision in the future might take a variety of forms; for example: outreach services for mainstream classes, clusters of centres across wide geographical areas or centres of excellence providing in-house or out-of-house consultancy and advice.

DfES (2003) *Report of the Special Schools Working Group*. **DfES Publications**

Key themes:

- A vision for the future role of special schools and the process of change in terms of leadership, teaching and learning, funding and structures and the way schools work with health, social services and other agencies
- Implications for workforce remodelling
- Introduction of inclusion indicators and marks for special and mainstream schools and a new category of specialism
- Implications for LEAs in developing budgets, regional and sub-regional planning and the promotion of innovative forms of provision

For special schools the reform towards greater inclusion has led to uncertainty and a lack of clarity regarding their future role. Acknowledging this in her introduction to this recent report, Baroness Ashton Upholland confirms the government's strong commitment to the sector and the willingness to work in partnership with special schools to ensure a secure long term future. To this end she established a working group; their report maps out a future programme of change proposing that:

- special schools should increasingly cater for the growing population of children with severe and complex needs
- they should be outward-looking centres of expertise and work more collaboratively with mainstream schools
- the sector should go through a process of change in terms of leadership, teaching and learning, funding and structures and the way in which it works with health, social services and other agencies which provide support beyond the classroom

In proposing the way forward, strong leadership is cited as a key area for development but more incentives are required for experienced teachers to apply to become special school heads and

there needs to be a greater interchange between heads of mainstream and special schools. New heads need to be suitably equipped with the "necessary skills to address the learning needs of all pupils in their schools, to run the school effectively, and to engage in partnership and outreach activities".

The report recommends that the Headlamp Programme (now the Headteacher Induction Programme) should include an additional module that would equip heads with the skills to:

> **"a) effectively manage the inclusion of more children with special educational needs into mainstream ensuring that all have a range of inclusive experiences**
> **b) develop a greater partnership role for special and mainstream heads to facilitate movement between the sectors**
> **c) develop a consultancy role for special school headteachers."**

Teaching and learning is also a key area for development with specific reference made to the government's agenda of remodelling the workforce and unburdening the workload of teachers. Special schools can play a leading role in this and it will inevitably involve issues such as incentives for recruitment, implications for teacher training and, importantly, have implications for the roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants. Assessment is also an issue with the recommendation for wider and more consistent use of the P Levels.

This working group links many of the new and proposed initiatives to this reform towards greater inclusion, eg extending multi-agency working in relation to the Extended Schools Programme. Local education authorities too are seen as highly influential and they are encouraged to be at the heart of any new federations and clusters of schools and to engage in regional and sub-regional planning. There are significant financial implications and it is suggested that LEAs can take advantage of flexibilities in school budget shares to facilitate greater staff and pupil movement between special and mainstream schools.

Key themes:

• Leadership challenges arising from inspections

• Problems relating to target setting and progress monitoring

• Support for special schools following critical inspections

The research reported in this paper focuses on the relatively high proportion of special schools that fail their inspections. Special schools are four times more likely to be made subject to special measures than are mainstream schools (Ofsted, 1997). The DfEE commissioned the researchers to examine post-inspection improvement arrangements.

Possible reasons for the discrepancy between special and mainstream schools are their small size, their relative unfamiliarity with organisational development and the possibility that the goals of special schools may not have coincided with those of the inspection process. DfEE commissioned the research with a view to disseminating knowledge about how special schools subject to special measures (that is eight per cent of special schools inspected) had used post-inspection action planning as a basis for school self-improvement.

Main findings about schools' progress post-inspection centred around two main areas: target setting / monitoring and evaluation and getting access to support. The action plans of all 60 special schools which had been subject to special measures were examined before carrying out detailed case studies of a sample of 14 special schools.

It is noted that the key issues identified by Ofsted have to do with how the Ofsted report is translated into targets. Measurement is the key factor. In setting a target the aim is to define clearly what is being aimed for so as to measure success. Targets may be related to pupil outcomes, quality of teaching or other matters. Targets for pupil outcomes vary greatly from school to school because of the great variation in populations of students. Often key issues and targets do not relate directly to pupil outcomes. Key issues in inspection reports for special schools frequently relate to improvements in quality of teaching, especially where schools are reported by Ofsted to have major weaknesses. The study found that relating targets to matters like these can be difficult for special schools.

The strongest theme that emerged about action plan implementation concerned the importance of the quality of the support which schools receive post Ofsted. This is particularly so where staff have received a critical inspection. It was found that in these contexts, schools are likely to require several different kinds of advice and support. Where help was most effective, care had been taken to provide well-differentiated support. The paper outlines a series of recommendations in relation to working with LEA managers, specialist consultants and the role of mentor headteachers and finance/ accountant advisers.

Whilst this paper does not address leadership as a theme directly, it clearly illuminates many of the issues facing those who take on leadership roles. In particular, it throws light on key challenges following an inspection, especially in relation to appropriate target setting and finding the right supportive expertise.

HMIE (2003) *The Special Schools Report*. **The Stationery Office**

Key themes

- Special schools play a significant role in the education of pupils experiencing learning difficulties or who exhibit challenging behaviour.

- In a significant number of schools leadership could be improved.

