THE CHALLENGES
FACING LEADERS AND MANAGERS
IN THE INDEPENDENT SPECIAL SCHOOL SECTOR
~ a changing agenda

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges facing leaders and managers of independent special schools during the period during when inclusion of SEN students in mainstream schools has been government policy. The challenges investigated centre around ascertaining the key role of these schools at this time, the general challenges they have faced, and the implications for them in the years ahead. This has included research on how independent special schools respond to external demands and expectations and how they balance these with their own internal imperatives.

The research was carried out using an empirical phenomenological approach, with the objective of gathering qualitative data through the undertaking of interviews at both the micro and meso level of the organisational structures involved in SEN education. Participants were drawn from three approved independent special schools and three non-maintained special schools from the south east regions of England. Schools represented varying medical forms of SEN such as deafness, physical disabilities, severe learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties. Interviewees consisted of the headteacher, a deputy and classroom teacher from each school and the data was triangulated through documentation analysis using the participating schools' recent OFSTED and CSCI reports as well as interviews with three SEN Caseworkers employed by three different LEA regions.

The findings revealed that a key role for independent special schools is propping up a seemingly failing national strategy. Challenges arise from educational matters when internal visions of what good special education should mean are over-ridden by external ideologies. External accountability tends to suppress innovation and change within the school by making the change process unwieldy. External accountabilities are inclined to conflict when they encroach upon the professionalism of staff, yet complement internal interests by effecting motivation to question objectives more closely. Balancing internal/external accountabilities is no problem for these leaders and managers, because their internal imperatives will always come first. Implications for the years ahead will arise from the success or failure of the national inclusion strategy to accommodate a rising number of SEN students under limited state provision.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This research study originated from an interest in the extent to which external accountability impacts on independent special schools. The researcher had experience where due to a change in the Commission of Social Inspection (CSCI) standards, an inspection in 1996 had determined that the independent special school in which she worked must increase the square area allocated to each boarder, change its dormitories into single/double study bedrooms and not allow odd numbers of children to share bedrooms, although according to the regulations at the time five was an acceptable number. Subsequently, the headteacher, the researcher in her capacity as bursar along with their architect spent many hours exploring the feasibility of reconfiguring the first floor of the school's main house so as to meet changing inspection criteria. This was somewhat contrary to the experience of the boarding staff in the school who had found that dormitory provision in the first two years of the boarders' life was beneficial as it helped the most vulnerable children make friends more quickly. Finally, the headteacher had to admit that it was impossible to reconfigure the main house of the school so as to comply with the regulations, nor were funds available to build new provision. At the next inspection the school had to go with non-compliance and argue its case. After a couple of years the inspection criteria changed and the school returned to its usual high attainment record in its inspection report.

This is but one example where challenges arise from external accountability and which creates challenges to the leadership and management of schools to resolve. However, independent schools, by virtue of their name, imply that they operate independently from controls of the state. Yet, as the example already given shows they are not necessarily as independent as their status indicates. Indeed, external accountability is not the only source from which challenges arise for leaders and managers of schools as internal factors, including the moral and professional accountability of teachers may also be hard to reconcile and thus produce their own challenges. The chance to undertake 'insider' research in this interesting region of leadership and management was an opportunity to study an area where little research had taken place and very little is known. Hence, this study grew from its initial stages of reviewing the impact of

external accountability to exploring in its wider sense, the nature of challenges that arise for the leadership and management of independent special schools as perceived by those who work in them. Focus therefore centres upon the point where external objectives and moral and professional accountability meet and captures the arising tensions and dilemmas for the educational management and leadership of schools when internal visions are constrained by externally imposed ideologies. In particular this study has sought to discover how such sets of imperatives are balanced by their leaders and managers in order to address the needs of learners who attend them.

In addition this study also includes a review of the national inclusion strategy in order to gain understanding about the context to which independent special schools in the UK operate and perspectives on the role that is expected of them in view of the national strategies in place in 2006. If the national policy of inclusion was working as it should, there would be little need for special schools as children with special educational needs (SEN) would be accommodated within mainstream provision. In effect the national policy of inclusion served to take away the traditional educational market niche of special schools. Thus, in order to gain comprehensive understanding about the challenges of leading and managing independent special schools, understanding is also helpful regarding the context in which they operate, so as to wholly appreciate the full picture about the leadership and management issues of special schools that exist in the independent sector. In addition, this study also features an examination of the extent and ways in which issues of accountability, both external and ones from internal sources to the organisation are impacting upon school communities. Of specific note are the ways in which external accountability is presenting challenges and having influence upon the decision making, curriculum and pedagogy of independent special schools. Furthermore, looking forward from 2006 this study has attempted to obtain an insight into the implications for independent special schools in the years ahead.

Local Education Authorities (LEAs) as implementers of government policy ultimately shoulder responsibility for the placing of certain students in independent special schools. A review of the working practice and interactions of LEAs with independent special schools adds a rich source of information to this research and offers alternative perspectives about leadership and management in the independent sector. The result of this research study builds an informative and rich picture about the issues in special

schools in the independent sector and the challenges that arise for their leaders and managers. For the purpose of this study non-maintained special schools and approved special schools have been referred to collectively as independent special schools, as different to state provision, they both operate independently from state governance.

This research has been undertaken by the bursar of Hillcrest which is one of the schools that participated in this research and is therefore 'insider' research. The approach to this research study was phenomenological, using empirical, qualitative research data, gathered by semi-structured, face to face interviews. A small number of six independent special schools were invited to participate in the research study, three of which were registered with the Department for Education and Skills as having 'approved' status and three were registered as 'non-maintained' special schools. In each of these two categories, schools were selected on the basis of their pupil populations and the type of SEN to which they catered, so as to achieve diversity in the size of schools as well as diversity in the types of SEN represented in the research. Pupil populations in the participating schools therefore ranged from 27 students in the smallest school to 245 students in the largest school and included schools that specialised in catering for severe learning difficulties (SLD), speech and language difficulties (SpLD), dyslexia, physical disabilities and profoundly deaf children.

The research design was based upon individual interviews with three participants in each school, namely the headteacher, a deputy head and a classroom teacher so as to obtain differing perspectives from the differing layers of leadership and management within each school. Interviews were also conducted with three SEN Case Officers employed by LEAs and which represented three different LEA regions so as an alternative view from those who implement government policy at the school level could be compared against those who are employed in schools. LEAs that participated in the research were opportunity selected and represented one metropolitan, one shire and one outer London LEA region. Triangulation was achieved through obtaining documentary evidence from the Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED) and Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) inspection reports from each participating school about the nature of external accountabilities imposed as a result of inspections. Analysis of the research data was achieved through content analysis which was subsequently

thematically organized against the findings from the interview questions as well as from the literature review and emerging issues rising from the data.

The impact for independent special schools from government policy is significant because, since the introduction of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability Act 2001 which is underpinned by a policy of inclusion all children of all abilities are required to be accommodated in mainstream schools. Thus the traditional niche of special schools has been threatened. The next section therefore links the policy context of government legislation on inclusion, and special schools with the historical context under which independent schools in the UK operate so as to indicate areas of challenge for the leaders and managers of independent special schools to resolve. Statistical evidence is also discussed so as to offer an indication of who attends these schools. The purpose of undertaking this research study is then detailed in the subsequent section, followed by the rationale of undertaking the study and the basis of the research questions.

The Policy Context

The education of children and adults who have special educational needs has received national and international political attention over the years and continues to do so. Government legislation applies equally to independent schools as it does to state schools in the UK and therefore independent special schools have likewise been caught up over the years with the changing reform of special education. A major past influence in the UK was the 1978 Warnock report which defined the concept of special educational needs and promoted the principle of children with SEN being educated whenever possible in mainstream schools. This principle was endorsed by the government and enshrined in the 1981 Education Act which also introduced 'Statements' for children with SEN.

A further round of sweeping changes regarding SEN education was introduced by The Education Act 1996. Specifically, Section 316 (1) of the Act determined that a child with special educational needs should be educated in a school which is not a special school, unless that is incompatible with the wishes of the parent. Under this Act, a child is defined as having 'special educational needs' (Education Act 1996:324) if he/she has

a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made. The term 'special educational provision' (Education Act 1996:312:4) is described as educational provision which is additional to, or otherwise different from the educational provision made generally for their age in schools maintained by the local education authority (other than special schools) or grant maintained schools in their area. Under the Act, the assessment of such needs is required to be documented by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in the form of a 'Statement of Educational Needs' (Education Act, 1996: Section 324). Hence state and independent special schools were presented by the Act with an expected diminishing pupil population and/or a changing composition of students. In the following year, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) gave additional weight to these reforms with the Green Paper 'Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs', which was presented to Parliament in October 1997. This paper outlined the government's vision of raising standards for all children, including those with special educational needs. The thrust of this initiative was for improving literacy and numerary and introduced target setting for all schools, including new technologies in order to help children with SEN reach their full potential.

An international perspective on inclusion can be traced back to The United Nations (UN) Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). These international strategies set the context to encourage more equitable forms of schooling. Specifically, these strategies were focused on meeting the needs of excluded and marginalised groups of learners, not least those with disabilities. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) continued this push for equitable forms of schooling by including provision for all children to be educated within mainstream schooling wherever possible. It determined legal enforcement against the segregation of persons on the grounds of disability, learning difficulty or emotional need. The Salamanca Statement (1994) represented an agreement reached by representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organisations. The agreement reached was based upon the idealism that the development of mainstream schools with an inclusive orientation was the best means of achieving 'Education for All' (UN strategy report) and should be the norm for the education of special needs and disabled students. Thus the legislation introduced

by the UK with regards to a policy of inclusion was in keeping with the international push for equal forms of schooling and inclusive provision.

Stronger rights for children with SEN to be educated at a mainstream school were introduced by the revised Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice together with the SEN Provisions of the SEN and Disability Act 2001 and the Education (Special Educational Needs) (England) Regulations 2001 (SENDA) which came into force on 1st January 2002. This Act amended the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and laid new duties on LEAs from September 2002 to arrange for parents of children with SEN to be provided services, information, and a means of resolving disputes. The Act also required schools, both state and independent, not to treat disabled pupils less favourably than non-disabled pupils. In addition, the Act required schools to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled pupils were not put at a substantial disadvantage to pupils who were not disabled. Furthermore, it placed a requirement for schools and LEAs to plan strategically and make progress in increasing physical accessibility to school premises, and to the curriculum. Thus schools and LEAs were presented with further layers of accountability in which to interpret and comply with government legislation.

The first hint that possibly the inclusion policy was not working as well as the government had hoped came just two years later, in March 2004 with the introduction of the new Children Act (2004). This Act provided the legal framework for the programme of reform detailed in the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' (DfES, 2003) which indicated that there was likely to be a continuing role for special schools. The changes introduced by 'Every Child Matters' served to advance the government's reform by further commitments to improving provision, maximising the potential for all children and young people, and closing the gap in achievement outcomes between the disadvantaged and their peers. Key proposals of the paper built on the four main areas of (1) supporting parents and carers, (2) early intervention and effective protection, (3) accountability and integration – locally, regionally and nationally, and (4) workforce reform. In the same year, building on these proposals, a further Green Paper 'Removing Barriers to Achievement,' (DfES, 2004) set out the government's long-term strategy for embedding inclusive practice into schools and enabling children with special educational needs and disabilities to realise their potential. It affirmed the government's view that all teachers should expect to teach

children with special education needs and that all schools should play their part in educating children from their local community, whatever their background or ability. Although such reform by default affected independent schools, the context of government policy was directed towards state education in view of the contentious way in which independent schooling in the UK has been perceived by society and subsequent governments.

In the same year as the Children Act 2004 was introduced, David Bell, Chief Inspector of Schools in England, launched a report (BBC: 3734370), in which it was stated that he did not advocate the shutting of special schools and cautioned local authorities against premature closure. Whilst there had been a growing acceptance of the benefits of greater inclusion, he reported, there had not been much evidence of an increase in special needs pupils in mainstream schools. The reason for this, he believed, was that while schools could comfortably accommodate looking after children with physical disabilities, they were more reluctant in relation to children with behaviour problems, in view of weighing up their responsibilities to other pupils. He concluded that it was an 'issue where conflicts between meeting individual needs and efficient education for other children are the most difficult to reconcile' (BBC: 3734370). Adding to this debate, a University of London report entitled "Excellence in Schools" suggested that it is the dominance of the commitment to raise standards, which risks separating out and marginalising those children with less recoverable SENs (those with severe, significant and complex needs) and concluded that there was a need to balance raising standards with other principles, like respect for diversity and individual needs, on the one hand, and social inclusion on the other.

However, by 2005 Baroness Mary Warnock whose report in 1978 had significantly influenced the national adoption of this principle had conceded that her policy had backfired, leaving a disastrous legacy. Lady Warnock controversially condemned her own inclusion policy, saying that successive governments had taken it too far and that vulnerable children had been damaged by being taught in mainstream schools. (Guardian, 2006).

The Conservative Party has consistently advocated the retention of state and independent special schools, and has argued that a consequence of the inclusion policy

is that children have been 'dumped on failing schools.' (BBC News, 3734370) They suggest that the government's policy of inclusive education for disabled children may be physically inclusive, but educationally exclusive. Other critics have been teachers themselves. At the annual conference of the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) (cited in CSIE 2005a) teachers were opposed to further inclusion of pupils with serious special educational needs in mainstream schools without proper support. An indirect effect of inclusion, it was argued, was that the needs of pupils without SEN were being neglected in favour of those pupils with SEN.

A report from The 2020 Campaign (2004) launched by "Parents For Inclusion" also confirmed inconsistencies between the rhetoric of government policy and its practical implementation which stated that there had been no overall decrease in the number of pupils attending segregated special schools in the last five years despite government rhetoric about supporting inclusion. 'Indeed, the number of disabled children in independent special schools is at an all time high' (2020, 2004). During this period there had also been heated correspondence between the Disability Rights Commission and the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers regarding a press release issued by NASUWT (CSIE 2005a) which argued that the policy of inclusion for all pupils to be accommodated into mainstream schools, particularly those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, was proving to be a disaster for both these pupils and their teachers, hence possibly for reasons like this, independent special schools in 2006 were continuing to play a part in educating SEN children. The next section moves on to discuss independent special schools in terms of their historical past, their status and who attends them.

Independent Special Schools

Special schools are part of a spectrum of provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) and for the purpose of this research means a school which is 'specially organised to make special educational provision for pupils with special educational needs' (Education Act 1996:1:6:2). There is diversity in types of special schools in both state and independent sectors in terms of differences in size, categories of pupil, and age groups served. Some special schools also provide residential education in various forms. Special schools cluster into four main groups for pupils with emotional and

behavioural difficulties (EBD), autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), specific learning difficulties (SpLD), and with severe, complex or profound and multiple learning difficulties (SLD/PMLD).

An independent school is 'one at which full-time education is provided for five or more pupils of compulsory school age, (whether or not such education is also provided for pupils under or over that age), not being a school maintained by a local education authority, a grant-maintained school or a special school not maintained by a local education authority' (Education Act, 1996: Section 463). There are 2,500 independent schools in the UK which cater for about seven per cent of all school children in England and Wales (Independent Schools Council). Whilst there is no legal definition of an independent special school, the DfES considers that any independent school where at least half of the pupils have SEN and at least 25 per cent have statements, should be considered as a school catering wholly or mainly for children with SEN. According to the Teachernet (2006) website www.teachernet.gov.uk/sen (accessed 30/4/2006) there are 228 independent schools which are designated as catering 'wholly or mainly' for children with SEN of which 95 are approved schools under Section 347(1) of the 1996 Education Act. Under this Act independent special schools can register to be approved by the Secretary of State as being suitable for the admission of children for whom statements are maintained under Section 324 of the same Act. This action allows LEAs to directly place and fund SEN students within an independent special school.

