

S U M M E R 2 0 0 3

Special Leadership?

What are the implications for the leadership of special schools of potential changes to the special school system?

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Introduction

“The only way to predict the future is to invent it.” (Alan Kay quoted in Dryden and Vos, 1998)

The focus of my research was to identify what are the possible implications for the leadership of special schools of potential changes to the special school system.

This was important to me for a number of reasons:

- I have never been the sort of person to sit back and wait for things to happen to me. I believe in having as strong an influence as possible on my future.
- There was discussion within the LEA about rebuilding the school where I am headteacher, and I was not convinced that just rebuilding it with more space but on exactly the same model was the right thing to do.
- I am convinced that there needs to be significant transformation across the whole education system to include new thinking about inclusion.
- I have a strong personal interest in the fields of ICT and leadership during change.

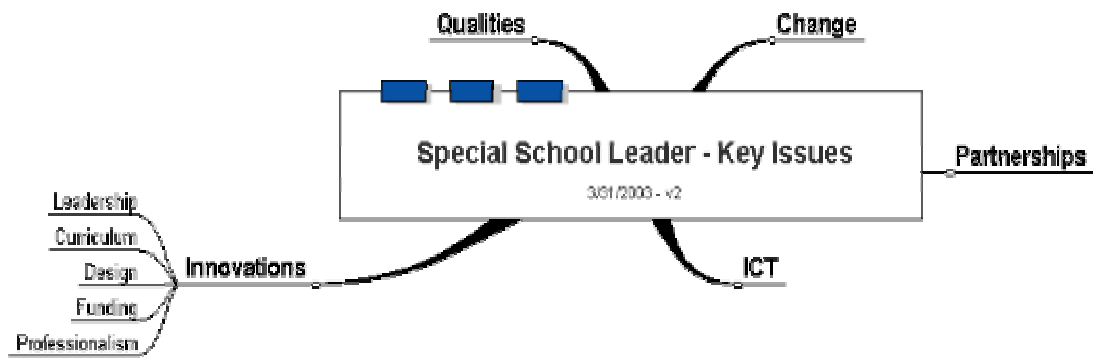
I believe this topic will be important for everyone involved in special education. I believe those of us working in special education have a responsibility not to sit back and wait for the inclusion agenda, or other changes, to impact on us but to be at the forefront of the changes:

There are three categories of people: the ones that make things happen; the ones that watch things happen and the ones that wonder what the hell is happening. (Prashnig, 1998)

The resulting report has been written following a range of enquiry activities:

- wide ranging reading
- discussion with two regional focus groups
- interviews with headteachers of seven special schools in England
- email conversations with three acknowledged academic experts
- an interview with a representative of Education Leeds
- a study visit to Australia, including visits to five special schools
- discussion with other NCSL research associates and attendance at Leading Edge seminars

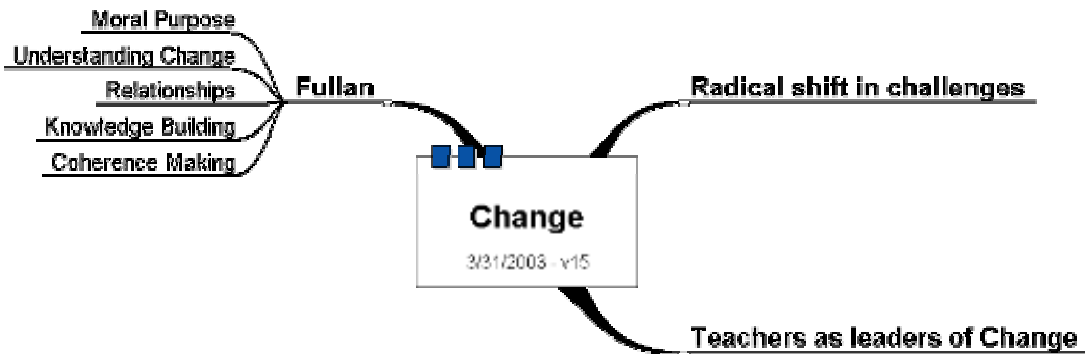
As a result of undertaking the research I suggest that there are a number of key areas which the special school leader needs to develop within the special school of the future. The following mind map identifies the key issues which the special school leader of the future will need to pay attention to:



I have attempted to combine my increased understanding of the major issues with examples of how these challenges are being met by practitioners. What follows is an exploration of both the theory and the practice.