This Standards and Quality Report draws evidence from 65 inspections undertaken during 1998 - 2002 and is the first to be published by HMIE. Although the report states that, "At its best the quality of education in special schools is excellent", the overall picture is mixed. Strengths include ethos, personal and social development and a high quality of pastoral care. Steady development is evident in devising and implementing individual education plans and the development of partnership with parents.

Areas for improvement for the majority of schools include ensuring pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum, especially at secondary level. Whilst pupil achievement is rated as good or better in 70 per cent of the schools inspected, teachers should set sufficiently challenging targets and tasks for pupils.

Key strengths identified include the range of varied teaching approaches used and the generally good level of pupil motivation in lessons. It is leadership provided by headteachers that is most often cited as a key strength. The report recommends that weaknesses in headteacher leadership be tackled (this relates to around 20 per cent of schools inspected).

Action for schools involves:
- ways of tackling weaknesses in teaching and learning
- assisting teachers' planning
- providing relevant information to parents
- improving inter-agency collaboration
- improving arrangements for staff review and development

Letts, T. (2002) "The Best of Both Worlds". *Special Children,* **November/ December, pp14-16**

Key themes:

- Future roles of special schools

- Co-location of special and mainstream schools

The article describes the process of establishing a new special education centre on a mainstream campus in Bristol. The population of pupils aged 11-19 with severe learning difficulties moved to a new purpose-built block attached to a local mainstream school. They are now two schools sharing one campus and working closely with each other to provide inclusive educational opportunities for students from both schools. This approach is similar to the co-location model of provision that is used in Western Australia.

The article does not focus directly on leadership and management themes but it does throw up some interesting questions for the future role of special schools and how such changes will affect the nature and practice of headteachers and those in positions of leadership.

Madison, A. (2002) "A Study of Curriculum Development in a New Special School". *British Journal of Special Education*, **March, Volume 29, No.1, pp.20-28**

Key themes:

- Using external demands to stimulate transformation

- Curriculum development as a change process

- Culture and leadership

The author of this paper, a headteacher, writes about the development of an outcomes-based curriculum for pupils in a new special school, the result of an amalgamation of three smaller special schools. Catering for approximately 262 pupils from two to 16, the continuum of special need within the school is said to be very broad. The author sets out the rationale for her work in the context of a need to promote shared approaches to teaching and learning at this newly formed school. The focus is on the process of change management through curriculum development within the new organisation over the first seven terms of its existence. The intention was to bring staff together through the development of a differentiated, outcome-based curriculum which was suitable for all pupils and which would ensure high quality teaching and learning throughout the school. The process of curriculum change was not smooth.

A new culture emerged as the school evolved, although the process of change was difficult to establish at the beginning. The author argues that re-engineering is not about small changes or improvements; it is about radically rethinking and changing what is currently offered. This process is necessary to bring about dramatic improvements and enhanced levels of performance. It is not a short process, since, "the process of change will almost certainly take a minimum of five years before any significant results are achieved".

The re-engineering processes enabled staff to take on new initiatives and accommodate them within the system through the application of previous learning or experiences. The author suggests that schools can become 'learning cultures' by constantly reviewing, constantly challenging, assessing and improving their performance. In this case, the curriculum developments in the school acted as a vehicle for the change process.

Mittler (2003) *Building Bridges Between Special and Mainstream Services*; **Enabling Education Network. http://www.eenet.org.uk**

Key Themes:

- Ways in which countries such as the UK and Japan, with well established systems of publicly funded special schools, can develop more inclusive practice by changing the role of the special school
- Working within the United Nations programmes on inclusion and disability

This paper was written by one of the most eminent figures in the special education field. Mittler argues that it is clear that the work of special schools is changing and there is considerable uncertainty in most countries about the future role of special schools. In the UK, the government is committed to retaining special schools as part of a broad spectrum of provision. The government is also in strong support of collaboration between special and mainstream schools. There is evidence that strong links already exist and the more successful link schemes reflect positive attitudes on the part of both sets of schools, "resulting in joint planning and clear thinking on the nature and aims of the links and whose needs were being served". It is also possible to consider registering all pupils with special educational needs on the roll of their neighbourhood mainstream school but also making provision in a special school. In this way special schools can develop their function as a resource centre, developing outreach work and using their experience in SEN to support inclusive practice. However, "special school staff may be competent in their own setting but may lack the tact, sensitivity and consultancy skills needed for working with colleagues. Training, supervision and support are essential".

In developing mechanisms for collaboration between special and mainstream schools, Mittler suggests consideration of school clusters, special classes and resourced mainstream schools. Resources here could include the UNESCO Open File on Inclusive Education (2001) which provides resources and materials to move towards inclusive education. Similarly, the Index for Inclusion (2000) enables all schools in the UK to carry out self-evaluation of progress and problems in developing inclusive practice.

Doubts remain about the ability of mainstream schools to meet the whole range of educational need in a neighbourhood but, as this paper concludes, inclusion is a long process, "a road to travel rather than a destination" and "the classroom of the ordinary school is the starting point and end point for such a journey".

There are implications from these international initiatives for countries such as the UK. Clear policies need to be worked out at central and local government levels and, above all, by special and mainstream schools.