In contrast to approved independent special schools, 'non-maintained special schools are predominantly for children with particular types of disability, which were established as part of voluntary charitable effort to help students mainly with severe forms of disability' (Johnson, 1987:38). However, there is no clear definition of the non-maintained special school other than occasional descriptive references to these schools in government publications. One such description written in the 1980s states: 'Non-maintained special schools are run by voluntary bodies; they may receive some grant from the Department (of Education and Science) for capital work and for equipment but their current expenditure is met primarily from the fees charged to LEAs for pupils placed in the schools' (cited in Johnson 1987:38).

According to government records, in addition to the 228 independent special schools, there were 70 non-maintained special schools and just over 1,000 maintained special schools (Gov, 2004). However, contrary to government policy, by 2006 only 59 per cent of children with statements of SEN were located in maintained mainstream schools, (equivalent to 139,020 pupils), which was a slight decrease from the previous year (DfES, 2006). The remaining 41 per cent of children with statements had placements in special schools (equivalent to 97,730 pupils). Furthermore of the 25,200 children assessed during 2005, 24,000 (95 per cent) were issued with a statement for the first time, but of these, 21 per cent were placed in special schools (maintained, non-maintained and independent). The implementation of the inclusion strategy was therefore seemingly continuous in under achieving its full potential.

The National Statistics Office (DfES, 2006) also reveal that in 2006, LEAs placed 3,790 children with maintained statements in non-maintained special schools, 5,030 in independent special schools and 2,710 in other independent schools and according to these statistics the government was spending £481 million for placements at independent and non-maintained special schools. School fees of pupils in independent special schools are funded from many sources and not just LEAs. Parents themselves are often the fee payers. Commercial companies offering a benefit in kind to their employees settle fee accounts as well as the fees that are paid by the armed forces with regards to their serving personnel. In addition some student placements are funded by Trusts in hardship cases or from bursaries awarded by the school. In other instances concerned grandparents, aunts and uncles sustain the payment of fees. However, for placements in the non-maintained schools it is generally the case that, due to the nature of SEN to which they cater, the fees are most commonly paid by the LEA as these are usually the more severe forms of SEN.

Nevertheless, leaving aside the funding issues relating to special education, during 2003 mixed government messages about segregated special schools were reflected in reports of varied practice around the country regarding future developments in the special sector. While plans went ahead for state special school closures in some areas, in others there were proposals to re-locate special schools on maintained sites, and expand the capacity of some special schools (CSIE: 2005a). Records show that special schools of

all types in England had decreased from 1,562 in 1983 to 1,160 in 2003, yet the numbers of students with special educational needs had continued to rise (DfES 2004).

►*The Historical Context*

Independent schools especially with regards to fee-paying have been a long-standing sensitive issue in the history of British education, yet it was 'concern over the performance of public education which heightened interest in private educational alternatives' (Levy, 1986:1). In Britain, fee-paying schools were officially designated as independent schools which encouraged the idea that they 'were not in any way dependent upon local or central government for financial or other support', (Walford, 2003:3). The private sector was seen by some to offend directly because 'it enabled families to purchase a valued form of schooling, and indirectly because it questioned the credibility of the state sector, that is, the implication by definition that state schooling is inferior' (Walford, 2003:12). Hence, in practice over the years, the relationship between the state and private schooling in Britain has been 'essentially pragmatic' (Tapper, 1997:96).

In the 1940s, both the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress supported a motion for the abolition of private education (Edwards, Fitz & Whitty, 1989:11). The argument for this motion was that 'broad democratic principles required that all children attend schools provided by the state' (Banks, 1955:227-9). In 1953 and 1958 more amendments were proposed that supported the end of fee-paying and the incorporation of schools into the state system, and in 1958 this amendment was only narrowly defeated. At the time, critics of private education argued that 'it perpetuated privilege, was deeply divisive, and diverted attention and resources from maintained schools' (Edwards, Fitz & Whitty, 1989:12). Johnson (1987:5), writing in the 1980s, suggested that 'an extreme view of public education would be that the institutionalised provision of education is not a proper function for a government; therefore there should be no 'state' schools. However, a directly opposing view would be that public education should be universally provided and exclusively used. Nevertheless, 'the divide between the two sectors has survived all the major social and political changes of the past century, and has resisted unscathed even the most determined of educational reforms' (Aldrich, 2004:53). The survival of independent special schools could be seen therefore

as surprising in that they conflict both with moves to abolish independent schools and with moves to establish inclusion.

Since 1996, policies aimed at including students with SEN in mainstream schools have made rapid progress in practice. Mainstream schools have accommodated students by setting up special units within their premises, and by student integration into classroom settings, frequently with teaching assistant support. Other schools, such as non-maintained schools and independent schools, have also integrated special needs students in response to the Disability Act and subsequent legislation. By 2006 private funding had also been reintroduced into the state sector. This was achieved through independent-state school partnerships (ISSP) and private finance initiatives (PFI) also known as public-private partnerships (PPP) which is a more generic and less politically charged term. Thus independent special schools have been caught up in a changing environment that is entwined with changing social expectations as well as academic ones. The next section therefore explains the rationale of the undertaking of this research which centred upon the challenges that are being faced by the leaders and managers of independent special schools operating in a changing environment.

Rationale for the Study

Despite increasing numbers of pupils with SEN (DfES, 2006), the National Statistics Office recorded in January 2006, that there were only 236,700 pupils with statements, across all schools in England and Wales, which was the lowest number recorded over the previous four years. The proportion of pupils with statements had stayed the same, at 2.9% on average, representative of one in 37 boys and one in 100 girls. However, the proportion identified as having special needs but who did not have statements had risen from 14.9% of the school population as a whole to 15.7% equivalent to 1,293,300 pupils. Reading into the statistics, there appeared to be a mismatch in espoused policy and practices.

Since 1998 it appears that the number of children with new statements of SEN has steadily decreased from 36,200 in 1998 to 24,000 in 2005. National statistics therefore demonstrate that since the inception of inclusion in England, there were fewer children with statements, but more children with SEN and a slight decrease in the number of

SEN children with statements that have been placed in maintained mainstream schools. However, the reverse might have reasonably been expected, as a result of the policy and the number of children with statements increasing due to rising rather than decreasing numbers of children with SEN. From these statistics it appears there is a large discrepancy between the number of children identified as having some kind of SEN and those who had successfully navigated or have been guided/pushed/pulled through the statementing process.

By 2006 the profile of mainstream schools had changed with regard to the range of students that were now being accommodated by them and this was reflected in special schools by affecting the market niche formerly held by them. This situation was likely to have added to the uncertainty about the future role that independent special schools as well as state special schools could and ought to play in supporting inclusion policies. It appears a matter of conjecture therefore whether the outcome of government strategies has achieved the total reform package intended. Although there has been a growing wealth of government policies promoting inclusion over past years, there is currently a hint of other parallel strategies running concurrently yet inconspicuously, such as a reduction in the number of children eligible for statements that might be playing a counteractive role in this specific area of reform which are likely to have impact on the leadership and management of independent special schools.

Consequently, the justification for this research stemmed from the extent to which the independent sector was perceived to be supporting a seemingly failing government policy and how this situation may be creating challenges for the leadership and management of special schools in the independent sector. Ten years since the introduction of the Education Act 1996 and five years from the introduction of the SEN and Disability Act 2001, the proportion of LEA placements of pupils with statements into independent special schools had increased. Although this represented only a small increase of pupils, this was significant because, if inclusive practice had been adhering to government policy, a drop rather than a rise in SEN students placed in independent special schools would have been expected. Due to national policy, the government would not want to be openly seen to be supporting special schools but actually seemed to be doing so imperceptibly.

The extent to which government policy is creating challenges for the leadership and management of independent special schools was a compelling basis for investigation. Although perceived to enjoy greater freedom than state schools, independent special schools, similar to state special schools, have been caught up with the strengthening of government legislation and the ambiguities surrounding the national policy on SEN education. Affected by the inclusion strategy, 402 maintained special schools had closed over the last twenty years, despite a general increase in the numbers of pupils with SEN. It was a cause for concern that the strengthening of externally imposed accountabilities may not sit comfortably with the internal interests of school communities. Specific challenges were thought to be in terms of local knowledge of the requirements of students and possibly individual visions, creativity and/or innovation of what good SEN education should be. Therefore the perceived freedom of these schools might be more restricted by these pressures than would be generally expected. Rather than promoting standards, such pressures might actually be serving as being dysfunctional towards raising standards and conflicting with teachers' professional and moral accountabilities. Hence according to Ball (1998) such pressures which have influential impact on an organisation need to be traced.

This research problem is reflective of the extent to which leaders and managers of independent special schools perceive their freedoms to be. This extends to the extent to which external accountabilities are complementary and/or conflicting with what they seek to do, and informative of how they are responding to such challenges. Furthermore, Grace (1995) supports the need for studies of school leadership which are brought into a relationship with wider political, cultural, economic and ideological movements in society. The National College for School Leadership (2003) also affirmed there to be a gap in research evidence about leadership and management in special schools, especially with regards to the impact of external accountability in schools.

Furthermore there is also support from the literature that 'greater study of the private sector as a whole was needed' (Walford 2003:4) as this sector, was viewed as being particularly under researched. Whilst headship has attracted the attention of many researchers over a long period of time, particularly research of headship in secondary and primary education, this is much less true for headship in special education. Indeed,

following a sustained search of the literature regarding special education and educational management, Rayner and Ribbins (1999:1) 'found very few references to headship in special schools' and also advocated further studies in this field. This lack of literature became even more significant, when considering what is currently known about headship in special schools operating within the independent sector.

The independence of these schools is often referred to as being private [institutions], and this notion of privacy might be one of the major reasons that so little research into independent headship has been attempted in the past. '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, 2001:108-112). Furthermore it has been suggested that the 'political theorists writing about the nature of political authority have given little attention to the impact of political authority on organization behaviour' (Bozeman, 1987:61). Thus from explaining the rationale as to why it was important for this research to be undertaken, the next section gives detail as to the purpose that the research study set out to achieve.

The Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to provide a systematic and critical analysis of the challenges faced by leaders and managers in independent special schools, specifically related to their role in educating SEN children, the growing demands of external accountability and the extent to which such issues need to be balanced with the internal interests of their communities. Drawing upon the writer's empirical study, this research has focused upon the extent to which external demands, complement and/or conflict with the internal aims and objectives of such schools, and the consequential implications for independent special schools in the future. The research questions were centred upon five main elements that were viewed as requiring investigation.

1. The first element concerned the role that independent special schools were playing, five years on from the introduction of the SEN and Disability Act 2001. Investigating the role expected of an independent special school was considered

crucial to the context in which leaders and managers operate and influential on the challenges of their leadership and management.

2. The second element concerned what those who worked in independent special schools considered to be the main challenges of leading and managing them. Of particular interest was why, if at all, the leadership and management of these schools might uniquely differ from leading and managing any other school.

3. The third element of investigation surrounded the extent to which accountability was arising as challenges to the leadership and management function of these schools. In particular the extent to which issues associated with externally imposed accountabilities, such as government legislation and inspections were impacting upon the organisational strategies and behaviour of those leading and managing these schools. This included the impact upon the decision making of leaders and managers, as well as the curriculum and pedagogy that was adopted by these schools.

4. Making up the fourth element of this research was the extent to which these leaders and managers are presented challenges by the need to balance accountabilities. This notion extends to the extent that externally imposed accountabilities complement or conflict with the interests of these school communities, including the moral and professional accountabilities of their leaders and managers.

5. The fifth and final purpose of this research was to seek what the challenges might be for leaders and managers of independent special schools in the years ahead.

The objective of this research was therefore to gain a comprehensive understanding about the challenges associated with being a leader and manager of an independent special school. The five main areas of investigation therefore centred upon:

• What are the challenges regarding the role of the independent special school?
• What are the main challenges of leading and managing a special school in the independent sector?

- To what extent do external accountabilities impact as challenges for the leadership and management of independent special schools?
- To what extent are leaders and managers presented with challenges because of the need to balance externally imposed accountabilities with internal interests of the school community?
- What might be the challenges that may arise for leaders and managers of independent special schools in the future?

These questions served as the starting point of this inquiry and were informed through a review of the literature in order to generate the interview questions that aided the gathering of a comprehensive interpretative picture surrounding the research problem. Chapter 2 of this thesis draws from the literature and follows the same thematic order as the five main elements identified in Chapter 1. The development of the methodology which was used to investigate the research problem is subsequently detailed in Chapter 3. This section explains why the methodology used for this research was an appropriate way of investigating the research problem and gives details of how participants were chosen. The findings of the investigation are detailed in Chapter 4 and analysed against the literature and discussed from emerging themes in Chapter 5. Details of the conclusions drawn from the study and an action plan are raised in Chapter 6.

Conclusion

The national and international push for inclusion has been implemented under a wealth of government legislation and formulated to address the shortfalls and society calls for justice with regards to the education of SEN children. Policies seem to have followed policies, all adding layers of accountability to those with the ultimate responsibility of implementing national policy. Debates on inclusion have been prevalent in terms of the advantages and disadvantages that arise from the implementation of this national policy which has left special schools with uncertainty and speculation as to how they will need to respond so as to secure a continuing and meaningful role. This research study was therefore undertaken to look at one aspect of this educational issue, so as to consider the challenges of leading and managing in independent special schools in 2006. The next chapter of this thesis therefore moves on to review the literature regarding the research problem.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

At the end of Chapter One, the research objective of this study was explained in terms of seeking an understanding about the challenges that are being presented to the leadership and management of independent special schools. This was particularly pertinent as it remained the case that in 2006 government policy was still striving to educate all children with SEN in mainstream provision wherever possible. From this starting point the literature review explores the research objective of the challenges presented to leaders and managers of these schools by examining what is known about leadership in special schools, the way in which they are affected by accountabilities and the extent to which they may need to be balanced between internal factors within schools. The concluding part of the literature review will consider the implications for independent special schools that might arise in the future.

This chapter therefore begins by examining the context in which independent special schools operate by considering the role of the independent special school with regards to the education of children with SEN in England and Wales. This includes how the role of these schools might be affected by government policies, particularly with regard to inclusion and mainstreaming. Of specific interest is how the leaders and managers of these schools are mediating such government policies with their more localised responsibilities of leadership and management in their schools. Adding to the context under which independent special schools operate, a review of the literature in this section extends to consider how interactions with LEAs may have significant repercussions for the leaders and managers of independent special schools to deal with.

From setting the context under which independent special schools operate and the role that in 2006 they are playing in educating children with SEN, the literature moves on to give specific focus on what is currently known about the leadership and management challenges associated with special schools. This includes the distinctive features that are associated with leading and managing in these schools, and the challenges arising from their external accountabilities as well as their moral and professional ones. These notions then act as a basis to consider the distinctive features of leadership and

management in independent special schools as well as aspects of leadership and management that may be common across all schools. The final section of the review considers implications for independent special schools into the future, thereby drawing together a rich picture of the challenges that affect the leadership and management of independent special schools and the consequential implications that rest with them.

The Role of the Independent Special School

The most important differences between state and private schools involve: a) their respective freedom of actions, b) organisational culture, c) the level of resourcing, and d) market forces' (Calnin & Davies, 2004:9). Independent schools have greater freedom than maintained schools in respect of the curriculum they offer and although most independent schools offer a similar range of courses to state schools and enter pupils for the same public examinations, the difference is that the independent sector is not obliged to teach the National Curriculum and comply with the associated education targets (Grace 1995). Independent schools are thus free to define their mission and are limited primarily by the conditions of the marketplace (Kane, 1986, 1989). The aim of those who manage fee-paying schools is to provide an educational service that parents will want to buy at a cost that they can afford. Access to private schooling is therefore subject to the pressures of both the state and the marketplace' (Tapper, 1997). The issue of difference, therefore, seems to be in the freedom of choice, namely the extent that schools are free to choose the way in which they will achieve and the freedom granted to purchasers of education to choose the school of their preference.

There are three key value conflicts, according to Tapper (1997:134) which have underwritten the relationship between the maintained and fee-paying sectors of schooling:

1. The fee paying sector provides an education to those who can afford to pay their fees, and parents have the right to purchase that education. Nonetheless the state retains the authority, usually in defence of community interests, to restrict the activities of both producers and consumers.