Change

The first key issue is around change. The incredible amount of recent change within the education system has often been magnified in special schools by uncertainties over their future.



“The field of special education faces deep changes in relation to its thinking and practices.”
(Ainscow, 2000)

My view is that the radical shift in challenges for everyone in special education and, particularly for the leaders, means that special school leaders need to become ‘change leaders’ committed to innovative activities.

During such a time of sustained and substantial change, a key challenge for special school leaders is developing the capacity and concept of teachers as leaders of change. Successful management of change and an acknowledgement that change will become the norm is a central factor in creating the conditions that can foster the growth of more inclusive practices.

Special school leaders have to manage ever shifting challenges and change and keep positive about their ability to cope with this both personally and within their schools. A key element of doing this is to develop all staff as leaders of change.

So how are special school leaders facing this challenge?

Blackfriars School

The headteacher, Clive Lilley, is developing Blackfriars School as a ‘key learning centre’. He has produced a booklet which identifies clearly to staff, parents and professionals what this means in practice. Examples relevant to this section are as follows:

- extend the knowledge and understanding of Blackfriars staff in inclusion and continue their professional development in this field through the DRIP (Developing a Resource for Inclusive Practice) project
- provide a specialist outreach and support role to physically/medically impaired pupils in mainstream schools
- to work to include all pupils for whom a place in mainstream is possible

Northcott School

Headteacher Mr M Johnson has organised an inclusion project with the aim of moving pupils into mainstream provision. The project involves:

- primary links with mainstream schools
- secondary pupils undertaking Duke of Edinburgh Awards with secondary schools

Mary Elliot School

Headteacher Mrs E Jordan is currently providing:

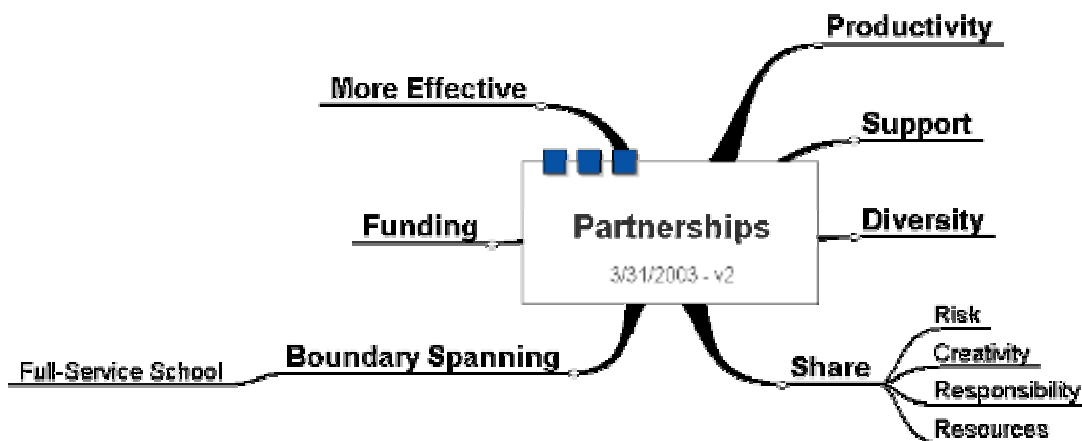
- staff training – with the intention that all staff feel comfortable in offering outreach or working in mainstream schools
- work shadowing – two-way with mainstream colleagues

Essex LEA

Oliver Caviglioli, head of a severe learning disability (SLD) school, is on a part-time secondment working for the LEA. He is developing the idea of 'pathfinder' schools to be established to try out the kind of ideas identified later in the design innovation section (see page 13).

Partnerships

Partnership development is the second key area. I suggest that the leader of the twenty-first century special school needs to demand increased partnership working from their own school, other schools and professionals. This is key in improving our ability to successfully fulfil our primary purpose. One part of partnership arrangements might be a focused attempt at using school facilities for training and community after-school use.