Nightingale, J. (2003) "A Special Relationship", *LDR*
February 2003, pp.29-33

Key themes

- In response to the government's policy towards inclusion, many special schools have struck up relationships with mainstream schools; there have been benefits from the collaborative approaches and partnerships that have emerged.

- Mainstream heads can learn much from their special school colleagues. Indeed, as inclusion becomes standard, it makes special schools powerful players.

This feature article draws attention to the outcomes of NCSL's recent seminar for special school leaders, highlighting some of the leadership "characteristics and ways of working in special schools, which leaders in mainstream are now looking to embrace". The innovative approaches of two special schools are outlined. All pupils at Ash Field School in Leicestershire have contact with mainstream and 10 per cent are dual registered. The school carries out ICT assessments on 450 mainstream pupils aged four to 19 in four different LEAs and provides INSET in ICT and special educational needs for mainstream colleagues. Ash Field also works with three universities. At Crosshill School, Blackburn, partnership working with mainstream provides opportunity for pupils to take a range of GCSEs and GNVQs. Pupils from mainstream also attend Crosshill and staff are developing working in teams in each others schools.

The paper argues that there are benefits to be gained through working collaboratively and developing partnerships, eg more effective use of teaching assistants, developing pupil skills in signing, special school staff developing INSET opportunities for mainstream colleagues. Links between schools can, it is argued, have a positive impact on behaviour and attendance.

In certain aspects, special schools are ahead of the mainstream field in implementing the transformation agenda. In mainstream education, government policy has meant that time and resources are focused on specific aspects of the curriculum, such as literacy and numeracy. However in special schools, with the absence of a formula for success or an agreed set of approaches for bringing about improvement, the focus has shifted to the needs of the individual learner. For leaders this means creative use of the curriculum, greater awareness of individual priorities and being willing to rework the way the school operates.

Ofsted; (2003) *Standards and Quality in Education. The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2001/02 - Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units.* **The Stationery Office**

Key themes:

- Standards continue to rise in most special schools which are meeting a wider variety of types of special educational need; this reflects positively on the responsiveness and expertise of staff.

- Most special schools are well managed, but the role of subject co-ordinators is the most common aspect for improvement.

- Only half the special schools inspected have set school improvement targets, but for those who have, strong evidence of the value of this is emerging.

- Leadership and management, and quality of teaching, were found to be unsatisfactory in a third of independent special schools, and in over a third there were significant weaknesses in the curriculum.

In the section of the Ofsted Annual Report for Schools 2001/02 in reference to special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs), there are indications of significant advancements. The 214 special schools (out of 1,300 providing for about 90,000 pupils) inspected cater for a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities and account for LEA maintained, non-maintained and approved independent special schools. Inspections judged that seven in 10 had improved significantly since their last inspection. In 25 per cent of the schools leadership and management have improved significantly, only one in 10 has not improved enough or has deteriorated. In over two-thirds the quality of teaching has improved and in over half, pupils' attitudes to school have improved. "Behaviour is good in the majority of schools."

In relation to leadership and management by headteachers and key staff it is significant that 52 per cent are deemed as excellent/very good. The report cites that "the characteristics of excellent management of special schools often include:

- the implementation and monitoring of whole-school approaches to functions such as assessment and the recording of progress

- the management of change, particularly the implementation of inclusion policies that bring a new and extended role for the school

- promoting the school's successful adjustment to dealing with a wider range of special needs."

For a significant number of EBD schools there is particular mention of the need to develop provision for literacy and numeracy along with a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum.

Powers, S., S. Rayner and H. Gunter (2001) "Leadership in Inclusive Education: A professional development agenda for special education". *British Journal of Special Education*, **September, Volume 28, No.3, pp.108-112**

Key themes:

• The challenges facing special school leaders

• The impact of performance management arrangements

• Implications for professional development programmes

The authors of this paper argue that there is a gap in the current provision in the UK in the area of professional development for those in leadership roles in special education. A questionnaire survey was conducted of the perceived professional development needs of heads, deputies and senior staff working in specialist contexts. The results reveal a significant concern with organisationally focused issues, support for school and LEA-based courses and higher education provision. There was also a perceived lack of government-funded training addressing the needs of those in leadership roles in special education.

Performance management through target setting, data auditing and evidencing is now having a dramatic effect on how educational professionals define and undertake their work in special schools. The consequences of this for managing special educational provision have been neglected and under-researched.

The paper suggests that what is being presented in the TTA National Standards as effective leadership and management in effective schools that have an improvement agenda, is based on a top-down model in which the leader is visionary and everyone else follows. It goes on to argue that this model is problematic for special education, where the emphasis has been on bottom-up approaches focusing on meeting the needs of individual children.

Rayner, S., H. Gunter and S. Powers (2002) "Professional Development Needs for Leaders in Special Education". *Journal of In-service Education*, **Volume 28, Number 1, pp.79-93**

Key themes:

• Agendas that need to be addressed in developing skills of special education leaders

• The lack of professional opportunities for leaders in special education

Issues around leadership and management are central to the concerns of many professionals in special education. This article reports on a small-scale survey of the professional development experiences and perceived needs of teachers with leadership responsibility who work in special education in the midlands, both in special and mainstream schools.