2. These schools perceive themselves as independent corporate bodies, which have the right in law to control their own affairs. However, because

schooling has important social consequences, there are demands that all schools should be democratically accountable.

3.   A central component of the independence of such schools is their right to select their pupils on the basis of whatever criteria they determine. Inevitably this runs up against the insistence that each school should be a neighbourhood school with a pupil intake as comprehensive in character as possible.   Although, in reality the social composition of many neighbourhoods will make such a goal unrealistic.

The future role of the independent special school appears to rest partially with the consequences derived from the inclusion policy and respective government strategies to strengthen their aims. A critical factor for the effectiveness of special education may not necessarily be a matter of inclusive or segregated education, but rather the correct or most appropriate placement of SEN students for meeting their needs (Hocutt, 1996). In practice,

> Judgements about inclusion will be influenced by whether or not pupils make better progress academically, socially and personally in a special school or a mainstream school. This, in turn, depends on the flexibility that mainstream schools can achieve in the curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and organisation, and the extent to which special schools provide a distinctive education also in terms of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and organisation.   (Farrell, 2004:98).

Moves towards inclusion in government policy means that schools will need to change (Clark, Dyson, & Millward, 1997). Change, is an interactive process among schools, the purchasers of their product and the evolving character of state and society (Tapper, 1997). Within the fee-paying sector educational change is fundamentally driven by self-preservation and as such if private schools cannot attract customers they will go out of business (Rae, 1981). Organisational survival will therefore be reliant upon a series of exchanges between the organisation and its environment, and the nature of these exchanges will give rise to broader responsibilities to society in general. 'These broader responsibilities, which are both internal and external to the organisation, are usually

referred to as social responsibilities which arise from the interdependence of organisations, society and the environment' (Mullins, 1996:310).

Political struggle, accordingly to Archer (1979) is at the centre of the change process. Consequently according to Archer,

> As schools change – or fail to change – there is an accompanying process of ideological struggle in which political and economic resources are used to determine outcomes. It is political struggle, or political inertia, with the accompanying commitment or non-commitment of resources, that determines whether social stratification pressures are actually translated into new forms of schooling.

> (Archer cited in Tapper, 1997:24)

Central to developing more inclusive educational practice is a refocusing of the role of the special school (Cheminais, 2003). As more pupils with learning needs are included in mainstream schools, maintained special schools are being asked to cater for children with more severe and complex needs (Rose, 2002). Accordingly Rose (2002) argues that the culture and practices of special schools have been subject to major change in respect of accepting and adapting to new policy initiatives: improving links with mainstream schools; keeping proactive to critics; learning to work within an increased dependency on government reform, and portraying a positive image to parents and others. However, special schools are invariably finding themselves responding to policy initiatives which lack clarity about their future role, whilst attempting to mask this uncertainty with a positive marketing image (Allan & Brown, 2001).

►*Inclusion*

In theory, if full inclusion were achieved, there would be no need for special schools. Thus the future need of special schools partially hinges on the presumption that inclusion has failings. The theory behind inclusion is grounded on an egalitarian view that society should be based on the principle of equal rights and opportunities for all and also on the notion that all children have the same entitlements and general learning needs (Wearmouth, 2001). Furthermore, as inclusive practice emerges, different discourses co-exist, albeit uncomfortably.

> Sometimes this is from a rights perspective: disabled children and other marginalised groups have a right to be educated alongside their peers, and sometimes this comes from an economic perspective: we cannot afford or sustain segregated special education, and so inclusion is the only option. (Miles, 2004:2)

In the past, many children with SEN would undoubtedly have been sent to special schools, but due to the change towards inclusive education, their needs are now expected to be met in mainstream schools, with the help of additional funding provided by the LEA through a Statementing process. The Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) define inclusive education as being 'where disabled and non-disabled children and young people learn together in ordinary pre-school provision, schools, colleges and universities, with appropriate networks of support' (CSIE, 2005b). However it appears that inclusion is about more than just the type of school that children attend. It is about the quality of their experience; how they are helped to learn, achieve and participate fully in the life of the school (Teachernet, 1). Nevertheless, the apparent precision of educational, medical and psychological descriptions of children's difficulties may well disguise inherent vagueness, and custom-and-practice in particular schools, and LEAs may create an unwarranted illusion of stability (Rix et al 2005).

Under The Education Act 1996, Section 313, 'inclusion has to be reasonably practical: the special needs must be able to be met; arrangements must not interfere with the education of the other children in the school, and resources must be used efficiently' (Wearmouth 2001:55). Inclusion, according to Allan (1999) involves two processes, namely increasing pupils' participation and decreasing exclusionary pressures. Within this context, 'inclusion can be read as a messy and an unstable process which mainstream pupils both sanction and prohibit' (Allan 1999:112). It is widely acknowledged that it is difficult to evaluate the outcomes of inclusive education (Hegarty, 1993; Farrell, 2000) and that the studies which have attempted to evaluate outcomes have been largely inconclusive.

According to the literature, social inclusion is central to the conflict between political inclusiveness and a politics of inclusion and represents opposed strategies for dealing with the difference: 'one by denying and suppressing it; the other by accepting and

engaging with it' (Askonas & Stewart, 2000:295). Policies that promote social inclusion are commonly viewed as advancing an ideal of equality, but at times this may be an unintended consequence because supporters of social inclusion do not necessarily pursue an ideal of egalitarian justice, but an ideal of common life. It may, therefore, be the case that policies which promote inclusion will also sometimes generate inequalities which are regarded by egalitarians as being unfair but are viewed by advocates of inclusion as fair. Consequently, under these conditions, equality and inclusion are not just different, they are rivals and as a result,

> A tension [therefore] exists as the result of 'internal' drives, linked to philosophy, vision and a deeper-seated notion of what special education means or should be, and the external forces of government policy, funding realities, educational initiatives and resource.
>
> (Rayner & Ribbins, 1999:36).

Critics, such as the General Secretary of the Secondary Heads Association (SHA) have added to the SEN debate by arguing that 'the misguided accountability regime with its emphasis on league tables, penalises schools with large numbers of SEN pupils and rewards schools that have few such children' (BBC News: 1442038). Government policies such as the delegation of resources to schools, opting out, together with the publication of exam results undermine justice and equality by creating winners and losers and increasing the impetus for exclusion and segregation (Barton, 1993). It is therefore not surprising that ambiguity, contradiction and confusion seem to surround the national inclusion strategy (Cheminais, 2003). Whilst all children can enter schools, not all children, including children with disabilities, necessarily learn (Sorrells, Rieth & Sindelar, 2004). Full inclusionists, have persuaded many stakeholders that all children should be educated in the regular classroom regardless of whether these settings can adapt to meet their needs or they can educationally benefit from such a placement. Hence criticisms [of the implementation of inclusive practice] stem from the adoption of a 'one size fits all approach' (Sorrells et al, 2004:163).

It seems that the biggest challenge facing the implementation of the inclusion ideology is social integration (Rix et al, 2005). According to Rix et al (2005) informants of their research were much more concerned about social integration than curricular integration.

It appears that informants viewed social integration as the basis of academic learning and although intellectual challenges were important for students in special education, teachers were seen to be cleverer in planning for the academic, rather than the social integration of students. Consequently there are concerns that insufficient notice has been taken about the needs of teachers who are expected to put the consequences of change into effect. One notable concern is that teachers appear to be dangerously overloaded as a result of innovation in the curriculum, the implications of preparation, an emphasis on greater accountability, and the explosion of knowledge with which teachers are expected to keep pace (Wearmouth, 2001; Fullan, 1992).

Local authorities have an inbuilt conflict of interest, in both having to assess whether a child needs special education, which is expensive and having to provide it. In 2006 the government was finding itself under increasing pressure by MPs to rethink its policy on special educational needs as ministers were being criticised for sending confused messages over how youngsters with special needs should be taught. Furthermore, at this time ministers were also being accused by MPs of quietly changing policy yet still allowing councils to believe that closing special schools remained government policy. The architect of England's special needs education system, Baroness Mary Warnock has also added pressure on the government to rethink its strategy by publically stating that the pressure to include pupils with problems in mainstream schools has caused confusion of which children are the casualties, despite the fact that the ideal of inclusiveness, 'springs from hearts in the right place' (BBC, 4071122). Baroness Warnock has publically admitted that the implementation of the policy and the consequential moving of pupils out of special schools has left a disastrous legacy. Warnock argues that governments must come to recognise that, even if inclusion is an ideal for society in general, it may not always be an ideal for schools. According to Baroness Warnock inclusion should mean being involved in a common enterprise of learning, rather than necessarily being under the same roof, and therefore has called for a change in the status and purpose of special schools (BBC, 4071122).

In clarifying the government's position Schools' Minister, Lord Adonis, whilst speaking at the launch of a new policy review on children and young people, announced 'Our policy is very simple. It's the needs of the child that come first and the right of their parents to exercise choice to ensure that those needs are properly met' (Guardian, 2006).

In his statement, Lord Adonis also reaffirmed that it was never the intention of the government that inclusion should mean the needs of the child or the rights of parents being infringed and verified that there was now no government policy to encourage councils to close special schools. This significant statement therefore was a strong indication that the government was moving from strict inclusion and closure of special schools to a more sensible pragmatic approach, although the consequences of what the change in policy might mean were left unclear. Furthermore BBC columnist Tom Shakespeare in his article written for the BBC (BBC: 270605) reported that contrary to the impression given by Baroness Warnock and the teaching unions, there had not been a huge trend away from segregated education into inclusive education. Thus, as implementers of national policy, the next section moves on to consider the LEA relationship with the private sector.

►*The LEA Relationship*

The role of the LEA is described in the literature as that of 'leader, partner, planner, provider of information, regulator and banker' (Ranson, 1992:15). According to Ranson, the 1988 Education Reform Act weakened the powers of LEAs by diminishing the administrative powers they had over institutions. Ransom argues that the intention of the legislation was not only to redefine roles and responsibilities of the education partners, 'but to do so as part of a broader reconstituting of the government of education, according to new values of public choice and accountability' (1992:10). However, this was achieved in a way that created tensions for LEAs now caught between the markets of consumer choice and the hierarchies of Whitehall regulation in terms of the National Curriculum.

Under Part 1 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA:2001), the government requires LEAs to have a duty to include all children with SEN, but who do not have a statement, to be educated in mainstream schools. Under this provision, children who have a statement of SEN should be included in mainstream schools, so long as:

- other children's education is not adversely affected (the LEA can only rely on this exception if it shows that there are no reasonable steps that can be taken to prevent such an effect);

- parents are in agreement.

A fundamental point to note here is not only must mainstream schools make adequate provision to cater for SEN students, but they must also consider the extent to which inclusive practice impacts upon those students who do not have learning difficulties. LEAs are, therefore likely to be subject to a potential conflict between these differing accountabilities.

Although the maintained sector of education in England and Wales has never aspired to make provision for the special educational needs of every child, since 1944, the majority of pupils who need special help with their education have had their needs met in maintained special schools. However, it has always been recognised that some highly specialised needs can only be met, with any degree of economic efficiency, by individual private institutions. Nightingale (2003) argues that there are benefits to be gained in both the private and state sectors by working collaboratively and developing partnerships. Albeit, whatever their own views on private schooling, education officers have regularly looked to the independent sector 'to meet certain needs of individual children through special education and boarding education' (Johnson, 1987:37).

Accordingly, 'LEAs are taking the inclusion issue in schools forward in a variety of ways and this involves feelings of uncertainty for staff, pupils and parents' (Atfield & Williams, 2003:28-33). As a result there seems to be an absence of clear context for planning since the future of special provision is uncertain, although according to Atfield & Williams (2003), LEAs are continuing with certain placements at independent and non-maintained special schools. Some placements are made to meet very severe and complex needs; others are made because of a lack of capacity locally such as educational provision, care or therapies. It therefore appears that 'change in local authority management comes not from legislation alone, but from a changing society and a changing environment' (Clarke & Stewart, 1990:1). Consequently, the weight of legislative change impacts by creating imbalance, building upon strengths although at times neglecting critical issues.

From setting the context in which independent special schools operate, this review changes focus in the next section to draw upon the literature as to the main challenges

that are presented to leaders and managers of special schools and in particular reviews the ways in which leading and managing independent special schools may be very different from other schools.

Leadership and Management of Special Schools

In view of the dearth of leadership research relating to independent special schools, it is important to consider how key aspects of leadership research in relation to special schools in general, might translate to the environment of a special school in the independent sector.

Whilst education in itself is intrinsically moral, special education is particularly emotive and as such 'education leaders must be prepared to deal with its moral dimensions' (Tucker & Codding (2002:95). Educational leaders are often passionate about raising educational achievement and as a consequence there is evidence to suggest that many of these leaders now feel more pressurized than their peers of a couple of generations ago (Bottery, 2004). There have always been tensions in educational leadership especially with regards to such things as managing and leading, and between demands and resources. There are also tensions between being a leader yet being dependent on others (Evans, 1996). However, 'what is new is the way the job has expanded and intensified, leaving leaders feeling disempowered' (Bottery, 2004:13). All these factors ultimately lead to varying degrees of tension within the system as priorities and ideas of moral purpose are balanced against legislation and government policies. With regard to independent special schools and their perceived boundaries of independence, such tensions are likely to arise from balancing the twin pillars of accountability and empowerment (Stoll & Fink, 1996:168).

One of the primary reasons, according to Hess (1999) that schools may find it difficult to make substantial improvements in school reform initiatives is that they are often being asked to implement new programs and practices in response to changing legislation and policies. Successful leadership and management within the context of independent special education extends to the skilful way in which the autonomy awarded by an independent status is balanced with government controls and demands derived from them, 'while at the same time not being controlled by these demands'

(Stoll & Fink 1996:168). According to Halpin (1994:199) there is very little research about the 'impact and consequences of education policy' in terms of whether things are improved or are made worse. Bottery (2004) implies that not enough attention is being paid to the policy and economic context within which educational leadership is practised. Whilst Wright (2001) equally argues on this point Wright also suggests that the economic and political climate has effectively reduced the ability of school heads and other educational leaders to transcend matters of government policy, their own values and preferred practice being submerged beneath a deluge of managerialist rhetoric, paperwork and legislative practice. However, contrary to this position, research undertaken by writers such as Day et al (2000), Moore et al (2002) and Gold et al (2003) have concluded that while external forces continue to impinge upon educational leaders' values and practice, the best practitioners nevertheless still find it possible to retain and practice their deeper personal values.

The key decisions that have to be made in schools are thus, often reflective of major changes in government policy. Consequently, school leadership is 'a site of considerable academic struggle especially in the context when leadership texts are overtly framed within managerial government policy' (Thrupp & Willmott, 2001:144). Translating current ideology into practice in special schools is not easy as it often unclear how such policies translate into special schools and indeed the independent sector. Thus translations are likely to vary from school to school and often appear to require justification on ethical, moral and legal grounds. These areas of decision making, interpretation and negotiation are most often retained by headteachers as they are likely to have significant repercussions associated with the school's budget, staff recruitment, innovation, and contact with outside agencies such as LEAs and inspection authorities. According to Day (2007:68) despite pressures from the implementation of multiple policy accountabilities 'successful headteachers are those who place as much emphasis upon people and processes as they do upon product'. Frequently, frustrations arise from having to perform a constant round of routine administrative tasks demanded by the LEA in conjunction with the prioritising of workloads. Attempting to respond and mediate to perceptions of individual 'need' as well as the 'needs' of groups, whole school populations and both the local and national community, requires 'headteachers in special schools engaging with complex issues of sameness and difference, equity and

discrimination, which ultimately, are very difficult to reconcile' (Wearmouth, 2000:63). This is also expected to be the case in special schools in the independent sector.