Partnership development is so important because it:

- offers support and diversity – through strategic partnerships there is a greater opportunity to offer support and diversity in meeting the needs of pupils with special needs
- attracts more, and different, funding – there are increased opportunities to access a wider range of additional funding
- improves service delivery – better educational opportunities will be on offer with a wider range of partnerships established
- increases productivity potential – successful partnerships are more likely to be able to achieve their designated vision and aims because of the additional capacity created by the partnership
- allows creativity, risk, responsibility and resources to be shared – interdependency towards shared goals will become established

‘Boundary spanning’

It is increasingly important also that special school leaders look towards ‘boundary spanning’. By this I mean the ability to work across normal boundaries, especially between education, health, social services and the community. To successfully do this the leader of a special school needs to understand the other sectors limitations and constraints, whilst establishing positive relationships for all involved.

As we enter the 21st century, it is more important than ever to provide a comprehensive and integrated educational, mental health, medical and social interventions. Full-service

schools represent a convenient way for students and their families to access these services. (Swerdlik, Reeder and Bucy, 1999)

The full service school concept has been embraced by a number of schools in the USA, and it seems to have particular relevance for special schools. The majority of the pupils within special schools have involvement with either social services or health, and in many cases both. Whilst the concept of the full service school, jointly funded by education, health and the community, social services, seems a distant dream to many leaders in special schools, boundary spanning is more easily attainable, and being developed currently in various contexts. Many special school leaders have already established good links with the health authorities and social services. Most effective special schools already have a close partnership with multi-disciplinary teams which includes health and social services professionals. The boundary spanning leader will be successful if they can establish a model based on interdependence, collaboration and enlightened self-interest.

The full service school takes boundary spanning a step further by providing a co-ordinated package to the 'client', the pupil and their parents. This involves having all associated professionals working in a holistic way, in partnership, on the same site.

So how are special school leaders facing this challenge?

Blackfriars School

- Offers a pre-school scheme for special needs pupils with the aim of integrating these pupils into local mainstream provision by statutory school age. It is called BEARS (Blackfriars Education and Access Resource Scheme)
- Works in collaboration with local further education colleges to develop and extend the school's 16–19 work as an inclusive FE provider with funding from the Learning and Skills Council
- Extends the home/school partnership to include parents and pupils with special needs in mainstream schools
- Provides a linked relationship with named schools and colleges to provide pupils with mainstream experience and social inclusion
- Provides professional development support for teachers and teacher assistants in mainstream schools to increase their capacity to support inclusion

Severndale School

- Provides outreach support
- Established a teacher training base – setting up management modules in partnership with HE

Crosshills Technology College

- School target of ensuring that every pupil spends some time in mainstream
- Inclusion project with a 0.7fte inclusion co-ordinator and a full-time teaching assistant
- Team teaching with a mainstream school
- Plan to move mainstream teachers into the special school and vice versa

Leeds LEA

- Partnership schools – group of pupils go with teachers, teacher assistants and resources into mainstream schools
- Shared planning time between special school and mainstream teachers of a minimum of half a day per half term
- Aim of 50 per cent of SEN pupils based in partnership schools with the remaining 50 per cent having some inclusion opportunities
- Discussions with the health authority to develop a health audit for pupils in special schools

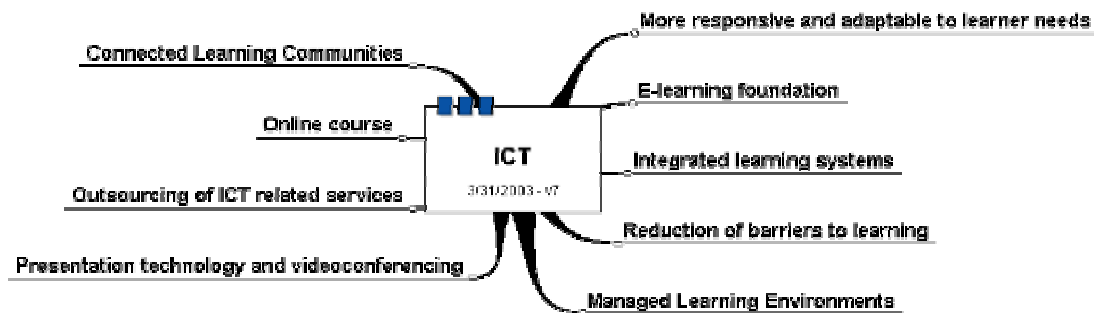
Essex LEA

- Developing a new model special school

Addington School

- Outreach support role developed through:
 - telephone and email helpline
 - teacher and teacher assistant support visits to mainstream schools and also into Addington
 - support teachers involved in delivering LEA training

ICT



It is the age of creative technological change. How do we as leaders develop our staff to embrace ICT changes? How do we ensure that ICT has a positive impact on the education of pupils with special needs?