It is argued that there is a perceived need for continuing professional development in leadership and management amongst leaders in special education. Local short-term training and longer-term professional development through postgraduate study is enabling many practitioners to engage with their own learning needs, but targeted and government-funded training is either not attracting them or is not targeted at them.

What headteachers and other leaders and managers should know, and what is worth knowing in order to do the job, are being defined and described around generic skills or capabilities that are concerned with enabling educational performance to be measured and evidenced. Leadership in schools is presented as being directly linked to school improvement and this is at odds with the emphasis on the range of services (eg in LEAs, special units and social services) used by schools in supporting children's needs by a range of professional and interested parties. This appears to be negatively reinforcing traditional segregation and isolation in special education.

The research intention flowed from the fact that too few dedicated professional development opportunities existed for special educators in the area of leadership and management. A pilot survey was organised in the form of a questionnaire, together with an evaluation form designed to elicit perspectives from respondents. A large number of the headteachers who replied, including four heads of support services, reported having undertaken no professional development in leadership and management. From the study there is evidently a need for professional development across special schools, services and units. Perceived professional development concerns are largely focused around the current centralised policy demands on schools and educational professionals.

Local short-term training and longer-term professional development through postgraduate study is enabling many special educational needs professionals to engage with their own learning needs, but targeted and government-funded training for a particular role, eg the preparation and support of headteachers, is either not attracting them or is not targeted at them.

The rapid pace of change in education in recent years, including the massive increase in managerial accountability, has resulted in most schools and teachers now being in what the authors call "adaption and compliance mode". To what extent has this determined the agenda of CPD identified here?

The need to cope with change and educational restructuring is leading to demands for professional development that is more about how to do it and how to do it without undermining people, rather than what it might mean personally for the people who are charged with leading and implementing it.

Rayner, S. and P. Ribbins (1999) *Headteachers and Leadership in Special Education*. Cassell

Key Themes:

- There are a number of features associated with leadership in special schools that distinguish it from the more generic issues about leadership and management.

- The diversity in terms of the nature of the provision within the umbrella of 'special schools' means that the context for leadership can differ sharply.

- Recent policy changes have resulted in greater diversity in terms of organisation and provision, for example the development of outreach services from special schools to mainstream; the clustering of schools around a special school.

- Implications for professional development activities

This is one of a very few books that focus specifically on management issues in special schools. It takes the form of a collection of tales of headteachers. The key intention was to "enable heads to speak for themselves". These are a series of individual portraits based upon accounts which individual headteachers give of their professional lives. The authors draw upon these tales in the final chapter: "Leadership and special education - towards a reframed zeitgeist".

Recent policy changes have resulted in a provision of a parallel continuum of resources. Special educational needs provision is now more complex and involves more than just special schools. Initiatives involving the establishment of outreach to support pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools, the creation of support services and the clustering of schools around a special school represent only some of the many developments which have added complexity and diversity to special educational needs provision.

From the leadership stories it is evident that there are several features associated with leadership in special schools. These are:

- a high value placed on relationships and personal growth

- a high regard for curriculum process rather than subject content

- an indication of good levels of teaching competence in their professional career

- prior experience of mainstream education as a virtual prerequisite for effective management in special education

- a positive regard for education and its value for children otherwise identified as refusing school or less able to access academic learning

The funding of provision and its organisation to resource systems designed to support pupils with SEN is a recurring theme in the research.

A number of separate issues exist for management and leadership which, while perhaps not unique to special education, take on a particular shape or nature contrasting with that to be found in a mainstream school. The special nature of special education does, it is argued, distinguish it from what is sometimes described as normal or mainstream provision. A great variety of different disabilities, categories and perspectives exist under the umbrella of SEN provision. It is argued that here lies a contradiction: the consequence of such diversity, for those who would lead, is that special schools, or other SEN provision, can vary. The expectation that SEN provision is or should be a coherent and single entity is, it seems, often seriously over-emphasised.

Rose, R. (2002) "A New Role for Special Schools". *Special Children*, June/July, pp.14-15

Key themes:

- Changing roles of special schools in relation to the mainstream

- Factors which seem to influence successful partnership arrangements

In this short article it is argued that, whilst there are many examples of informal arrangements of co-operation between special and mainstream primary schools, evidence which demonstrates how this has worked, its effectiveness, and the conditions required to encourage successful collaboration is somewhat limited. Staffordshire LEA commissioned a team of researchers to look into those conditions perceived as necessary for the successful promotion of inclusion through special and mainstream partnership. From an initial survey, a number of trends emerged which were then used to form the basis of interview schedules that were used as the main method of gathering information.

The author suggests that the role of the special school in supporting inclusion may be critical over the next few years. Additional classroom support was a critical factor in enabling pupils who had transferred from special to mainstream. Where support for mainstream teachers had been provided by the special school, time was set aside to discuss the use of learning support and to avoid creating dependency. All of this has direct implications for those in leadership roles.