Conflict is a continuing characteristic of the school leadership role (Begley & Johansson, 2003) and therefore leaders within all contexts need to have a moral purpose defining their values and beliefs, especially during times of rapid and extended change (Fullan, 2001). However, this is particularly relevant for leaders in SEN environments as they need to make decisions and lead these environments during the challenge of developing inclusion. A changing pupil profile is a common additional challenge for SEN environments as with the inclusion agenda 'many SEN environments are having to cope with pupils with increasingly complex SEN' (Burnett, 2005:50). Michael Fullan suggests that the moral imperative to make a difference has particular relevance to those leading SEN environments and is evident at the level of the individual: the school; beyond the school, and in society. Those working within SEN environments claim to be strong advocates of the right of the child to high-quality provision. In successful SEN environments leaders have achieved this through 'critical thinking, openness to new possibilities and an unwavering belief in what they know to be in the best interests of the pupils' (Burnett, 2005:6).

Research has shown that leaders do not take the same shape or form in different organizations, different departments, or even in a team over time (Bennett et al, 2003). Although, the National College of School Leadership (2005) deems that leaders in specialist contexts engage in similar tasks and deploy broadly the same range of skills as their counterparts in mainstream education. For independent special schools any difference may not therefore stem from differences in the tasks that are undertaken, but are more likely to arise from the specific leadership challenges that arise due to the nature of independent schools and the students who attend them.

A function of leadership and management is to 'skilfully mediate external changes so that they integrate with the vision and values which exist in schools' (Day et al, 2000:156). According to Burnett (2005:16) it is increasingly important that highly effective leaders of SEN environments look toward 'boundary spanning'. By this Burnett means the ability to work across what many would see as the normal boundaries

from which schools operate. Gilmore & Krantz (1991) also views it as an important feature of effective leaders to weave together boundaries and suggests that,

> At the boundary line between any unit and its wider organizational context, or alternatively, at the boundary between the enterprise and its wider environment, a leader integrates the unit's mission or strategic orientation with the tools and means for accomplishing it. It is specifically the function of leadership to weave the two – to articulate an appropriate mission which the resources of the unit can realistically achieve and to deploy its resources efficiently in the service of its primary tasks.
>
> (cited in Dimmock, 1993:213)

Elliott (2001:562) argues that the need for clarification of educational priorities has never been greater at this time when educational policy is being driven by economic imperatives and teachers at all levels are being held to account in terms of standardized learning outputs that are believed to possess commodity value for the labour market. According to Thrupp & Willmott (2001:57) 'educational planning should be an educational aid rather than a managerial tool of external accountability'. In the context of managing schools, both the means and the ends are people, therefore the way in which managers in education go about their work differs according to their beliefs about the people in their schools. Within this context Thrupp & Willmott indicate that there is no absolute right or wrong way to manage or lead, albeit leaders and managers should implement and evaluate their plans within the contextual features of their schools, such as the school mix, teachers' skills and their experience.

The most successful leaders in the SEN environment have the capacity to develop successful partnerships, create change and build capacity so that the change 'promotes sustained learning: lasts over time; is supported by available resources and is achievable; it does not impact negatively on the surrounding environment, and also builds future capacities' (Burnett, 2005:3). Problem solving is most commonly an inherent tension for school leadership. There are often even greater challenges to those working within SEN environments due to the nature of students who attend them. Whilst leaders need to be aware of the additional demands placed on them, they must

also be mindful that there are many parents who have fought extremely hard to get what they feel is right for their child and as such are extremely articulate at putting their case forward. The demands of parents can be wide and varied in all educational settings but it is noted that 'there are particular challenges faced by those leading in SEN environments' (Burnett, 2005:48). There are those who would argue that the parents are best placed to decide what is in their child's best interests, but there are times when the understandably additional stresses placed on them as parents of a child with SEN may not make them the best placed advocates for these decisions. Alternatively, a school member of staff may be seen as an effective advocate, but again they may well have values and beliefs that do not match that of the child (Burnett, 2005:7). Consequently issues of professional judgement and staffing are most common in special education.

In special schools and those that are independent, there is the challenge of leading and managing a diverse workforce. For most SEN settings there are a significant number of other professionals in addition to teachers, classroom support staff and administrative staff. These include speech and language therapists, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, teachers for the visually impaired, teachers for the hearing impaired, school nurse, counsellors, therapists. It must be recognised that these other professionals often come from a different cultural background and have their own agenda. Therefore an ability to manage the different cultures and multiple agendas is a prerequisite for a successful leader of a special school.

In special schools the literature informs us that teachers need different levels of understanding of pupils' diversities and the ways in which they learn. Conventionally teachers have seen themselves as professionals whose function and responsibility it is to make informed decisions on the basis of the knowledge and experience. The effects of special education legislation and fragmented solutions to unwieldy reform has caused teachers in special schools to become 'dangerously overloaded' (Wearmouth, 2000:53) as a result of curriculum innovation. This situation has also been exacerbated by the changing profile of class groups and its implications for more complex planning and preparation, greater accountability and the explosion of knowledge with which to keep pace. Furthermore Gewirtz (2002) points to the resentment and accumulated stress among teachers because of an increased emphasis on recording and monitoring student progress which they perceive as a distraction from the real work of teaching.

Burnett (2005:45) argues that it is clear to anyone who has worked in a number of different SEN settings that 'context is everything and that there can be as much that is different between supposedly similar settings as there is in common'. Children with special educational needs experience difficulties where there is a significant mismatch between what they themselves bring to bear in learning situations and the expectations that are made of them. The interrelationships between SEN children's learning achievements and their social and personal development are complex. Consequentially, at times there is a dilemma for teachers in the balance they seek 'between acknowledging and responding to pupils' special education needs while at the same time trying to ensure that they have access to the full range of curricular experiences' (Beveridge, 1999:71).

►*Challenges, Visions, Dilemmas and Tensions*

Many leaders feel strongly about the tensions that need to be balanced between internal requirements and external pressures, often resulting from government initiatives, that may hinder or assist the progress of schools (Dunford et al, 2000). According to Scott (1994) over the past decade, professional judgement in schools has become increasingly politicized and problematic. 'Politicized because of the structures of public accountability that now surround it and problematic because of the unresolved tensions between these structures and the ways in which professionals have traditionally exercised their judgement' (Nixon & Rudduck 1994:105). The dilemmas created in schools by what often appear to be somewhat fragmented and contradictory government policies may be insoluble (Wearmouth, 2001). School based research studies such as Campbell-Evans (1988), Raun (1994) and Begley (1988) suggest that expert/successful leaders' basic human values and professional values dominate their decision making. Furthermore, they are inclined to make greater use of their values to solve complex problems, and 'give greater weight to the consequences of their decisions for students and; are guided more by their role responsibilities' (Day & Leithwood, 2007:10).

From the literature we find that much of the schools' effective research concludes that vision was an important aspect of school success and identified school leaders as critical contributors to its development and implementation (Dimmock 1993; Adair 2002;

Handy 1993; Brighouse & Woods 2003; and Stoll & Fink 1996). Vision defines not what we are, but rather what we seek to be or do (Colton, 1985).   Therefore the management of externally imposed change can create tensions about how best to introduce positive change within a school and the link between values internally generated and externally imposed.   This dilemma reflects the position of many headteachers as they find themselves caught between sets of imperatives for changes – internal and external (MacBeath et al, 2000).   In many cases the external impetus for change derives from government legislation, DfES, OFSTED and/or LEAs.   Changes that are externally imposed often require the head to interpret incoming policy documents before they can inform staff so as they may be understood, interpreted and actioned appropriately.   How heads do this depends on a number of factors including, leadership style, and the role of the senior leadership team.   The internal imperatives, on the other hand, are a complex mixture of school based factors, ie., the given needs and conflicts of a particular school, some of which would exist irrespective of the leadership approach adopted.

As a consequence of the complex nature of leadership and management in schools, headteachers are inclined to find themselves managing a set of tensions and eventually navigating specific problems (Day et al, 1999). The way in which people conceive their roles, shapes how they think, act and feel (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Within this matrix of dilemmas and tensions, leaders are managing the need to maintain a school, develop it and also to deal with the different value sets, external and internally driven about what constitutes appropriate forms of development and school improvement. Therefore the limit that this role places on their autonomy and decision making, combined with the visibility and public nature of their loss of control, may serve to undermine their moral authority as leaders as they seek to justify what others may view as the unjustifiable. The literature indicates that the field of education offers many examples of the dilemma between institutionalization and responsiveness (Pfeffer, 1981).   According to Kean (1988:128) 'the problems in the world have partly been created by people. Thus there is no problem that people cannot solve.'   Nevertheless, a decision is usually a choice between alternatives, but rarely a choice between right and wrong. In many cases it is a choice between two courses of action, neither of which is provably more right than the other, nor necessarily based on pure facts. In real life, a fact is often in the eye of the beholder, whilst decisions are largely based on opinions (Horton, 1992).

Ball (1990a:154) judges that 'political, ideologically-loaded decisions are choked by bureaucratic-administrative systems and attempts are made to displace issues of moral and cultural identity with the imperatives of administrative efficacy.'

> There often arise quarrels between theories, or, more generally lines of thought, which are not rival solutions of the same problem, but rather solutions or would-be solutions of different problems, and which, none the less, seem to be irreconcilable with one another. In disputes of this kind, it is often found that one and the same thinker, is strongly inclined to champion both sides and yet, at the same time, support the other. This thinker is both well satisfied with the logical credentials of each of the two points of view, and sure that one of them must be totally wrong if the other is even largely right. The internal administration of each seems to be impeccable but their diplomatic relations with one another seem to be internecine. (Ryle, 1953:1)

In order to act purposefully, leaders must make choices. Therefore, leaders need to be able to make some calculation of the likely consequences of the different courses that are open to them (Downey & Kelly, 1978). These calculations cannot be made by reference to particular experiences, but based on the general conclusions those particular experiences have led them to make. Under these circumstances 'abstract accounts tend towards tidy generalities and often fail to capture the messy realities of influence, pressure, dogma, expediency, conflict, compromise, intransigence, resistance, error, opposition and pragmatism in the policy process'(Ball, 1990b:9).

Thus the challenges of leading and managing independent special schools in an environment that favours inclusion and views special schools as segregative are more likely to derive from the disarray arising from shortfalls within national policy as opposed to the tidy expediencies of its general implementation. The next section of this review moves on to consider the extent to which issues of accountability both external and internal to schools have impact and influence upon the leadership and management function. Of specific interest is how this issue might manifest into challenges for leaders and managers in special schools, especially those placed within in the

independent sector.

Accountability

One of the main objectives of accountability as it relates to special schools, whether it derives from an external or internal source, is to ensure that children with SEN reach their full potential. The imposition of accountability can therefore determine that people are accountable, answerable, are liable and behold specific responsibility for certain actions and outcomes. According to the literature, there are many meanings surrounding the term accountability which is described as meaning 'another name for whom to blame if things go wrong' (Tyack, 2003:123). Being accountable is associated with being liable and being required to give an account or explanation of actions and where appropriate, to suffer the consequences, or undertake to put matters right if errors have been made (Oliver, 1991). In other words, accountability is both 'explanatory and amendatory' (Turpin, 1990:421-2) and by association is closely related to responsibility, transparency, answerability and responsiveness, and these terms, according to Oliver (1991) are often used interchangeably.

Accountability is about being obliged to deliver an account as well as being able to do so (Sockett, 1980). Furthermore the term accountability denotes responsibility for adherence to codes of practice rather than outcomes and in these cases answerability is for due process rather than the results of professional responsiveness (Scott, 1989). Within this context, whereas 'responsiveness is freely arrived at, accountability is imposed from outside, the first concept subsumes the second, it is a much broader idea' (p17). Accountability also refers to the fact that decision-makers do not enjoy unlimited autonomy but have to justify their actions (Held & Koenig-Archibugi, 2005). Therefore choices have to be made about the balance between the different forms of accountability. Deliberations as to the consequences from different forms of accountability such as legal and political accountability form the basis from where it is judged whether a number of forms of accountability can be accommodated in parallel (Oliver, 1991). Thus, issues of control and accountability are central to understanding how education systems work (Scott, 1994).

According to the literature accountability is also defined in terms of 'discretionary judgments, calculated risk, and entrepreneurial ventures' (Kearns, 1996:xv). At times,

accountability is also described in terms of administrative advocacy, when government and non-profit professionals interpret and communicate the needs of citizens to higher authorities who have the power and resources to meet those needs (Kearns, 1996). In other words, accountability can be any situation in which individuals who exercise power are expected to be constrained and in fact are reasonably constrained by external means, and to a degree by internal norms (McKinney & Howard, 1998). The imposition of external constraints and the internalization of norms and the problems associated with each of these dimensions of accountability are therefore likely to result in tensions between freedoms and constraints.

With regards to freedom and accountability it seems that accountability cannot be imposed or demanded, but occurs as an inevitable outgrowth of freedom because we account for what we choose and what we claim as our own. As long as we think accountability is to be avoided and thereby requires force to bring it into being, we are unintentionally creating a breeding ground for entitlement' (Koestenbaum & Block, 2001). When others try to hold us accountable we are inclined to double our efforts to claim what is ours should be given special treatment. Nevertheless, the politics of education must not be mistaken for education politics because there are differences. According to Dale (1994) the politics of education means 'the agenda for education and the processes and structures through which it is created, while education politics are the processes whereby this agenda is translated into problems and issues for schools, and schools' responses to those problems and issues,' (Dale, 1994:35). Consequently, there must be political entrepreneurs with the ability and incentive to invest in the formulation of institutions and the monitoring and enforcement of rules (Held & Koenig-Archibugi, 2005).

In both the public and non-profit sectors, 'trends towards customer satisfaction, quality management, and cost-effectiveness [have had] profound impact on how accountability is defined and measured' (Kearns, 1996:3). Accordingly, accountability is viewed as having many dimensions and meaning different things to different people. There are a number of different accountability mechanisms of importance which range from 'professional/peer accountability, public reputational accountability, market accountability, fiscal/financial accountability, and legal accountability' (Held & Koenig-Archibugi, 2005:75-81). Other dimensions of accountability, to name but a

few, consist of democratic, managerial and legal accountability (White & Hollingsworth 1999). Wong & Nicotera (2007:36) add to the list with other models of accountability, such as those which incur 'political: bureaucratic, professional, market and moral accountabilities'. Wong & Nicotera argue that at times, differing models of accountability are likely to conflict one upon the other. For example, political accountability is likely to conflict with bureaucratic accountability when local constituents insist on greater involvement in decision making. Professional accountability is likely to clash with bureaucratic accountability when agency functionaries ignore or mistrust professional standards of good practice. Likewise market accountability is likely to compete with moral accountability when experiments in mission-driven and market-based schooling confront the ethical obligation to educate all students, including those with disabilities.

In studies of accountability in education undertaken in the late 1970s and early 1980s for example, Elliott, 1981a, 1981b; Becher et al, 1981, there was found to be a difference between those who regarded accountability as self-regulation, in terms of, teachers' responsibility to themselves as professionals, to their colleagues or professional associates, pupils, parents, and to society at large: and those who regarded accountability in education as something which was externally imposed; through contractual obligation, inspection, testing and other regulatory mechanisms. There were also two different perspectives among those who regarded accountability as a process of self-regulation. One perspective defined accountability in terms of moral obligation: which emphasised giving voluntary accounts of decisions or practices; and another which saw it as being called to account (Poulsom, 1998). The accountability environment is a 'constellation of forces – legal, political, socio-cultural and economic – that place pressure on organizations and the people who work in them to engage in certain activities and refrain from engaging in others' (Kearns, 1996:29). Nevertheless, 'it is the combined effects of the mechanisms, context, content, and structure that explain the intended and unintended outcomes of educational policy and the gap so often reported between policy and practice' (Scott, 1994:3).