As the technologies evolve to provide increased functionality and greater portability, and software applications become more intelligent and responsive to the user, these developments will provide exciting opportunities for pupils to personalise their access to digital learning resources in and out of school. This is likely to become increasingly important for pupils with special needs or medical conditions that may prevent them from attending regular classes.

The further development of ICT will lead to a reduction of barriers to learning and an increase in opportunities for those with special needs to participate fully through such technological advancements as voice-activated software and touch sensitive screen technologies. This will also be enhanced through the further development of individual set-ups for increased computer access, through switches and rollerballs, etc. There will also be increased communication opportunities through the continued development of both hi-tech and low-tech communication aids appropriate to the needs of the individual.

The development of **managed learning environments** (MLEs) that enable the provision of personalised feedback and target setting has already started. The next phase of this development will ensure that the MLE is appropriate and accessible to all pupils with special needs. The special school of the future is likely to work in partnership with providers, to develop the structure of MLEs so that they can meet the individual needs of the pupil.

There will be increased use of **presentation technologies** which, when used effectively, can overcome inhibitions and disabilities that might otherwise hinder personal development. One example of how this can be successfully demonstrated is by developing presentational skills through the use of technologies such as interactive whiteboards.

The use of **videoconferencing** is being used to significant effect in a small number of special schools. Given the large geographical distances between many special schools, there is potential in this technology for networking schools and sharing professional training and development opportunities.

A number of schools have developed the concept of an **e-learning foundation** to ensure equality of opportunity with regards to technological access. The implications of this for special schools are potentially greater than in mainstream schools as the need for highly individualised, and therefore high cost, ICT equipment for pupils with special needs. All of this implies the establishment of e-learning foundations, or alternative funding streams, to ensure access at home and at school.

The **outsourcing of ICT related services** is a possible area of revenue raising which most special schools have not yet targeted. Some possible opportunities which may be open to special schools are:

- marketing ICT training facilities to local businesses
- online delivery of teaching resources that reflect the schools strengths and/or specialisms
- access and ICT specialist teachers available for individual assessments, school professional development and advisory work

Schools are beginning to develop the provision of an intranet, which may be externally provided and maintained, that has all teacher information and materials available for easy access and helps reduce teacher workload. It might have schemes of work with linked internet or other relevant resources, available by broadband to ensure speed of access. Some schools will also develop **online** professional development **courses** which are available to their own staff, and to other schools, perhaps forming part of an accredited course.

The development of networks of schools, special with special, and special with mainstream, is already well developed in some areas. The concept of developing **connected learning communities** will further develop the role and purpose of networks. It will develop to schools participating in innovative curriculum initiatives and the development of advantageous partnerships with other schools and institutions. The purpose of these will be to provide online information, courses and contact for pupils and staff.

The effective use of ICT is well established in many of the schools I visited during my research and it is clear that this will be further developed by the special school leader of the future.

So how are special school leaders facing this challenge?

Blackfriars School

- Shares ICT expertise with the wider community via the school's role as a UK online centre
- Offers ICT assessments for special needs pupils in any school
- Offers advice to mainstream schools on the most appropriate hardware, peripherals, software for SEN pupils
- Offers access to a resource bank for a limited loan period
- Offers to mainstream schools pupil and staff support, for a fixed period of time, in the use of ICT
- Telephone, fax, email and web site information service

Severndale School

- Communication aids project assessment centre
- ICT manager who provides INSET courses

Crosshills Technology College

- New building which will include:
 - work bases with pods for laptops
 - interactive whiteboards in many classes
 - e-library being developed

- huge screen with ability to video conference
- media studies centre
- online centre