Thomas, G., W. Ching Yee and J. Lee (2000) "'Failing' Special Schools: Action planning and recovery from special measures assessments". *Research Papers in Education*, **15(1), pp.3-24**

Key themes:

- The experience of special schools that are placed in special measures

- Possible explanations for the high proportion of these schools

- Implications for support arrangements

Ofsted suggests that schools subject to special measures are characterised by high proportions of unsatisfactory teaching, pupils who make insufficient progress and low standards. Leadership is commonly weak; there may be poor relations among sections of the local community. Such schools are often characterised by poor behaviour and attendance. They are frequently failing to implement aspects of the National Curriculum and there is often concern over health and safety and pupils' welfare.

The DfEE commissioned the research reported in this paper in response to the high proportion of special schools receiving failing inspection reports. The intention was to identify the ways in which special schools subject to special measures had used post-inspection planning as a basis for school improvement and the extent to which they had made progress as a result of that planning.

The research used data on all the special schools in England which are, or had been, subject to special measures. At the time of the research this was 61 schools (of these eight had already been removed from special measures). Analysis of the plans is based on a wide range of documentation for nearly all the 61 schools and in addition 14 of the 61 were visited for in-depth analysis of the process of implementation. The proportion of special schools for pupils with EBD in the cohort (half the sample) was much higher than the proportion of similar schools nationally (17 per cent).

Special schools are four times more likely than mainstream schools to receive special measures inspection assessments. This research examined the ways in which these schools made progress out of special measures. Their progress was related to the conduct of certain planning-related activities that followed inspection. These included the degree to which the whole school community was involved in change, the degree to which responsibility for undertaking tasks was specified, the adequacy of monitoring proposed activity and the realism in scheduling change. Whether these activities happened depended in turn on the quality of leadership and on the nature of support from external advisers. Although generic inspection judgements have enabled change in most cases, better target advice about necessary change for special schools would certainly be helped by differentiation between inspection themes for special and mainstream schools.

Certain factors emerged from the research. These were as follows:

- The lack of special expertise and experience amongst the registered inspectorate presents a question of validity in the inspection process.

- There was a concern that the inspection process focuses heavily on the National Curriculum at the expense of the broader curriculum of the special school.

- Target setting as defined by the DfEE is generally misunderstood and monitoring and evaluation arrangements in action plans are typically unspecific. Evidence from the research showed that all the special schools had great difficulty with target setting using measurable criteria for evaluation.

- Poor support from an LEA may lead to an undirected action plan and to inconsistent monitoring and evaluation. The research showed that appropriate advice in the form of external consultants/ LEA was difficult to find.

A lack of differentiated support and the provision of a 'critical friend' who could act as a source of personal guidance to the headteacher were found to be contributing factors. Change within the senior management team was one of the most common consequences of special measures assessment. One of the clearest associations with progress was the ability to make key staff changes. Those special schools that had been successful in the implementation of the action plans had involved the staff, parents and pupils in decision-making. However, an overreaction to the special measures status without a clear rationale for action often resulted in too many advisers offering contradictory advice without clear role definition.

There were tensions in most of the schools for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties between a therapeutic mission and an educational one. Residential schools had special difficulty implementing a plan - care staff had different priorities from education staff. Such schools cater for children from a range of LEAs and this makes for administrative problems in terms of funding and ambiguities about where support is to be sought and who to involve.

The paper concludes that further work is needed to focus on the extent to which special and mainstream schools present essentially different environments to inspect. There are importantly peculiar features and issues that need to be addressed in special schools. Many of the staff related problems relate to the small, insular cultures of special schools. In such cultures, the tradition of highly idiosyncratic pedagogic and therapeutic methods present ample discord if staff are from different methodological backgrounds.

5. Themes and Issues

In this section we reflect on our reviews of the recent specialised literature on management and leadership in special schools in order to define themes and issues that are relevant to practitioners in the special education field. In so doing we also draw attention to other, more general sources on leadership that are worthy of attention. We remain focused on the important challenges currently being faced by special school leaders in England. In particular, we consider the need to develop forms of leadership practice that will enable special schools to provide high quality education within existing circumstances, whilst at the same time developing new roles in relation to the implementation of the national reform agenda.

5.1 The overall situation

As we have seen, there is surprisingly little specialised literature available. Furthermore, the sources that do exist are often slight in relation to the evidence they present and noticeably diverse in respect to the themes that are addressed. We conclude, therefore, that this is an important aspect of educational leadership and management that has received insufficient theoretical and empirical attention. When we consider the uncertainties and challenges that face the field, this is clearly a matter of considerable concern.

Arguably the most noteworthy text on management and leadership issues in special schools was a book edited by Tony Bowers back in 1984. It is significant that almost twenty years later many of the themes of that book once again emerge from our review of more recent publications. For example, various authors in the Bowers publication argued that the future of special schools depended upon the limitations of ordinary schools' ability to deal effectively with individual differences. Thus, their future development would need to be considered in close collaboration with those responsible for mainstream schools.

Similarly, much of the literature we have found in this review focuses on the development of the curriculum in the special school (eg Allan and Brown, 2001; Madison, 2002), another theme that is emphasised in the Bowers book. Some of the authors refer specifically to the tensions caused by the imposition of the National Curriculum and the fact that the type of curriculum is constrained by the characteristics of the pupil population. These tensions are further magnified by the national requirements for targets and assessment and monitoring arrangements, as part of the accountability agenda. Some of the research has shown that it is these tensions that cause schools greatest difficulties, resulting in a high proportion of special schools placed into special measures. The articles reviewed also show that for some in positions of leadership in special schools the way forward is viewed in terms of curriculum development. This would suggest a need for a focus on leadership for learning. This has implications, too, for the development of partnerships with mainstream schools (Rose, 2002).