It is difficult to reconcile the closely entwined concepts of autonomy and accountability (Edwards, 1991) because it rests with the degree to which accountability and autonomy are applied in relation to each other. Therefore a balance between the twin demands of

both may be required in order to ensure that people work simultaneously within guidelines and with a degree of independence. It is often the case that notions of choice, ownership and self-management, happen behind a smoke screen of apparent 'freedom and choice,' (Smyth, 1993:7). However, autonomy is regarded as one of the principal educational aims and can be defined in various ways, relating to different levels of human rationality. 'Firstly, that which is society determined, secondly, that of society determined aims, but allowing citizens to choose aims amongst that set (defined as a weak autonomy), and thirdly, where society is allowed to choose the aims that they set whether approved by society or not (defined as a strong autonomy)' (Winch & Gingell, 1999:21-22). Schools enjoy significant discretion or autonomy when the decentralisation of power is to the institutional level rather than to the regional or local (Grace, 1995). However, where the choice of accountability criteria is made largely by one group, for example, the government, and when it conflicts with teacher professionalism or ideas of child-centred schooling, Grace records this as a 'dysfunction' to school leadership.

All independent schools in England and Wales, are required to register with the DfES and similar to their mainstream counterparts are required to undergo regular inspections by approved inspectors as determined by the mandatory requirements of the DfES. The DfES lays down certain minimum standards and can make schools remedy any unacceptable features of their building or instruction, as well as excluding any unsuitable teacher or school proprietor. Whereas maintained schools are inspected by the Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED), independent schools are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) which operates under the auspices of OFSTED. Approved and non-maintained independent special schools are an exception to this rule and are inspected by OFSTED as public money pays the school fees for the students who are placed by LEAs. According to Teachernet (1), special schools are four times more likely to be made subject to special measures than are mainstream schools. The report also confirms that 2.2 per cent of special schools require special measures, compared to 1 per cent of primary schools and 1.7 per cent of secondary schools, and the most common reasons they suggest are poor leadership and management, inadequately challenging or relevant curricula, and/or a breach in statutory duties, for example, on health and safety.

Impacting accountability upon independent schools also stems from the control on charities in the UK by the Charity Commission, insomuch as in the vast majority of cases, English independent schools are registered charities and as such they are required to be non-profit making in a commercial sense, and any surplus made has to be put back into the charity by its trustees, (Independent Schools Council, 1999). In this respect, their situation is not dissimilar to that of maintained schools in England and Wales operating under 'Local Management of Schools' (LMS) where any surplus on the accounts for any financial year has to be put back into the school and carried over into the next year. Currently, however, the issue of charitable status for independent schooling has acquired an important political dimension as in 2006, the government introduced the Charities Act 2006 which removed the presumption that independent schools, as educational organisations provided public benefit as 'deliverers of education' and in place laid a requirement upon independent schools and other charities to prove evidence of how and the extent to which they provided benefit to the public. However, 'despite the body of legislation that entrenches independent schools' right of existence and their right to charitable status they remain under constant threat of political interference' (Boyd, 1998:34). It therefore seems that private non-profit organizations are being subjected to the same type of scrutiny once reserved for government organizations (Kearns, 1996). Key to the successful leadership and management of special schools is therefore the way in which such accountabilities are balanced.

Balancing Accountabilities

Leaders and managers in special schools have regard for their accountability to students, their students' parents/guardians, their own professionalism and their accountability to the larger community and government. Although accountabilities often concur with each other, for they all have the same objective of ensuring a student's potential is achieved, they are also prone to consist of contradictions, tensions and dispute about the way in which this is undertaken. According to Woodhouse (1994) accountability should be seen as a whole, having regard to the proper relationship between internal (departmental) and external (public) accountability. Those factors which are internal and those which are external to the school and which impact upon performance are difficult to separate one from the other, (Scott, 1994). From their research Bottery &

Wright (2000) have found that schools rated internal factors more highly than any of the external factors (including legislative influence) and in particular schools rated curriculum influences most highly. According to the professional identities project conducted by Moore (2004) teachers are frequently aware of ideological contradictions in their work which resulted in them being involved in difficult decisions regarding competing ideologies. External accountabilities and internal factors may therefore need to be balanced between all interested parties and present some of the greater challenges of leadership and management in schools.

Power and politics are inevitable and important parts of administrative activity, whether or not power is generalizable across decision issues is an empirical question, not a matter of definition (Pfeffer, 1981). Power and politics in an organisation is all about who gets what, when and how according to Lasswell (1936) and this is still an applicable interpretation in today's accountability environment. Power is a relation among social actors in which one social actor can get 'another to do something that would not otherwise have been done' (Dahl, 1957:202-203). Accordingly, the power of a social actor within the organisation therefore derives from that actor's ability to cope with uncertainty and it is the relationship between criticality and the use of power that can be used to see what issues an organization defines as critical (Pfeffer, 1981). It is the case that external structural factors often act as constraints on individual action (Bennett et al, 2003).

Legal requirements such as health and safety legislation and laws relating to child protection both place direct structural obligations on organizational decision makers and act as definitions of proper and appropriate behaviour by organizational members. Hence, organizational structures define both constraints and the formal relationships within which individual members of the organization may take action. Consequently the internalisation of norms as an alternative to external imposition of rules is dependent upon a high degree of consensus amongst a school staff and thus dissent can present serious problems (Hoyle, 1986). External drivers arise from policy interventions and edicts that require compliance. The decision makers of organizations are therefore required to address the external constraints upon the organization against the 'tensions [that] exist as the result of internal drives, linked to philosophy, vision and a deeper-

seated notion of what special education means or should be' (Rayner & Ribbins, 1999:36).

In comparison, internal accountability, according to Kogan (1986) is rather more complex, as this form of accountability not only captures a consumerist model of accountability to students and parents arriving from a free market, but also a moral and professional model of accountability in dealing with self interests. It is argued that education is much too expensive not to be held accountable (Drucker, 1993). Unlike external accountability which is fundamentally gained through processes, procedures and documentation, internal accountability often comprises the social aspects, processes and outcomes from the organization. Whereas moral accountability necessitates decision makers to question the purpose and extent to which they are accountable to a range of audiences: their professional accountability is more likely to derive from their areas of responsibility. Frequently headteachers are therefore finding themselves 'positioned uneasily between those outside of schools instigating and promoting changes and their own staff within school who will ultimately have to deliver them' (Harris et al, 2003:13). Hence, headteachers, and those around them, are increasingly aware of being caught between these two sets of drivers (Harris et al, 2003).

External control mechanisms seek to influence internal operations (Fuhrman & Elmore, 2004). Just as individuals operate within schools, schools are nested within larger systems and environments. An emphasis on external accountability has had impact on the ways in which professionalism has been conceptualised by governments and by teachers themselves in the micro-political contexts of individual schools. For example, policy and initiative documentation can act as mechanisms of accountability and feature as ways of regulating autonomy, bringing changes in managerial philosophy, restructuring rethinking pedagogy and as a means of understanding and interpretation.

MacBeath (1998) regards improving the micro-efficiency of schools as a means of addressing the macro-problems of the state and society. New accountability approaches, by their very nature, seek to influence from the outside what goes on inside schools. Moreover, such policies assume that external forces can play a determining role in changing the internal workings of schools. The limitations of such assumptions, however, have provided grist for the vast literature on policy implementation in

education. Literature on the implementation of policies over the past three decades is provided by Berman & McLaughlin (1977); Goertz, Floden & O'Day (1995); McLaughlin (1987); Spillane (2000); and Weatherly & Lipsky (1977). The heart of the issue is the problematic relationship between external accountability and how this is mediated by headteachers with internal sources of control and the consequential implications for organizational learning and improvement. Such professional models of leadership lay particular stress on autonomy (Scott, 1994). However, it is the scope leaders and managers enjoy between their respective external and internal pressures that are likely to cause them to balance and actively seek solutions between accountability, the autonomy of teachers and the control of education. What this all means for independent special schools in the future in discussed in the next concluding section.

Implications for the Future

It is likely that the future of special education will be influenced by many factors. Among these is the extent to which aspirations to include all (whatever this is specified to mean in different contexts) enhance or erode the knowledge and skills of those presently working with pupils with SEN: and hence raise or lower the quality; of teaching and learning for pupils with SEN (Farrell, 2004). The context of uncertainty may provide special education with new opportunities for continuing its historical purpose to represent the interests of those learners who become marginalised within existing educational arrangements. According to Ainscow (2002) it seems that key themes for educating children with SEN will include:

- 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
- The 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
- Leadership challenges arising from inspections
- Problems relating to target setting and progress monitoring
- Support for special schools following critical inspections

Implications for the future of independent special schools will undoubtedly arise from government initiatives and possibly from ill thought out policy planning. Over the last 20 years the view has been taken that 'increasing accountability of practitioners will enhance educational outputs and thus make the nation more successful in the global economy' (Male, 1999:32). In contrast, the Secondary Heads Association has argued that school accountability is very much greater than is necessary, and this over-accountability is having the effect of increasing bureaucracy and acts as a disincentive to creativity. Potentially, it is this over-accountability of schools dealing with challenging circumstances, which illustrates the complications of balancing pressure upon and support for all schools. The pressure-support axis describes a continuum with, at the one end, a high level of support from the system and on the other extremely strong pressure. External pressure will always be necessary to maintain the attention for this internal concern about quality, but it should not result in too much pressure (MacBeath, 2000).

External pressure on schools in the future will seek to improve the internal learning process and encourage headteachers to focus on objectives directed at teaching and learning (Male, 1999). Each school will be expected to fulfil its educational mission and to focus on that mission as its first and over-riding priority, 'as opposed to following a rule-book of government regulation' (Beare, 2001:67). However, it is expected that the next decades will make unprecedented demands, which will be external ones as well as internal ones. Externally there will be a need for new thinking and radical innovations in the relationship between national governments, their regional organisations and other different regions (Drucker, 1993). All educators are now under pressure 'to consider the consequences for their organisations of inadequate performance on quality measures, and adhere to organisational requirements through ever-increasing scrutiny' (Harris et al, 2003).

As more SEN resources are delegated to schools to support early intervention, it is critical that appropriate accountability arrangements are put in place so that parents may be confident that their child is receiving the provision they need whether or not they have a statement (Archer, MST:2004). Local authorities are expected to play a critical role in monitoring this and in future government has recently made it clear that special

schools will continue to exist, although probably in smaller numbers and with a modified role. The vision is of a unified system whereby the distinction between mainstream and special schools is subsumed in a wider community of schools within which pupils and teachers move more freely according to their needs and expertise. Hence 'the complexity of headship in the future will rely upon the judgements and decision-making being made at the right time, in the right way and involving the right people' (Barker, MST:2004).

According to the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) special schools must be seen as part of the move towards greater inclusion and not separate from it. Special schools have a vital and continuing role to play and although inclusive schooling does work for some, special schools are uniquely placed to serve the needs of their own children as well as benefiting mainstream schools (Croner, 2003:Issue 25). However, as inclusion advances, teachers will be required to improve their skills and demonstrate their ability to meet a wider range of needs. Special schools will therefore need to ensure that they are aware of what other schools are doing in this field and that teachers are trained and supported appropriately. According to the Chris Webb-Jenkins writing in Managing Schools Today (MST) the area of SEN is expected to continue to be as sensitive as it is important, and it not expected that a complete consensus will ever be reached as to what is the best form of provision for meeting the needs of all SEN children. 'Whilst government policy continues to lean towards inclusion, the potential challenges to the leadership and management of special schools will be in terms of 'ensuring that suitable SEN provision is made for every child who needs it' (MST, 2006).

The future context of independent special schools is therefore likely to be of an increasing partnership between the maintained and independent sectors so as to widen access to the educational and other opportunities provided by charitable independent special schools and thus affording by them a greater public benefit to society. Charitable status underpins the social purpose of these schools and is what integrates them into society. According to the Independent Schools Council (ISC), there is a huge amount of good will towards partnerships with the maintained sector and LEAs and crucially, at this point in time this effort is voluntary, and is part of social purpose. However, in the future the choice might be between a socially engaged charitable sector

or a strictly commercial one, that has little or no interest in seeking partnerships or in helping the maintained sector, (ISC: 2006).

Generation of the Research Questions

The theme of the enquiry as cited in Chapter 1 was to research the challenges associated with leading and managing special schools. The literature has determined a number of issues with relation to the role of independent special schools due to national policy and issues associated with the accountability of independent schools and their perceived freedoms. The generation of the research questions followed a line of questioning that encompassed challenges from the following perspectives.

The role: What is, and what is likely to be the role of independent schools in view of the governments' inclusion programmes and their implementation? The move towards inclusion has meant that schools will need to change (Clark et al, 1997). For special schools this has meant the need to refocus their role (Cheminais, 2003). However, the role available to special schools is highly dependent upon society aspirations regarding whether inclusive rather than segregated education is best for students with SEN. In truth, is it purely a matter of inclusive or segregated education or is it a deeper rooted more complex matter of where the student will be happiest and make most progress? The literature indicates that organisation survival is reliant upon a series of exchanges between the organisation and its environment (Mullins, 1996). This has been reflected in special education by government policy which has left special schools with uncertainty about their role, as effectively the inclusion strategy, if successfully implemented, threatens to take away the traditional niche held by special schools to educate students with SENs. This situation has significant implications for special schools in the independent sector as they are reliant on maintaining pupil numbers for their income and hence their economic survival. However, the literature appears critical of the progress that has been made regarding the government's implementation of the inclusion strategy (CSIE, 2005a) and therefore is possibly reflected in the extent to which their role has needed to change and in the leadership and management practices of these schools.

Leadership, strategy and management: What are the main challenges faced by leaders and managers of independent special schools?   Conflict is a continuing characteristic of school leadership (Begley & Johansson, 2003). The literature suggests that educational policy is currently being driven by economic imperatives and as such there is a need to clarify educational priorities (Elliott, 2001).   The literature also suggests that insufficient attention is paid to the policy and economic context within which educational leadership is practised (Bottery, 2004). If the role of special schools has changed, or not changed, to what extent is this issue reflected in the challenges of the leadership and management of these schools?   Special schools have distinctive features, and as a consequence possibly distinctive challenges when mediating government policy (Rayner & Ribbins, 1999).   Leaders and managers of independent special schools employ a diverse workforce of not only teachers, but therapists, nurses and care workers.   In what ways, then is leading and managing in independent special schools different to leading and managing in other schools?   What challenges do they face with regards to achieving their strategic objectives or assuring the appropriateness of their curriculum and pedagogy?   Leadership texts are often overtly framed with managerial government policy (Thrupp & Willmott, 2001) and therefore the impact of accountability is likely to also have causal effects on the arising challenges for the leadership and management of these schools to resolve.

The Impact of Accountability: In what ways do external accountabilities impact and present challenges to the leadership and management of independent special schools? The literature affirms that **i**ndependent schools are subject to the pressures of both the state and the marketplace (Tapper, 1997) and **e**xternal accountability impacts in the micro-political contexts of individual schools in different ways Drucker (1993).   It appears that it is common that schools often find it difficult to make substantial improvements due to being constantly asked to implement new programs and practices in response to changing legislation and policies (Hess, 1999). Therefore, to what extent and how does the imposition of external accountabilities present challenges to those employed in independent special schools? Despite the impingement of external forces, the literature suggests that educational leaders still find it possible to retain their deeper personal values and practices (Day et al, 2000: Moore et al, 2002: Gold et al, 2003). The impact of certain external accountabilities therefore provides the challenge whereby there is a need for leaders and managers to mediate government policy so as to merge

with their own internal imperatives and values.

Balancing accountabilities: To what extent are leaders and managers challenged due to the need to balance externally imposed accountabilities with the internal interests of their schools? External control mechanisms essentially exist to influence internal operations (Fuhrman & Elmore, 2004). The literature indicates that leaders feel strongly about the tensions that need to be balanced between internal requirements and external pressures, which often result from government initiatives that may hinder or assist the progress of schools (Dunford, 2000: Edwards, 1991). To what extent and how do leaders and managers of independent special schools rise to the challenge of balancing internal/external imperatives? Are external accountabilities influential upon the internal workings of schools and decisions made by these leaders and managers? Leaders and managers may at times need to dig deep in order to balance their external accountabilities with the school's internal imperatives. This is likely to include them in critically questioning their own moral values as well as their professional ones and as such was judged likely to tease out more deeply and be enlightening about what it is like to be leader and manager of an independent special school and the implications for these schools in the years ahead.