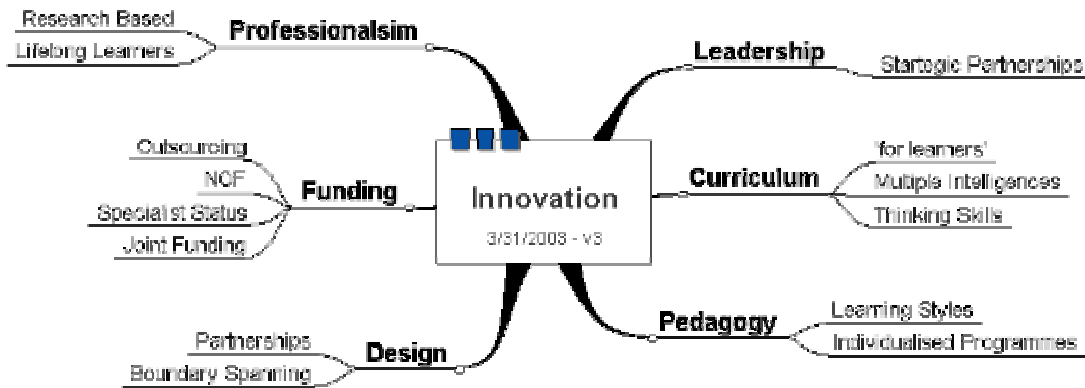
Addington School

- Laptops for all teachers
- Introduced the use of interactive whiteboards
- Access and ICT support teacher who has a coaching role within the school

Innovation

Drucker (1999) contends that the only leaders who will survive in a period when change is the norm will be the change leaders, for “to be a successful change leader an enterprise has to have a policy of systematic innovation”.

From undertaking this research, I believe that the most significant areas for innovation for the special school leader of the future are identified below.



Leadership

I suggest that the special school leader needs to be innovative in their development of strategic leadership at all levels through increasing the awareness and intellectual capacity within the organisation and through linking to and developing strategic partnerships.

So how are special school leaders facing this challenge?

Severndale School

- Fostered strategic partnerships with a number of SEN focused companies (Smirthwaite, Intergrex, Spacekraft)

Mary Elliot School

- Used futures thinking to develop a 3–5 year plan identifying five strategic intents with intention of developing capacity within the school

Holyport Manor School

- Developing the idea of staff acting as consultants in:
 - ICT
 - social communication disorders, including ASD
 - equal opportunities including complex challenging behaviour

Addington School

- School improvement group with two strands to which any member of staff can participate in time-specific projects: the teaching and learning forum and the research and development forum
- Data manager – developing Addington School’s autumn package for use in assessing value-added

Curriculum

Increasing knowledge and awareness of ‘multiple intelligences’ is impacting on curriculum development and innovation. Some special schools see this as an opportunity to develop a ‘curriculum for learning’ which recognises the existence of multiple intelligences and establishes learning to learn courses incorporating the teaching and making explicit of ‘thinking skills’.

Linked to the innovation in curriculum is increased knowledge of how learning occurs. Special schools could be at the forefront in developing highly individualised programmes of learning and teaching. These could be based on informed knowledge of the individuals learning styles alongside knowledge of how the brain learns. The use of technology is obviously a key factor in this area. It is interesting, but disappointing, to note that in discussions with special school leaders there was only one who focused on curriculum development discretely. For many of the others the main focus was on delivery of content, ie through ICT.

Design

Innovative school design – how the school is organised – can be a strong influence on curriculum and pedagogy.

So how are special school leaders facing this challenge?

Blackfriars School

- Provides day centre opportunities for profoundly disabled young people from 19–25
- Provides a specialist outreach and support role to physically/medically impaired pupils in mainstream schools

Education Leeds

- Leeds is organised into five ‘wedges’ to encourage co-working between schools and a real mix of schools. Each wedge has a specialist inclusive learning centre which provides:
 - a range of early years, primary, secondary and post-16 partnerships
 - no child pre or post-school on a segregated site
 - outreach

Essex LEA

- Proposing a model of a teaching hospital where coaching is the focus, with teacher assistant taking small groups

Perth, Western Australia

- Building new inclusive campuses co-located with mainstream schools, where possible. The current range of provision is as follows:

- education support school (own site and principal)
- education support centre (co-located with own principal)
- education support unit (co-located with team leader)

Ballajura Community College, Perth, Australia

- The inclusive learning team is a whole school team within Ballajura Community College and is a new innovation in the education of students with disabilities. It consists of a team leader, four education support teachers, 11 education assistants and two social trainers