Writing in the Bowers book in 1984, Ainscow argued that a concern with curriculum development had to be an essential feature of an effective special school and that it was the responsibility of the headteacher to establish a working atmosphere in which such developments could occur. It is ironic, then, that this would seem to be increasingly relevant in today's climate of performance management and measurable achievement, to which special schools must conform. In fact, it can be argued that if special schools are to develop inclusive partnerships with their mainstream counterparts then there needs to be a consideration of how curriculum development, and the leadership practice necessary to implement such developments, can be brought into effect within the context of the special school.

5.2 Using more general literature

It was clear from the review that the issue of inclusion is increasingly seen as a key challenge for leaders in special education. It is important to note that a similar concern permeates much of the more general literature on educational leadership. Given the paucity of the more specialised literature, it would be sensible for practitioners to make use of some of these wider sources, particularly those that point to ideas about leadership that can foster responses to pupil differences. For example, Leithwood et al (1999) suggest that in the future all schools will need to thrive on uncertainty, have a greater capacity for collective problem-solving and be able to respond to a wider range of pupils. With this in mind, Fullan (2001) describes five mutually reinforcing components necessary for effective leadership in times of change: moral purpose, understanding the change process, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing and coherence making.

Lambert et al (1995) argue for what they see as a constructivist view of leadership. This is defined as "the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct common meanings that lead toward a common purpose about schooling". They use this perspective to argue that leadership involves an interactive process entered into by both students and teachers. Consequently, there is a need for shared leadership, with the principal seen as a leader of leaders. Hierarchical structures have to be replaced by shared responsibility in a community that becomes characterised by agreed values and hopes, such that many of the control functions associated with school leadership become less important or even counter-productive.

Much of the literature on the role of leadership in relation to school improvement places emphasis on the importance of social relationships (Hopkins, Ainscow and West, 1994). Johnson and Johnson (1989), two key figures in the field of social psychology, argue that leaders may structure staff working relationships in one of three ways: competitively, individualistically, or co-operatively. Within a competitive structure, teachers work against each other to achieve a goal that only a few can attain; an individualistic structure exists when teachers work alone to accomplish goals that are unrelated to the goals of their colleagues; a co-operative structure exists when teachers co-ordinate their efforts to achieve joint goals. They go on to argue that to maximise the productivity of a school principals have to:

- challenge the status quo of traditional competitive and individualistic approaches to teaching
- inspire a clear mutual vision of what the school should and could be; empower staff through cooperative team work
- lead by example, using co-operative procedures and taking risks
- encourage staff members to persist and keep striving to improve their expertise.

Within this overall formulation, the authors place a strong emphasis on the need to build co-operative teams. This seems to be particularly important in special schools, where there is a need for partnerships between professional from different disciplines, including those from social services and health departments.

Team work is also vital in order that special schools can have the flexibility necessary to respond flexibly to the new opportunities that are evident and, indeed, to the uncertainties they face. For example, the long-term benefits of developing collaborative working were evident in one particular special school for pupils with physical disabilities and moderate learning difficulties (Fox, 2001). There the headteacher empowered the two professional groups of staff, health and education, to share their practice and to work in a new, collaborative way within a multidisciplinary culture. One of the key characteristics in this process was the way in which she modelled her vision to the staff. Staff developed greater flexibility in ways of working that enabled them to cope with changes beyond their control such as staff shortages and organisational restructuring. In this way her leadership may be described as transformational. Southworth states that "transformational leadership involves considerable social skills of advocacy, inter-group relations, team building without domination," (Southworth, 1999). This headteacher was committed to deep change within herself and in the organisation she led. In this way she 'walked ahead' as she modelled the development of collaborative working to her staff. This has echoes of Senge when he says,

> **"...we are coming to believe that leaders are those people who 'walk ahead', people who are genuinely committed to deep change in themselves and in their organisations. They lead through developing new skills, capabilities and understandings. And they come from many places within the organisation."**
>
> **(Senge, 1996:45)**

Arguably the most relevant theoretical and empirical source in relation to the future of special education, is provided by a North American study carried out by Riehl (2000), who develops "a comprehensive approach to school administration and diversity", focusing specifically on the work of school principals. It concludes that school leaders need to attend to three broad types of task: fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive practices within schools and building connections between schools and communities. It goes on to consider how these tasks can be accomplished, exploring how the concept of practice, especially discursive practice, can contribute to a fuller understanding of the work of school principals. This analysis leads the author to offer a more positive view of the potential for school principals to engage in inclusive, transformative developments. She concludes: "When wedded to a relentless commitment to equity, voice and social justice, administrators' efforts in the tasks of sensemaking, promoting inclusive cultures and practices in schools, and building positive relationships outside of the school may indeed foster a new form of practice" (page71).