Implications and challenges in the future: What is the nature of developing and unfolding implications that may present themselves as challenges to leaders and managers of independent special schools in the future? The future of special schools is likely to be determined by the emerging issues from inclusion as well as from any future developments (Atfield & Williams, 2003). Long term planning may be difficult if there is uncertainty about the path these schools should follow due to the limits of their role. Currently the Secondary Heads Association deem that school accountability is very much greater than is necessary. How will the impact of accountability present implications and challenges for leaders and managers of independent special schools to resolve in the future? What issues are viewed as remaining the same? The final avenue of the research investigation was therefore to seek understanding as to what a selected number of leaders and managers employed in independent special schools thought were their likely challenges in the years ahead.

The five main objectives of this research therefore set out to discover what a selected number of leaders and managers of independent special schools understand in terms of:

1. What is the role that is expected of an independent special school?

2. What are the main challenges of leading and managing independent special schools?

3. In what ways do external accountabilities impact and present challenges to the leadership and management of independent special schools?

4. To what extent are leaders and managers challenged due to the need to balance externally imposed accountabilities with the internal interests of their schools?

5. What is the nature of developing and unfolding implications that may present themselves as challenges to leaders and managers of independent special schools in the future?

Conclusion

The literature has indicated that the implementation of government policy on inclusion has not been as successful as the government had hoped and LEAs are continuing to find the need to place certain children in independent special schools. Therefore despite government rhetoric and the implementation of the inclusion programme independent special schools are still continuing to play a significant part in educating SEN children, and creating solutions between the requirements placed upon them from a diversity of external accountability and the requirement to mediate such policies within the internal interests of school communities. These concerns were informed by the literature and served as the basis from which an appropriate methodology and research questioning was developed. The next chapter identifies the methodology used for this research investigation and details how it was developed.

CHAPER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research has been to gain an understanding about the nature of challenges that arise for the leadership and management of independent special schools. This involved seeking perspectives on the role that is now expected of these schools since the national strategy of inclusion has been introduced and the extent to which externally imposed accountabilities conflicts and presents challenges that need to be balanced by their leaders and managers. With this notion in mind, a further objective of this research was to clarify what this meant in terms of any consequences and implications for independent special schools in the longer term. Therefore the content of the data required for analysis was judged to be the experiences and interpretations of those involved with the leadership and management function in these schools at all levels of the organisation. In keeping with gathering data of people's accounts and experiences the research was approached using a qualitative method. The study consisted of undertaking twenty-one face-to-face interviews, eighteen of which were carried out in special schools and three with representatives of LEAs whose responsibility included the placing of students with SEN in appropriate schools. The methodological framework described in this chapter gives details of the demographical location of the study and includes the eligibility of schools and their staff to participate, and why there was a need to ensure diversity in the sizes of the participating schools and medical models of SEN that were represented in the research.

Consistent with undertaking qualitative research, this investigation was undertaken as an empirical, phenomenological study, collecting interpretative accounts of the research problem from participants using the technique of interview. This approach to research enabled a wealth of subjective data from stakeholders in schools and LEAs to be gathered and developed into a deep and rich data base from which critical interpretation could be made. This method addressed the research problem from both the micro-level and meso-level of the organisational structures involved in SEN education by gathering accounts from staff in three approved independent special schools and three that operated as non-maintained special schools (NMS). Differing medical models of SEN were represented by schools that specialised in educating children with physical

disabilities, severe and profound deafness, severe learning difficulties as well as specific learning difficulties as well as other associated difficulties were represented in the research. From each of these schools, data was gathered from three key persons, namely the headteacher, a deputy head and a classroom teacher using semi-structured, open-ended questioning. Each interview undertaken was digitally recorded and notes taken during the interview. After each interview each digital recording was transcribed into a Word document to facilitate the transcription and quality of the data. Documentary evidence was used to triangulate the data and this involved the content analysis of The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) reports of each of the participating schools so as to consider the impact from these two particular sources of external accountability.

The grounds for applying a qualitative approach is detailed in the following sections of this chapter which commences with the research philosophy, the methodology which supported the way in which the research was undertaken, and how the design framework was developed. Following sections describe how the validity of the research was assured and why face to face interviews were chosen in preference to other forms of instrumentation. The concluding sections of this chapter describe the process whereby schools and participants were invited to participate in this research study, the research ethics and the context of the participant researcher.

Philosophy

According to Dewey (1916) education is [extensively] concerned with the development of distinctly human capacities of knowing, understanding, judging and behaving intelligently. Thus, the interactions between education, economy, society, culture and politics can give life to broad generalizations and explain the uniqueness of each system (McLean, 1995). According to McLean, all education systems need to be judged on their capacity 'to develop areas of morality, rationality and personal-cultural authenticity and consequently at times educational goals, may appear conflicting rather than complementary' (McLean, 1995:5-6). The phenomenological approach to research is particularly conducive to understanding the constructs people use in everyday life to make sense of their world and supported by the writings of Schutz (1967) who details how 'the phenomenologist attempts to see things from the person's point of view' (cited

in Bogdan & Taylor, 1975:14). Thus the phenomenological approach is concurrent with naturalistic inquiry, which has a concern with meanings (Cohen et al, 2001) and gives 'priority to people and their actions' (Hoyle, 1986:10-16). Although one form of criticism of organisation theory according to Hoyle is that the process of schooling cannot be understood by reference to the characteristics of schools as organisations but by reference to the social, political and economic characteristics of society.

The literature reminds us that it is the purposes of the research that determine the methodology and the research design, in other words, the approach must match the objectives of the study (Cohen et al, 2001). As this research was heavily weighted upon the interpretation of experiences and reflections of practitioners the approach to this empirical study seemed best suited to a phenomenological, interpretative way of researching which blends more freely than objectivity with practitioners' feelings, their expected differing experiences and/or individual reflections. The phenomenological approach therefore not only offered the capability to capture data that was detailed, rich and complex but also presented an opportunity to deal with diversity and complexity in the collection and interpretation of data. Thus approaching the study in a phenomenological manner allowed the latitude to investigate and interpret the nature of challenges that are faced by leaders and managers of independent special schools from both the social and political perspectives of schooling. The interpretative approach to research also offered the scope to research a multi-dimensional picture about the research problem by gaining layers of meaning and perspectives from practitioners involved in differing aspects of SEN education.

By taking an interpretative approach to this research study it was recognised there would be a number of truths that emerged depending upon individual participants' perspectives and these perspectives required critical interpretation. Therefore mindful of this pitfall, the research methodology was built upon a phenomenological framework conducive with the gathering of interpretative data that best suited 'interpretative explanations' (Cohen et al, 2001:29-34).

Methodology

The qualitative approach to humanistic enquiry facilitates data to be collected that brings understanding and meaning to the studied phenomena (Cohen et al, 2001). Words, especially organized into 'incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavour that often proves far more convincing to a reader – another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner, than pages of summarized numbers' (Miles & Huberman, 1994:1). The literature informs us that, in qualitative research, detailed consideration should be given to the holistic picture in which the research topic is embedded (Morrison 2002). Furthermore, the qualitative approach to research is also advocated as being conducive to research which is discovering the happening of an event (Anderson & Arsenault, 2001). This situation is comparable to the research study under scrutiny which set out to discover 'understandings and report how or why people behave as they do' (Marvasti, 2004:3). Qualitative research is viewed as having greater focus on the reflexive, or the give-and-take relationship between social theory and methods (Marvasti, 2004). The literature suggests that this approach does not lead itself to covering laws, but rather to a practical understanding of meanings and actions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This research was ultimately a study of school leadership and management which was brought into a relationship with wider political movements in society, in the way it gave focus to the pressures, challenges and associated responses connected with leading and managing independent special schools. The strength of a qualitative approach, according to the literature is that it is holistic, insomuch as it strives to record the multiple interpretations and meanings given to situations and events, (Brock-Utne, 1996). Nevertheless, 'learning through experience cannot guarantee knowledge, but it may be a precondition of it' (Winch & Gingell, 1999:91).

One of the characteristics and strengths of qualitative research is being able to probe the detail and nuances of a situation in depth and from a number of angles (Hammersley, 1993). Thereby applying this approach enabled differing perspectives to be explored more easily. According to Hammersley, qualitative research also allows for the complexities in situations to be revealed rather than reducing them to measures. This scope was essential for the researcher in order to identify the conceivably varying challenges that are currently being faced by leaders and managers of independent special schools. In working within an interpretative framework, it was expected that the

data to be gathered would likely be value-laden in terms of accounts of internal interests and personal preferences. Therefore again the setting of this research with a qualitative approach was most suited for the conveying of interpretative feelings and emotions as well as normative data about the research problem.

The setting of the research problem in independent special schools against the context a national policy of inclusion formed a strong rationale for undertaking the research inquiry. Using a qualitative approach aided the research by providing a contextualised framework within which the researched topic could be interpreted and judged, (Hammersley, 1993). Furthermore, setting the research using a qualitative method, according to Hammersley was more likely to challenge the researcher and demand further exploration rather than being an end in itself. This was particularly applicable to this study also, insomuch as the researcher's aim was not only to seek perspectives from those employed in schools, but also to seek other perspectives about the research problem from those working in Local Education Authorities in order to add to the dimensions of the emerging data collected. Hence the qualitative approach was a particularly conducive way of creating a rich data base from which critical interpretation could be made. Furthermore, collecting data in a qualitative manner, according to Hammersley, encourages creative thinking and also encourages dialogue between the emerging data and the researcher, thereby aiding the quality of critical interpretation of the findings and conclusion to the research.

The word qualitative implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that form and shape the research study. Critics of quantitative research argue that experiments, official statistics and survey data may simply be inappropriate to some of the tasks of social science. For instance they exclude the observation of behaviour in everyday situations (Cicourel, 1964; Denzin, 1970; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Gibrium, 1988). Nevertheless, the fact that quantitative measures are a feature of some good qualitative research shows that the whole qualitative/quantitative dichotomy is open to question (Silverman, 2000).

In summary therefore the adoption of a qualitative, phenomenological approach to research enabled this specific research problem to be studied in a comprehensive and full manner by enabling data, consisting of subjective matter such as beliefs, attitudes, experiences and perceptions to be methodically collected and meticulously interpreted from differing dimensional layers and perspectives. A quantitative approach would not have suited the gathering of the interpretive data, and furthermore basic quantitative information about independent special schools can be found from either the National Statistics Office, or the Department for Education and Skills. Quantitative data for this purpose would have therefore added little knowledge about what we know about how leaders and managers function within independent special schools. The belief that science can produce objective knowledge rests on two key assumptions: 'first the ontological assumption that there is an objective reality "out there" and secondly that it is possible to remove all subjectiveness and bias in the assessment of that reality' (Johnson & Duberley 2000:57). Therefore the phenomenological qualitative approach was considered the most suited way of fulfilling the research objective of gaining understandings into the challenges of leading and managing independent special schools, in terms of their role, the impact of accountability, the way in which accountabilities are balanced and the implications for independent special schools in the years ahead.

Locations and Samples

The selection of the location was influenced by the Independent Schools Council which listed in their published literature, independent schools alphabetically, within regions of the UK. It was therefore considered appropriate to view this research from a regional aspect and incorporate diversity by including a representation from counties within a region. To facilitate access and minimise financial costs, the choice of schools was limited to those residing in the southern counties, surrounding London and thereby were within one hour's travelling time for the researcher.

In considering the composition of a purposive sample of schools to participate in the research, differing types of SEN inclusive of both social and medical models were judged likely to have a bearing on the different ways in which issues presented themselves as challenges to the leaders and managers of independent special schools.

For example, schools that catered for students with behavioural difficulties might have greater focus on the social aspects of SEN, to educate their students on acceptable social behaviour. Whereas schools which catered for students across the autistic spectrum where their impetus might be centred on the medical features of SEN, and student mobility. Schools which offered boarding accommodation were expected by the researcher to have an extra impetus for providing moral education, acting in loco-parentis to the boarding student by providing a 'homely' environment and dealing with humanist issues, such as hygiene and friendships. All special schools are responsible to show evidence to their inspecting authorities, such as the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), or Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) that they are providing an appropriate education for the students they teach. Schools catering for differing types of SEN are therefore likely to be subject to differing challenges and thereby were viewed likely to have differing experiences to relate to the researcher. However, from the researcher's professional experience of SEN it was important not to try to ring-fence disabilities into specific or narrow categories as it is fairly common that many SEN students suffer with co-morbidity which is a complexity of difficulties which can extend across a range of disability boundaries. Nevertheless, such models of SEN were a starting point for the researcher when beginning her iterative engagement with the data.

►*The Selection of Schools*

Schools were located through reference to lists of independent schools supplied by the Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools (AGBIS) and the Independent Schools Council. Out of the 1,160 special schools listed, in England and Wales, 247 were independent special schools of which 98 were approved. Although only 39 per cent of independent special schools were approved, it was felt important to take a balanced approach to this research whereby the purposive samples should be drawn equally. A small sample of six schools was considered as constituting an appropriate number, as this allowed for the participation of a balance of three approved schools and three from schools without approved status. In each of these two categories, schools were also selected on the basis of their pupil numbers so as to show diversity in the size of school, from the large, to the middling and small. This approach helped the researcher to establish a balanced depth of data for the analysis of the findings. Hence,

schools were identified that could contribute not only because of their demographical location, and function as special schools, but also because they offered a diverse representation of SEN including the added feature that they all offered boarding accommodation. The selection criteria were based upon schools which were:

- Catering for 7 to 18 age students. The criteria incorporating age range similarities was adopted so as to minimise any anomalies that might be age specific between nursery, junior or secondary schools and therefore more easily allowed for comparisons between the participating schools.

- Sized to take between 25 and 255 students. This addressed the diversity of pupil numbers in schools, so as to ensure a purposive and diverse sample of participants from which to draw upon.

- Offering day and/or boarding placements. This allowed for a greater scope of detail gathering, stretching from the academic to the welfare impact of any external accountability issues that may be relevant to the research problem.

- Located within the southern counties. The criteria was set due to the researcher's limitations to access further-a-field schools and also to define a specific demographic location for the research.

- Representative of the sector whereby they were also listed as registered charities, for example, not for profit organisations. This was an explicit criterion as schools that were operating as profit making organisations were thought more likely to have different agendas than those operating as charitable establishments.

Schools were excluded if they were:

- Schools that were part of a larger group of schools. The decision to exclude these schools was taken because, the centralised element of their operations, was likely to be significantly different to other such stand-alone schools.

- Schools that were privately owned. This type of school was judged more likely to be profit making and therefore their agendas might be heavily informed by finance which would conflict with the Office of Fair Trading restrictions.

Resulting from the selection criteria, the following schools were invited and accepted their invitation to participate in the study and these schools therefore formed the basis from which participants were invited to be interviewed. Participating schools were:

Known as Greybridge Manor in the research, school 1 is an independent, co-educational, specialist school for dyslexic pupils aged 7 to 13. The school caters for 100 students who include both weekly boarders and day pupils and is defined as a SPLD school. Greybridge Manor is an approved school, it is registered as a charitable trust and inspected by both OFSTED and CSCI. In 1996, the school was recommended by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools as one of the top ten special schools in the country. Over 30 LEAs have supported pupil placements at the school and there are also pupils who are privately funded.

School 2 is referred to as Amberleigh Court in the research. Amberleigh Court is a co-educational day, weekly and full boarding school for children aged 7 to 13 years who suffer from dyslexia and associated learning difficulties and is defined as an SPLD school. Founded in 1988, nearly one third of students have a statement and a small number are funded by local authorities. It is approved under section 347 of the Education Act and is a registered charity. Currently there are 120 students on roll, of which a small number are full boarders. The school is inspected by both OFSTED and CSCI and serves in the research as the middling size of the group of three approved schools.