Port Phillip Specialist School, Melbourne, Australia

- Implemented the 'fully serviced school' concept with a head of integrated service, a professor with expertise in all aspects of paramedical service delivery, and staff with extensive experience in the use of ICT to optimise outcomes for pupils with special needs. The integrated service model acknowledges the importance of classroom-based services and allows more students to receive services than using the traditional models of withdrawal and 1:1 delivery. There is an art centre with 0.6 art therapist and a dental clinic on site

Funding

The current strong trend to look for innovative and alternative methods of funding our schools rather than relying only on public spending is an issue for all schools but there are likely to be particular issues around the funding of specialist provision. Funding may well, for instance, come from a multi-agency budget through a formal agreement about how the agencies are going to meet the needs of the clients within certain defined geographical area.

So how are special school leaders facing this challenge?

Blackfriars School

- £200k gained from lottery funding to build a sports hall which is open on a Saturday for families
- New Opportunities Fund (NOF) grant has been acquired to pay for sports hall staff
- £70k per year is raised through the use of the school as a community resource
- ICT support manager who acts as technician / network development / training / web site earns income for the school through his support of mainstream schools
- UK online centre (4.00–8.00pm on a Thursday) earns income
- Pool opens 5.00–7.30pm, 5 nights a week for family swimming
- Day centre – 19–25 year olds funded from Social Services and private funds
- Proposed technology college status – joint bid

Crosshills Technology College

- Technology College Status – joint bid
- £1¼ Million build - funded from DfES through identifying community links and development opportunities
- Funding gained through NOF for: a Cyber-café, and a family learning project

Severndale School

- The ICT Manager offers income earning courses to mainstream colleagues

Professional development

Innovation and improvement will be easier if teachers work is properly informed by the most recent research, if the link between research and practice was strengthened with all teachers being seen as researchers, and if lifelong professional learning was seen as the norm. Special school leaders, like all school leaders, need to encourage and develop professionalism within their school and also to facilitate opportunities for mainstream colleagues to either undertake or benefit from the experiences and/or knowledge gained from working with pupils with special needs.

So how are special school leaders facing this challenge?

Blackfriars School

- Provides professional development support for teachers and teacher assistants to enable mainstream schools to increase their capacity to support inclusion
- Aims to research and share best practice in inclusion through a range of projects

Severndale School

- Has becoming a teacher training base, setting up management modules in partnership with HE, in response to a recognised need to develop middle and senior managers

Crosshills Technology College

- Teacher assistants are being trained to become lecturers in the new building and unqualified teachers. Three teaching assistants have trained to become counsellors

Addington School

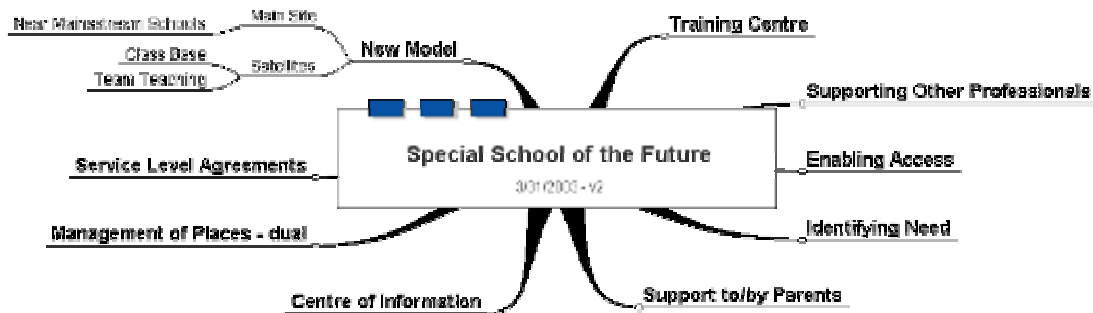
- Has become an accredited NVQ training and assessment centre in order to develop own staff competencies and also as a centre for mainstream training

Ballajura Community College

- Has established an Inclusive Learning Team to meet the needs of all pupils within their community

The special school of the future

So what additional roles do I think that the special schools of the future may need if they are to become outward looking centres of excellence?



I believe the roles will be many and varied depending on the particular circumstances that surround the special school. Below are some possible roles.