Research by Spillane, Halverson & Diamond (2001) expands upon these issues. Their work examines the complexity of school leadership and provides a further theoretical framework for thinking about the literature reviewed in this report. Their study of "distributed leadership" challenges the notion that school leadership resides in any one individual. They point out that although tasks may be performed by a single person, the impact of his or her action on the organisation reflects a variety of socio-cultural features and demonstrates how "social context is an integral component, not just a container, for intelligent activity," (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, p 23). Their research highlights the importance of looking beyond headteachers and other formal leadership roles in understanding leadership practice in schools.

5.3 Leadership and culture

Running though the Bowers book referred to earlier, is an emphasis on collective decision-making and the importance of leaders encouraging staff participation. It is interesting that much of the more recent literature on inclusive education emphasises similar themes (eg Ainscow, 1999; Booth and Ainscow, 2002; Corbett, 2001; Kugelmass, 2001). Reflecting on this point, Ainscow (2002) considers the implications for those who have made their careers in the field of special education, particularly in respect to their roles in the development of inclusive practice in mainstream schools. He concludes that the field of special education has a particular tradition that is of importance. Recalling the 'best special education contexts', he notes that they always seem to involve a particular way of working. In essence this means the creation of a problem-solving culture within which those involved learn how to use one another's experiences and resources in order to invent better ways of overcoming barriers to learning

There is considerable evidence that norms of teaching are socially negotiated within the everyday context of schooling (eg Keddie, 1971; Rosenholtz, 1989; Talbert and McLaughlin, 1994). It seems, then, that what we might refer to as the culture of the workplace impacts upon how teachers see their work and, indeed, their pupils. However, the concept of culture is rather difficult to define. Schein (1992) suggests that it is about the deeper levels of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, operating unconsciously to define an organisation's view of itself and its environment. Culture manifests itself in norms that suggest to people what they should do and how. In a similar way Hargreaves (1995) argues that school cultures can be seen as having a reality-defining function, enabling those within an institution to make sense of themselves, their actions and their environment. A current reality-defining function of culture, he suggests, is often a problem-solving function inherited from the past. In this way today's cultural form created to solve an emergent problem often becomes tomorrow's taken-for-granted recipe for dealing with matters shorn of their novelty. Hargreaves concludes that by examining the reality-defining aspects of a culture it should be possible to gain an understanding of the routines the organisation has developed in response to the tasks it faces.

Research suggests that when schools are successful in moving their practice forward this tends to have a more general impact upon how teachers perceive themselves and their work (Ainscow, 1999). In this way the school begins to take on some of the features of what Senge (1989) calls a learning organisation, ie "an organisation that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future" (p. 14). Or, to borrow a useful phrase from Rosenholtz (1989), it becomes 'a moving school', one that is continually seeking to develop and refine its responses to the challenges it meets.

It seems possible that as schools move in such directions the cultural changes that occur can also impact upon the ways in which teachers perceive pupils in their classes whose progress is a matter of concern. What may happen is that as the overall climate in a school improves, such children are gradually seen in a more positive light. Rather than simply presenting problems that have to be overcome or, possibly, referred elsewhere for separate attention, such pupils may be perceived as providing feedback on existing classroom arrangements. Indeed they may be seen as sources of understanding as to how these arrangements might be improved in ways that would be of benefit to all pupils. If this is the case, the children referred to as having special needs can be seen as representing 'hidden voices' that can inform and guide improvement activities in the future. In this sense, as Susan Hart (1992) has suggested, special needs are special in that they provide insights into possibilities for development that might otherwise pass unnoticed.

It is important to recognise, of course, that the cultural changes necessary to achieve schools that are able to hear and respond to the 'hidden voices' is in many cases a profound one. Traditional school cultures, supported by rigid organisational arrangements, teacher isolation and high levels of specialisms amongst staff who are geared to predetermined tasks, are often in trouble when faced with unexpected circumstances. On the other hand, the presence of children who are not suited to the existing 'menu' of the school provides some encouragement to explore a more collegiate culture within which teachers are supported in experimenting with new teaching responses. In this way problem-solving activities may gradually become the reality-defining, taken-for-granted functions that are the culture of the inclusive school, ie a school that is attempting to reach out to all pupils in the community.

In essence, then, it can be argued that those in leadership roles in special schools should seek to develop organisational cultures that encourage experimentation and collective problem-solving in response to the challenge of pupil diversity. Such cultures are necessary in order that more effective ways of responding to the increasingly challenging populations within the special schools. It may also be that they are also the most important gift that the special education community can offer to the movement towards more inclusive forms of education.

6. Looking to the Future: Some implications and recommendations

It is clear from this review that leaders in English special schools face many of the same challenges and pressures faced by their colleagues in mainstream schools. At the same time, they have the added problems created by specific changes in the nature of the populations they serve and the uncertainties that arise from the so-called inclusion agenda.

We have argued that together these factors present leaders with a particularly sharp version of the maintenance-development dilemma. In other words, they have to find ways of working with their colleagues in order to ensure quality within current constraints, whilst, at the same time, encouraging forms of experimentation that will lead to different and more relevant uses of the resources in the special education sector.

In this concluding section we consider some of the implications of this review in order to suggest actions that need to be taken in order to move thinking and practice forward in the field. With this in mind we draw on the experiences and views of some of the special school leaders who are part of the Specialist College Trust Network.