The third and largest of the approved group of schools with a pupil role of 245 is referred to as Hillcrest in the research, and is located in the M3 corridor. Hillcrest, founded in 1939 is a Catholic independent school that caters for boys aged 9 to 18 who suffer from speech and language difficulties, dyslexia and other associated learning difficulties. Approved under section 347 of the Education Act, it offers day, weekly and full boarding and is defined as a SPLD school. Just under half of their students are boarders and nearly one third of students have statements funded by local authorities. Hillcrest is a registered charity and is inspected by both OFSTED and CSCI.

School number 4 and first of the group of three non-maintained independent SEN schools is referred to as Oakhammer, and is a small special school which caters for children with visual impairment, emotional and behavioural difficulties and Epilepsy. Founded in 1988, it currently caters for 19 boys and 8 girls. All of their students have

statements and is classified as an SLD school. Oakhammer is a registered charity and is inspected by OFSTED and CSCI.

School number 5 known as The Lord Radleigh in this research is the second in the group of three non-maintained special schools. The Lord Radleigh caters for the care and education of young people with physical disabilities and is a registered charity. The school is co-educational, and currently caters for 110 residential students and 40 days students with an age range of 5 to 16 years. One hundred percent of their students have statements and the school is inspected by OFSTED and CSCI. The school is run by the Lord Radleigh Trust and has achieved 'Investors in People' status.

The sixth and final school making up this group is referred to in the research as Newton Heights. Newton Heights is a national co-educational grammar school for deaf children. It is set up as a non-maintained residential special school for children aged 11 to 19 years and is a registered charity. The school caters for boys and girls with profound or severe hearing losses, who are above average learning potential. The original school was founded in 1883, and currently there are 237 students on their roll. Newton Heights is subject to inspection by OFSTED and CSCI. Participants were then drawn from these six schools.

►*Respondent Selection*

The number of persons that should be invited to partake in the research presented the researcher with a number of further considerations. It was debatable whether it was better to have a larger number of participants engaging in shorter interviews, or involving a smaller number of participants engaging in more lengthy interviews. The approach to the research had to be realistic about the amount of time that teachers could be spared from their classrooms. The researcher decided to invite three persons from each school to partake in the study and judged that approximately forty five minutes for each interview would be a realistic time to be afforded by interviewees. The selection of these three persons also presented options to the researcher for participants to be: a) randomly selected participants, b) headteacher selected participants or c) researcher selected participants. The choice of researcher selected participants was applied so as to allow for greater consistency to the research approach. The remaining issue to be

resolved was the range of perspectives that needed to be captured. Perspectives from different roles was viewed the most likely to offer a diversity of interpretive accounts. Consequently in order to capture elements of leadership and management throughout the school organisation the researcher chose to invite the headteacher, a deputy headteacher and one classroom teacher from each school to engage in an interview.

►►*Headteachers*

Headteachers were selected for interview because of their involvement in interpreting accountability initiatives and then deciding how such initiatives should be implemented in their schools. As headteachers, their leadership and management role was considered to give them a unique opportunity to assemble a holistic picture of their organisation. Due to their position they were likely to possess understanding upon both the external accountabilities placed upon them as well as the internal requirements from staff, the meeting of their students needs, and/or the requirements of running an education business.

►►*Deputy Heads*

The views of deputy headteachers were sought because they were likely to be the headteachers of the future and were seen as those having responsibility to cascade and implement strategic decisions made at senior management level, down to classroom teaching. Those in the position of deputy head were also likely to be informative on matters of leadership and management and add additional perspectives to the data informed by headteachers. These perspectives were therefore important to the research as they could link not only the data from the interpretations of headteachers but also against the perceptions of the classroom teacher. This is not to suggest that headteachers were viewed as not understanding issues from the perspective of classroom teaching. However, an additional perspective from this level of management served to improve the quality of data gathered and further illustrate how the research problem was impacting on the ways in which each of the schools were lead and managed.

►►*Teachers*

In seeking a multi-layered, multi-dimensional finding to this research problem, it was also important to the researcher to understand how such external initiatives were impacting upon classroom teaching and practice. Because the education of students is a core purpose of schools, it was conducive to explore the picture from this particular layer of the educational organisation and therefore one classroom teacher from each school was invited to partake in an interview. Those who participated in the research did so at the request of the headteacher of each school, and were selected due to their timetable, availability and willingness to take part in the research. Classroom teachers were therefore quite randomly selected without regard to the age of children they taught or their speciality subjects.

►►LEA, SEN Case Officers

Three Local Education Authorities in the south east of England were also selected and invited to partake in this research study. Special schools have within their populations many children who have Statements of Educational Need and SEN Case Officers employed by LEAs have the responsibility of placing such children in appropriate educational establishments. For this reason these participants were an excellent supplementary source from which the research could draw upon perspectives not only from the meso level of the research problem, but also because as implementers of government initiatives, they could add additional dimensions to the perspectives given by the interviewees in schools. All three LEAs were known by the researcher to have placements of SEN students in independent special schools and some of their placements were in the schools participating in the research. The following section explains why the instrumentation of interview was used to gather the data from these invited participants.

Instrumentation

From the point of conducting a small-scale research in education, the instrument chosen to collect data was that of semi-structured, key participant interviews (Platt, 2002; Johnson, 2002) using a prepared schedule with probes and prompts. A face to face approach to gathering research data, by means of interview enabled the capture of the more humanistic elements, such as values, morale anxieties, body language and ethical judgments, as well as hard factual evidence about the research problem. The

fundamental advantage of the semi-structured interview over the questionnaire was that it gave the interviewer and the interviewee greater scope to develop discussions more fully while still maintaining a basic consistency in the way in which the data was collected. The interview is a flexible and adaptable way of finding things out according to Robson (1993), although Robson believes biases are difficult to rule out and interviewing is time consuming. The research questions used in these interviews were thus semi-structured so as to maintain central focus on the research problem, allowing the participant and researcher a limited amount of autonomy to probe more deeply in the questioning and answering session. This approach also offered the advantage of systematically gaining data that built into a comprehensive picture of key participants' experiences and views of the research problem under investigation.

Interviewing is a particularly useful tool when engaging in research about the impact of decisions on members of institutions, and factors influencing the outcomes of teaching and learning (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). According to Silverman (2004),

> Meaningful reality is constituted at the nexus of the hows and the whats
> of experience, by way of interpretive practice. Interviewing is a form of
> interpretive practice, as respondents and interviewers articulate their
> orientations and understandings in terms of the experience in question.
>
> (Silverman, 2004:149)

Face-to-face interview, supports high quality gathering of the data, as it allows a much higher level of spontaneity and a more open process of negotiation than is possible using other methods (Rayner & Ribbins, 1999). The literature describes how in-depth interviewing commences with commonsense perceptions, explanations, and understandings of cultural experience and aims to explore the contextual boundaries of that experience (Johnson, 2002). The ability to gather unique and/or commonality of individual interpretations and experiences is more likely to develop the database into a rich holistic picture about the challenges of the leadership and management function in independent special schools, as opposed to other forms of data gathering. However, the main disadvantage of face-to-face interviews according to Sekaran (1992) is geographical limitations and the travelling time taken up. Those who aim to understand and document others' understandings choose qualitative interviewing because it

provides us with a means for exploring the views of research subjects, whilst granting these views the culturally honoured status of reality (Silverman, 2004). The method of interview, according to Tuckman (1972) is suited to qualitative research and serves the purposes of 'providing access to what is inside a person's head (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)' (Cohen et al, 2001:268).

For the purpose of this research, face to face interviews was considered an ideal form of capturing high quality data, as it determined the conditions whereby the researcher is required to gain access into the differing schools, their cultures and selected staff and work from a framework that allows the flexibility to probe more deeply to clarify certain points. Thus the data can take on additional meanings when the emotional and social elements are reflected in the data. In gathering data by means of interview, the researcher had to be aware that respondents might not impart with the fullness of truth and thereby jeopardise the quality of the collected data to the unwary researcher (Coleman & Briggs, 2002).

Other forms of instrumentation such as action research were dismissed as unsuitable for researching this particular issue as this method is not conducive to collecting historical or fairly recent experiences of key participants. Utilising observation techniques was also rejected on the grounds that there were no guarantees that such experiences would be happening at the time of study, as this issue was not necessarily one of incrementally unfolding actions that could be undertaken as a longitudinal study. However, the use of a questionnaire was an alternative way of collecting the required data. Busy people are not necessarily inclined to see questionnaires as being a priority amidst their workloads. Indeed the author herself has to admit that many questionnaires had found their way into her own waste paper bin as after weeks of delay they were past their return date. To have a trickle of questionnaires returned could likely give a distorted picture of the research problem. It was judged that staff in schools were more likely to reveal a fuller picture in discussion, as opposed to finding the time to fill in the questionnaire. It was also thought more likely that heads would be less likely to reveal sensitive information in a questionnaire as opposed to interview. The limited resources of the researcher could not extend to both interviews and questionnaires, thus the questionnaire was rejected in favour of the method of interview because respondents cannot be coerced

into completing a questionnaire. 'They might be strongly encouraged, but the decision whether to become involved and when to withdraw from the research is entirely theirs' (Cohen et al, 2001:245). A further disadvantage of this method of gathering data was of its inability to catch what respondents wanted to say rather than to promote the researcher's agenda. Thus the use of questionnaire was therefore rejected in favour of interview. This choice allowed the researcher to capture a greater depth of detail on the research issue from a smaller number of schools: rather than what could be realistically expected from the method of questionnaire utilising larger numbers; but possibly collecting a shallower account of the research objective.

The interview schedules used for the gathering of research data can be found in the appendices of this research study. Separate interview schedules were prepared to reflect the different positions held by interviewees and sub-questions were generated so as to probe more deeply and enable clear and comprehensive understanding about the issues which make up the five main aims of the research. The questions asked of headteachers were slightly adjusted so as to have greater meaning to deputy heads and further adjusted so as to have relevance to the activities of teachers. The schedule of questions for LEA Officers centred upon their working practice as it related to the education of children with SEN, their interactions, and the extent of their influence over independent special schools. In addition, the use of documentary evidence in the form of OFSTED and CSCI inspection reports served to triangulate the gathered qualitative data and inform upon the qualitative data gathered by interview.

Documentary Evidence

The undertaking of documentary research was aimed at triangulating the data collected through interview and adding additional layers of meaning and evidence to the research issue under investigation. According to the literature text is evidence in a way in which speech is not (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). OFSTED and CSCI reports provided a rich and valuable line of investigation to this study in order to substantiate the ways in which external accountability impacts upon independent special schools and causes challenges and implications for their leaders and managers to resolve. Other supplementary sources of documentation consisted of the National Statistics Office and other official documents detailing legislation. Additional sources of information informing the

research included associations such as The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and the Independent Schools Council (ISC).

However, it was taken into account that sometimes information drawn from documents is outside the context from which they are written and therefore not necessarily value free. In using primary documents, one has to be aware that they are written for a specific context and this affects how they may be interpreted? However, the context for inspection reports was very close to that of this research in that OFSTED and CSCI reports identify challenges for the leadership and management of independent special schools. The collected data of this research therefore comprised of not only the data collected from interview but also documentary evidence contained within school inspection reports. The format of the presentation of the data is discussed in the next section.

Data and Presentation

Qualitative data analysis is defined as 'working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, the search for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982:145). Qualitative researchers tend to use inductive analysis of data, meaning that the critical themes emerge out of the data (Patton, 1990). The challenge therefore was to place the raw data into logical, meaningful categories; to examine them in a holistic fashion; and to find a way to communicate this interpretation to others.

Analysis of the data consequently aspired to offer a qualitative display of subjective, interpretive data that was illuminative about the research problem from which researchers could learn and take note. There were three general purposes to be gained from analysing data, namely, learning, proving and improving (Easterby Smith, 1986:13). The mode applied for analysis of the interpretative data was through its content. Content analysis, according to Silverman (1993) 'is the collation of data into fields, domains, themes, words, phrases, actions, inactions, counting for comparisons, and categories' (p48). Thus the analysis of the research data followed this example and was collated in ways that would reveal key issues that were contained within the research data. This approach involved clustering units of relevant meaning (Cohen &

Manion, 1994), and expose fundamental issues that explained regularities. In this instance, categorisation was post-facto, insomuch as fields of analysis were informed by interviews and selected after the data had been collected, but before it was analysed.

The analysis commenced with identification of the themes emerging from the raw data, a process sometimes referred to as open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During open coding, the researcher identified and tentatively named the conceptual categories into dimensional categories which formed a preliminary framework for analysis. Words, phrases or actions/inactions that appeared to be similar were grouped into the same category. The next stage of analysis involved the re-examination of the categories identified to determine how they were linked, a process sometimes called axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The discrete categories identified in open coding were compared and combined in new ways as the researcher assembled the big picture. This categorisation of the data applied equally to the interview data as well as the data derived from documentary evidence.

The undertaking of this qualitative research, which was set within an interpretative framework sought understanding, rather than knowledge, and interpretations rather than measurement (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). The outline of the presented data has followed the research objectives introduced in Chapter One and addressed in the literature research and research findings in adherence to the same order. Direct quotations have been used as far as possible so as to show and give a depth of feeling and emotion that participants harboured regarding the research problem. In addition, direct quotations are identified in italics and accompanied by contextual commentary and interpretation. Findings have been compared and contrasted with the literature and anomalies in the data highlighted. Visual representations in the form of diagrammatical collations of the data support and draw attention to the main themes of the findings so as to add clarity to the research problem.

Validity

Validity is important to effective research and is addressed in qualitative research through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved. It also concerns 'the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher' (Cohen et al, 2001:105). Following the recommendations from the published literature, the validity of this research, has been secured through its selection criteria, as well as the meticulous collection, triangulation and analysis of its data.

The selection criteria ensured a rich depth of data was collected concerning the challenges of leading and managing in independent special schools. Set within the south east region in England, the selection of schools was based on criteria that best served to achieve diversity in the qualitative data, so as to capture a complete picture about the challenges faced by leaders and managers of these schools. Furthermore, the selection criteria formed a framework from which the authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of this research was ensured by the gathering of qualitative data from respondents who represented differing levels of responsibility within school organisations. However, the main drawback was that the qualitative data was also dependent upon the subjectivity of respondents, their opinions, attitudes and perspectives which together contributed to a degree of bias. The literature expresses the need for there to be confidence in the data in terms of its 'authenticity, credibility, auditability, and transferability' (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993:323-4). In this regard, the authenticity of this research was therefore assured by the mix of schools, the mix of disabilities and the mix of the participants thus portraying perspectives from both the micro and meso levels of the research problem.

Validity was also addressed through the collection of data in terms of the comprehensive way in which the data was collected, recorded and transcribed. Internal validity for qualitative data requires attention to credibility and plausibility which are described in the literature as ways of establishing rather than definitions of validity (Hammersley, 1992). However, others such as Lincoln & Guba (1985), Sandelowski (1986), and Whittemore et al (2001) see credibility and plausibility as only alternative ways of thinking about validity. In qualitative research this can be regarded as 'a fit between what researchers' record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982:48). The credibility of this research

was secured in a number of varying ways. Firstly, by the selection of respondents who were knowledgeable and had experience in the workings of independent special schools. Secondly, by ensuring that respondents were given the opportunity to offer detailed accounts in their responses or probed more deeply for greater clarification on certain points. However, it was often the case that respondents had other issues that they wished to discuss, which although not necessarily pertinent to the research problem, painted a picture which aided the analysis and context of the findings. In addition the flexibility of using an interview as a method of gathering the research data facilitated the gathering of data that was original, individual and interpretive accounts of how the participating interviewees viewed and had experience of the challenges involved with leading and managing independent special schools. The credibility of this research was further ensured by triangulation of the research findings.