- **Training centres** – which provide training and assessment opportunities leading to recognised accreditation for:
 - support staff
 - teachers
- **Supporting other professionals** – who work with individuals with special needs to enable their delivery to become more effective through SEN awareness and/or training
- **Enabling greater access** – for pupils with special needs within mainstream settings by providing assessment and advice regarding the use of ICT etc
- **Identifying need** – the development of special schools as assessment centres where pupils may come to have needs assessed prior to attending the relevant educational establishment
- **Support to/by parents** – special schools have an extremely important role to play with parents in terms of developing greater support for them and also facilitating support groups of parents
- **Centre of information** – special schools are a significant resource in terms of specialist knowledge, something which might be recognised and developed
- **Management of dual places** – greater flexibility of placement will become a feature of many special schools and it needs to be recognised that this requires careful management to ensure that pupils receive the educational provision that best meets their needs
- **Service level agreements** – this is the more formal arrangements that will need to be put into place between the special school and mainstream partners and/or the LEA or other partners. This more formal agreement will be required to ensure that partnerships that are established are not lost when key players move on

From reading widely around the subject of the school of the future, as well as having the wonderful opportunity of visiting many special schools in the UK and Australia, the model that I believe is best placed to be the future of special schools within our current context is as follows.

- A **main site** which is located **near to mainstream sites** for all age groups that the special school is serving
- A number of **satellite** classes within mainstream schools which have a **separate class base** for the times when it is not appropriate or suitable for the pupils with special needs to be in the mainstream class. Also, opportunities for **team teaching** to take place either in the separate class base or within the mainstream class including pupils with special needs

I believe that there still needs to be a specialist base for a number of reasons:

- It is important for teachers to have a shared opportunity to develop and foster the necessary skills needed to become more inclusive
- There are a significant number of pupils who, through their particularly complex needs and/or challenging behaviour, still need the specialist setting
- It would be naïve not to recognise that finance is a factor. It is more cost effective to have the specialist resources needed by pupils within one setting
- Many of the roles identified earlier need a significant base
- Given the wide age range that many special schools cater for, the location near, possibly on the site, of a mainstream school, means that one site can cater for pupils from 2–19

The idea of having satellite classes, within the role of the special school, is to enable:

- a much greater flexibility of provision than is currently available in many areas
- the mixing of mainstream and special school staff and the sharing of good practice
- ongoing opportunities for professional development for mainstream and special school staff to build schools which are more inclusive and able to meet a wider range of pupil need successfully
- to 'protect' the mainstream school from the inclusion of more pupils with special needs skewing their placing in the league tables – another factor which it would be nice, but naïve, to ignore

The concept of partnership schools, where there are formal agreements between schools, seems to be the most secure way of building on personal relationships between leaders to ensure long-term commitment. Ideally, this would be developed alongside partnerships with health and social services to provide a holistic service provision to pupils with special needs.

The nearest models to the one described above, that I have seen, are in Oxfordshire and Perth, Australia.

Oxfordshire has a number of special schools that have adopted a 'co-location' approach to their development. Bishopswood in Sonning is totally co-located within the local primary and secondary schools. A number of other special schools have classes within mainstream schools which remain under the role of the special school.

In Western Australia there is a range of provision:

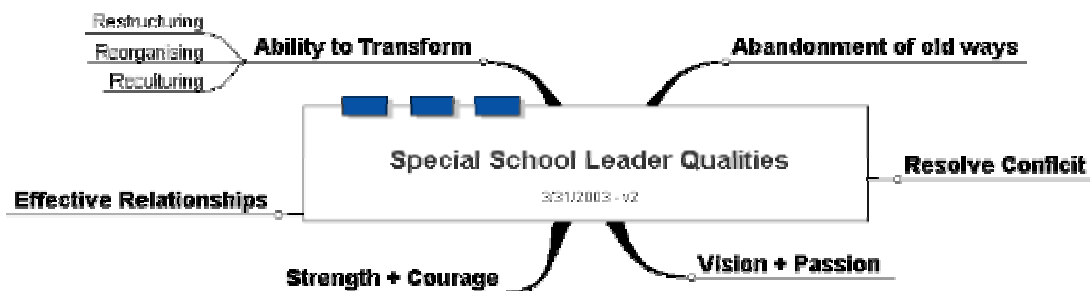
- education support schools – led by a principal and very similar to our separate special schools
- education support centres – again led by a principal but located within a mainstream school
- education support units – run by a team leader (head of department) within a mainstream school under the direction of the mainstream principal

My view is that the Western Australian model provides the greatest range of possibilities to ensure the placement is correct for the pupil with special needs. However, if I was to transplant this arrangement to the UK I would want all three units to be under the direction of the special school headteacher.