6.1 Moving practice forward

Around the country there is increasing evidence of special schools that are involved in experimental initiatives that are focused the development of new roles (DfES, 2003). In these contexts it is particularly encouraging to see the way in which some special school headteachers are taking the lead in exploring new relationships with mainstream schools. A number of contextual factors are helping to facilitate these efforts. It has helped, for example, that recent Government policies, such as Excellence in Cities, Education Action Zones and the Leadership Incentive Grant, are seeking to encourage partnerships between schools more generally. Too often, however, special schools are excluded from these developments, thus reinforcing a sense of isolation. This also means that opportunities for sharing expertise are missed.

Looking at some of the current initiatives that are going on, it is possible to discern three main types of activity. These are as follows:

1. The development of what might be described as enclaves within mainstreams schools so that special school pupils can experience the mainstream curriculum

Talking about this approach, the headteacher of one special school commented that some of the mainstream schools with which they have tried to work 'are not particularly inclusive in style'. In one secondary school, for example, a group of students and staff from the special school had use of two rooms on the periphery of the building, giving a feeling of being marginalized. There was talk that this arrangement lacked a sense of shared ownership. There have also been some issues regarding the timing of the school day, in that the secondary school with which they are most closely involved starts well before the special school pupils arrived in the morning. Consequently, the pupils that spend the week in the mainstream context miss out on the opportunity to join form tutor periods. These events are, of course, significant moments in relation to the social life of the school.

2. Strategies to provide direct support to individual pupils in the mainstream who are seen as being vulnerable to exclusion or referral for possible transfer to special provision

Staff who become involved in such mainstream support activities usually carry out a preliminary visit in order to explore what might be the most appropriate strategy to use. There are, however, potential dangers in this approach.

For example, one special school headteacher commented:

> **"We never allow it to become a system for collecting pupils. Mainstream schools have always done this. We say, this is your problem and we will help!"**

There is also the danger that providing intensive support to individual pupils may lead to a sense of dependence that might obstruct progress towards the capacity building that is necessary in order to improve support for learners within the mainstream.

3. The development of new roles for the special school in strengthening inclusive practices more generally within the mainstream.

Currently many LEAs are developing stronger strategies for school-to-school collaboration, through the development of various types of clusters and federations. Unfortunately, as we have noted, in some LEAs the special schools are excluded from these important developments. In other LEAs the intention is that each cluster of schools will involve a new type of special school that will act as the inclusion support centre. Such initiatives are opening many new possibilities for special schools to contribute to the strengthening of inclusion strategies. Commenting on these possibilities, one special school headteacher noted:

> **"We can become the hub for a range of services, so they can't do without us."**

6.2 Dilemmas and challenges

Such initiatives throw further light on the dilemmas and challenges that face those in special education as they seek to explore new ways of working within the so-called inclusion agenda. For example, many special schools have got outstanding facilities and resources, not least in terms of technology. Given this evident strength, why should parents see the mainstream as a positive option? At the same time, in order to ensure the continuation of their current financial arrangements, special schools need to maintain their pupil numbers. So, what incentive is there to put more efforts in strengthening mainstream provision? Additionally, is it sensible to invest staff time in supporting individual pupils within mainstream schools if this reduces the quality of provision made for those within the special school context?

Heads of special schools involved in various types of inclusion related initiatives refer specifically to staffing issues that have to be addressed. From a management perspective, for example, a key strategic issue relates to the need to arrange staff time so that they can go out of school. In some schools it is one teacher who mainly does the mainstream link work. Other schools have decided that it is better to involve many staff, including teaching assistants, in these activities.

Those in special schools point to wider contextual factors that can act as barriers to the further development of their roles. In particular, it is noted that the government's standards agenda is tending to leave mainstream schools with less space, time and resources in order to experiment with collaborative arrangements. It is evident, too, that confusion about the purposes of inclusion can act as a barrier to further development, leading some in the special school sector to argue that greater progress would be possible if there was a clearer lead from government. At present, it is argued, it does seem that much depends on the actions of individuals in the field.

6.3 Fostering change

These, then, are some of the dilemmas and challenges facing special schools as they explore new ways of working. They suggest that there is an urgent need to find better ways of preparing and supporting those who take on leadership and management roles within the sector. Interestingly, the recently published report of the Special Schools Working Group comes to much the same conclusion (DfES, 2003). All of this implies also a requirement to develop a much more extensive and richer resource of publications that can be used to inform professional development in the field. At the same time, we would underline the relevance of the wider literature on management and leadership.

We conclude, then, by suggesting areas of further research that are needed in order to formulate effective preparation and support strategies. Specifically, we need detailed studies related to the following questions:

- What are the ways in which special schools are successfully contributing to the development of inclusive policies and practices?

- What forms of leadership practice are involved in such initiatives?

- How can leaders be prepared and supported in developing their work in these contexts?

Whilst there is clearly a need for much more systematic empirical work in relation to these questions, there is also room for collaborative action learning activities that involve practitioners themselves. Sadly, the many interesting initiatives that are currently going on in different parts of the country remain largely undocumented. It seems, then, that the time is ripe for research that builds on the interesting initiatives that are emerging in this field.

Acknowledgements

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