The special school leader of the future

“If schools are to be that different, there will be a radical shift in the challenges faced by their leaders and in the qualities needed for such a role.” (Bennett, 2002)

So what qualities does the special school leader of the future require?



It is clear that in order to redefine what role special education plays in an increasingly changing education system, and to allow for the innovation described earlier, there needs to be a systematic abandonment of old ways including:

- design – abandonment of previously held models
- boundary spanning – abandonment of ‘silo’ models and the belief that problems and solutions occur in one sector
- curriculum – abandonment of many curriculum areas in order to introduce and establish new areas
- pedagogy – abandonment of old styles in favour of the new knowledge of learning styles

Change often leads to conflict. The ability to resolve the conflict will be a key quality of the successful special school leader of the future. The ability to foster a shared vision is also a key component in being a successful leader. There is a need for the ability to think big and imagine the impossible. This requires passion, in addition to vision. Radical solutions must become the norm if current and future aspirations are to be met. The future will require a transformation of the culture of special education, a re-engineering of the management of learning, and a reorganisation of structures. I believe that dramatic organisational change can occur within a system if driven by passion and commitment.

Of course, the need to bring about the necessary changes and to challenge some of the long held beliefs will not meet with success if the leader does not display strong inner strength and courage. The importance of strategy will remain, but it is through relationships, and not plans, that it will be exercised.

It is the nature and quality of the leader’s relationships, both internal and external, that will be crucial to the success of the school.

Clarke and Kohn (2002) suggest that there are three essential elements to the transformational reform:

- restructuring
- reorganising, and
- reculturing

Restructuring includes looking again at learning and teaching practices and at the policies and procedures that govern the school. Reorganising includes looking at roles of leaders and staff within schools, the size and purpose of schools and how the school is measured. Reculturing is looking at the beliefs, values and assumptions that shape the behaviour of members of the school community.

Acknowledging diversity as the new reality means that differences should be recognised and celebrated. As I hope the examples in this study evidence, special schools in many circumstances are trying to take the inclusion process forward.

Methodology

The following research report has been written as a result of undertaking the following activities:

- reading a wide range of current and leading edge information on futures thinking, inclusion and the special school
- discussion with focus groups
 - ASH (Berkshire Association of Special School Heads) – three meetings with five headteachers (two hours each)
 - SCRIP (South Central Regional Inclusion Partnership) – two meetings with five LEA representatives/ headteachers (one hour each)
- interviews with headteachers of beacon special schools – a selection of those where leadership and management have been identified as a strength. (The interviews lasted for about 2 hours.)
 - Blackfriars School – Mr Clive Lilley
 - Mary Elliot School – Mrs E Jordan
 - Northcott School – Mr M Johnson
 - Severndale School – Chris Davies
- email conversations with following academic experts:
 - Mel Ainscow
 - Richard Byers
 - Brian Caldwell
- interviews with Mike Hatch (Crosshills Technology College, Blackburn) and Sylvia Robertshaw from Education Leeds, through recommendations from Mel Ainscow (approx two hours each)
- interviews with Paul Donkersloot and Oliver Caviglioli – headteachers of special schools, through personal contacts (approx two hours each)
- international study visit to Australia
 - Chris Forlin, Associate Professor at Edith Cowan University
 - Roger Smalies Principal of Castlereagh Special School, Perth
 - Lee Sutherland, Team Leader within Ballajura Community College, Perth
 - Bob Meenan, Principal of a Secondary Education Support Centre, Perth
 - Marlene Brown, Principal of Gladys Newton Special School, Perth
 - Bella Irlicht, Principal of Port Phillip Specialist School, Melbourne

And finally a significant benefit to my research associateship has been the opportunity to network with like-minded colleagues from a range of educational backgrounds through discussion with other research associates and attendance at NCSL Leading Edge seminars.

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