Triangulation was an additional way in which the validity of this research was addressed. There is much debate in the literature about the value of triangulation and the extent to which it is possible to arrive at a single definitive account. Triangulation means 'comparing many sources of evidence in order to determine the accuracy of information or phenomena' Coleman & Brigg (2002:68). Triangulation is suitable for ensuring the accuracy of either positivist or interpretive research (Cohen, & Manion, 1994). Some writers argue that triangulation provides for a broader, richer account in generating alternative accounts (Fielding & Fielding, 1986; Greene, 1994; Mason, 2002; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Seale, 1999; Silverman, 2000). In accordance with the literature, triangulation of the data was obtained from the perspectives of LEAs as well as from the perspective of external accountabilities through inspection reports. As special schools generally include within their numbers children with maintained Statements, and because LEAs have responsibility and a certain amount of control over such placements in special schools: the relationship between these two levels of authority, were viewed as having impact upon each other; in ways that affected both the achievement of their objectives and how those objectives were met. Although interviews were initially difficult to set up, LEA Officers were keen to discuss their views regarding their interactions with independent special schools and showed an enlightening different perspective from those interviewed in schools. Both of which it is suggested were fairly laden with their own agendas and interpretations of responsibilities and duties, both morally and professionally.

The meticulous analysis of the data also added to the validity of the research findings. Transcriptions of the data were input into formats in order to allow for the cross referencing of the data. This included comparing responses from headteachers against deputy heads, teachers and LEA Officers and cross referencing responses between schools so as to make certain the analysis was meaningful and clear about the challenges that arise for leaders and managers of independent special schools. There was a wealth of data that was collected, but the coherentness of their explanations was sometimes lacking. Nevertheless, the gist of what interviewees were trying to describe was always clearly evident from the transcriptions. However, a significant amount of the data revealed many differing issues which stemmed from the schools' unique context and/or their individual experiences, albeit issues regarding external accountabilities and interactions with LEAs and inspectors were remarkably similar.

External validity (Schofield, 1993:200) refers to 'the degree to which the results can be generalised' and in this respect the researcher has not claimed that these findings are generalisable across all independent special schools. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Eisenhart & Howe (1992), generalizability in naturalistic research is better interpreted as transferability. Within the positivist approach to research this would relate to the research's external validity in terms of the trustworthiness of the findings over other similar special schools. With regards to this qualitative, small-scale approach transferability could never be a significant aim, but instead this research offers a significant contribution in terms of giving a clear descriptive picture of the research objective, so that others can decide the extent to which findings from this one piece of research are dependable and transferable across all independent special schools. However, the researcher believes that a number of the issues raised in the findings will be the same issues that would be raised by the leaders and managers of other independent special schools should further research be attempted.

Lincoln & Guba (1985:108-9) suggests that in qualitative research the notion of reliability should be construed as dependability which involves such checks as providing an audit trail of the events surrounding the research period. The consistency of the research findings often referred to as the dependability of research was addressed in this research through the clear identification of an audit trail in which the researcher

has documented methods, decisions and the effectiveness of the research strategies employed. According to Lincoln & Guba, (1985:320-321) an audit trail consists of 1) raw data; 2) analysis notes; 3) reconstruction and synthesis products; 4) process notes; 5) personal notes; and 6) preliminary developmental information. In keeping with the recommendations of the literature, the audit trail of this research is outlined in the appendices. The auditability of the research was thus achieved through the rigorous, systematic and transparent collection of the data. Each stage of the process was clearly documented and each step of the activity clearly identified, in terms of what happened, when it happened, how it happened and why it happened so as it built the research undertaken into an auditable sequence of activity for readers to discern how the findings were derived. The next section moves on to discuss the direction of influence that the participant researcher had upon this research study.

Participant Research

The researcher was solely responsible for conducting all interviews necessary for the gathering of data. The researcher fulfils a senior leadership role as school bursar of the largest of the three approved schools which has participated in the research. In fulfilment of the post for thirteen years, the researcher takes an active part, by way of research studies to contribute towards the evolution of school strategies and therefore has experience in interviewing. The school in which the researcher is employed fitted suitably within the selection criteria and therefore presented a prime opportunity to initially test the interview questions.

Thus the first round of interviews was undertaken at the researcher's school, which proved to be a good sounding board to ascertain whether the interview questions were comprehensively understood and appropriate for the research purposes. There were mixed reactions from the researcher's colleagues, ranging from uncertainty that the researcher would understand the answers, to uncertainty as to whether the interviewee had indeed given the researcher the correct answers to her questions.

It was clear from the first round of interviews that the interviewee that was classroom based was predominantly operationally minded. In other words she did her job as best she knew how, without fully recognising any strategic implications to the business. The

interview with the deputy head however, was different insomuch as it was very much inward thinking and questions were construed with regards to his particular role competency as opposed to the challenges of leading and managing in an independent special school. The interview with the head was also different insomuch as he construed the research questions around the strategic nature of the challenges he faced, giving particular focus on the politics of SEN education. It was clear from an early stage of the research that there was going to be diversity in the gathered data. The relationship between the researcher and interviewees was not necessarily the determining factor which promoted the way in which interviewees responded to the questions. It appeared that it was more of a matter of how they viewed themselves within the context of leadership and management in their schools rather than the familiarity of the researcher. It is therefore argued that the researcher's position as an insider gave greater benefit to the research than detriment or bias.

As an 'insider' the researcher's position offered an advantage to access and research those leading and managing independent special schools and also a person to whom participants were likely to accept and speak frankly. The researcher was fortunate enough that all those invited to participate in the research were willing and there were no rejections. That is not to say that access into these schools was easy. It took the researcher many telephone calls and letters to set up the interviews. Windows of opportunity were tight and interviews had to be conducted when interviewees were allocated free time by teaching timetables. On arriving at one particular school, the headteacher was so weary from the preceding day's OFSTED inspection that she suggested the interviews should be cancelled. It was only after a lot of persuasion that the headteacher agreed that the interviews could take place.

The challenge for the researcher was to keep interviewees focused. Many had tendencies to veer into all sorts of discussions that they wished to get off their chests without necessarily being precise about the research question. The researcher's experience of the interviews in her own school put her on guard about this problem at an early stage of the research and therefore the researcher was alert to ensuring the research questions were answered at some point in the interview. Participating headteachers, deputy headteachers and classroom teachers were all familiar with discussing issues with their own bursars and although power and relationship influences

existed the conduct of the interviews did not indicate any significant influence that might detract from the gathered data. However, the biggest challenge for the researcher was to make 'the familiar strange' in order to take an alternative or multiple perspectives on the 'realities' that were encountered and thus provide a meaningful picture about the challenges of leading and managing in independent special schools at the time of the research in 2006.

Ethics

The literature explains that ethics involves the process of and search for moral standards that aid us in identifying and clarifying right and wrong actions and 'to facilitate and promote consistent application of moral norms, basic standards or principles to guide right actions' (McKinney & Howard, 1998:4). Ethics, according to McKinney & Howard, is thus the 'continuous pursuit of moral standards' (p4). Nevertheless, there is a distinction between ethics and morals (Pring, 2000) as according to Pring ethics are the philosophical enquiry into the basis of morals or moral judgements whereas morals are concerned with what is the right or wrong thing to do. In accordance with best practice associated with research, ethical standards were addressed and carried out in accordance with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Revised Guidelines (2004) and University of Lincoln guidelines for the conduct of research.

Informed consent is 'the most fundamental principle for ethical acceptability' (Anderson & Arsenault, 2001:18). According to Kvale (1996) confidentiality and the consequences of interviews are main areas where ethical issues can be problematic. The method applied in this research met a moral accountability to those being researched in so much as initially, letters were written to headteachers of all selected schools, outlining the subject of the research study and requesting their voluntary consent to be subjected to interview. Letters were followed up by telephone contact, enabling the objective of the research, and any causes of concern to be discussed more fully. It is also the primary obligation of the researcher to protect the anonymity of research participants and to keep research data confidential (Frankfort-Nachmias, & Nachmias, 1992). The anonymity and confidentiality of participants was respected in the research by the use of pseudonyms in order to protect both schools and the members of their staff who kindly agreed to be interviewed. Interviews carried out with LEA SEN Case

Officers also maintained the 'non-traceability' of each officer, and used instead a fictitious district area of each participating LEA for labelling purposes. Nevertheless, all information was accepted by the researcher as being confidential and for the purpose of this research only. Once collected, the storage and use of personal data whilst the research was ongoing was conducted in compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and all research data was stored electronically under security password. Information not needed for the study was securely disposed of as required by the Act.

Throughout the investigation, a key ethical intention of the researcher was to ensure that participants were quoted correctly. Scott (1994:139) warns researchers that they 'are accountable to those participating in their research, and accordingly there are ethical issues relating to whom the researcher will account to in the research, and the issue of quoting the research data verbatim, or not'. To minimise the risk of incorrect interpretation of interviewees' responses, all interviews were digitally recorded so as to offer the facility of 'playback' and allow transcription to be verbatim and therefore to a high quality. Nevertheless, due to the practicalities of the research, it was agreed with the participants before interviews commenced, that critical interpretation of data to form a research account would be necessary. Subsequently the full verbatim transcription was used as a sound basis from which to outline, categorise and quote indicative research issues.

At the time of this research the Office of Fair Trading was just completing an investigation into whether independent schools were engaging in cartel practice. A significant consideration in carrying out this research was therefore the restrictions placed upon all independent schools by the Office of Fair Trading, which prohibited any exchange or discussion on financial information. Whilst the researcher's role as bursar of an independent school offered advantages for access purposes, it served as a disadvantage on this ethical issue. Therefore to avoid any conflict of interests, questioning was designed to circumvent any embarrassment to the participants and as identified in the document evidence section of this chapter, the sighting of documents was limited to OFSTED and CSCI reports only. No financial documentation formed any part of the study, although financial implications have been raised and discussed in the findings, analysis and conclusion chapters as they emerged from the collected data. Ownership of the results rests with the researcher as well as the right to publish in the

interests of an open society. Debriefing sessions were not offered by the researcher, due to time constraints, but summaries for participant validation purposes were undertaken at the end of each interview.

Conclusion

This methodology was developed as an appropriate way of researching a problem that could be best informed by the experiences, accounts and interpretations of practitioners. Basing the research within an interpretive, qualitative approach to research, offered the scope to create richness to the depth and breadth of the data collected and enabled differing perspectives of the research problem to be gained. This method captured diversity in terms of the schools that were invited to partake in the research as well as diversity in the selection of the participants and the roles they represented within schools. The method of face to face interviewing was the instrumentation chosen as being best suited to this research problem as it offered the flexibility and scope to probe where emerging issues might need further clarification and aided interactions/discussions between the researcher and participants. The method of digitally recording all interviews aided the accurate transcription of the data which was initially transcribed in full and then categorised in terms of the layers of perspectives amongst leadership, management and LEAs.

The next chapter moves on to detail the findings from the gathered data. Interviewees' responses have been illustrated by using the quotes of participants' interpretations regarding the extent to which externally imposed accountabilities are impacting upon them in terms of leading and managing the independent special schools in which they are employed. This data is supplemented by interviews with LEA SEN Case Officers employed in three different LEA regions and which serves to add further dimensions of data to the data gathered from school participants.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The presentation of the research findings is an iterative account of how interviewees responded to the interview questioning. The empirical data is displayed as summative, textual representations and segmented into elements of data that best illustrate the research problem (Miles & Huberman 1994). The format of this chapter is therefore presented in a semi-naturalistic format that uses quotations that are identified in italics from the interviewees to compare and contrast their views. The data has been categorised and thematically organized so as to contain and symbolise the richness of the data gathered in this investigation and the language used as far as possible has been the language used by the interviewees as they have responded to the interview questions. To ensure the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms have been used to refer to the different schools that have participated in the research and to the LEA Officers who were questioned.

This chapter has been divided into five sections following the format of research questions identified in Chapter 1. The first section appertains to how challenges arise from the key role of independent special schools, the market in which they operate, including the pupil population that are currently attending these schools. This section also details the gathered data regarding the relationship between the state and private sectors and the working practices of LEAs including the placements of SEN students in independent special schools in terms of three specific issues. The first being LEAs' policies in placing or withdrawing children from independent special schools; secondly, their understanding of the ways in which financial considerations influenced their placement decisions; and third, the role of LEA inspections and issues relating to the control that LEAs believe they have upon the schools to which they have placed children.

The second section of this chapter focuses on the general challenges of leadership and management in independent special schools and builds onto the previous section by ascertaining the leadership and management function of special schools as interpreted by those interviewed. In particular this section explains how leading and managing

special schools may present differing challenges from leading and managing in any other school and identifies what interviewees named as being the main challenges to the leadership and management of the schools in which they work.

The third section centres on the challenges that arise from the impact of externally imposed accountabilities in terms of the kinds of external accountabilities that are currently having influence upon independent special schools. The perceptions of interviewees as to the extent to which they have been subject to a growing amount of external accountability is also discussed and in particular how such externally imposed accountabilities have had impact upon their strategic objectives, curriculum and pedagogy.

The fourth section of this chapter centres upon how leaders and managers balance sets of accountabilities and the challenges associated with them. The findings in this section set out to detail interviewees' responses to the extent to which external accountabilities need to balance with internal interests from within school communities. In addition this section also includes interviewees' accounts about the extent to which external accountabilities conflict with the internal interests of these schools.

The fifth and final section of this chapter concentrates on the implications and challenges that may arise for independent special schools in the years ahead. This includes the perspectives of those interviewed regarding changing policies at national levels, the market in which independent special schools operate and the perceived challenges and implications for the leadership and management of independent special schools well into the future. In line with the structured format of this chapter the first section therefore commences with findings concerning the role of independent special schools from the perspectives of interviewees employed in schools as well as from the perspectives of interviewees employed by LEAs.

The Role of Independent Special Schools

The findings of this study revealed interviewees to have a range of opinions about the extent to which the role of independent special schools has been subject to change as a result of inclusive practice. Most schools were found to have made adjustments to their

role, but these actions were not altogether directly attributed by the interviewees to the consequences associated with the national inclusion policy. However, interviewees were generally in agreement that from their experience, such adjustments had caused a certain degree of change and complexity in the leadership and management function in their schools. It appears that headteachers are now finding themselves '*dealing with a wider range of SEN both academic and social*' *(headteacher, Hillcrest:06/03/06).* Interviewees also suggested that '*its more of a battle ground with LEAs who we find most of the time confrontational*' *(headteacher, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06).* A different perspective from one teacher described how '*inclusive practice has not changed the way we manage the school, but I do think that we have had to take a wider perspective of what we are about*' *(Teacher, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06).* One particular headteacher conveyed fairly confusing messages when she explained in her statement, '*I don't believe inclusive education has affected the leadership and management of this school in any shape or form really*' *(headteacher, Amberleigh Court:28/03/06)* but then completed her statement by adding '*but inclusive practice has altered our pupil intake*'. This was a finding that was somewhat paradoxical, insomuch as if inclusive practice had altered the intake into her school, then it would have been reasonable to assume that the leadership and management of her school would have also had cause to readjust accordingly in order to take account of the altering needs of her pupil composition. In contrast, the consensus of responses from the deputy heads and teachers interviewed was that they viewed the leadership and management function in their schools as being more challenging than in the past. For example the teacher of Hillcrest commented '*its now more challenging because my expectations are different and my approach is different*' and another teacher believed that '*it has made it more difficult because we are taking on a more specialist role now*' *(teacher, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06).* Other comments from teachers regarding a change in the leadership and management role in their schools included having to deal with extra academic and social problems, social awareness, and issues of professional development, in terms of being required to engage in learning new teaching practices. Reflective of this finding, deputy heads generally concurred that they needed to be more adaptable '*because the kind of children is changing, so the school has to change*' *(deputy head, Hillcrest:06/03/06).* Contrary to the view of the headteacher of Amberleigh Court, her deputy head was adamant that she had seen a change in the leadership and management role in her school due to inclusive practice and stated '*without a doubt it has changed*

through changing the sort of child that is now coming here' (28/03/06). Thus there was evidence amidst the findings to suggest that inclusive practice has affected a certain degree of change in the leadership and management role in independent special schools. The extent of the change was found to vary school by school and at different levels in the participating organisations. Interviewees were also questioned about what they understood by the term inclusive practice so as to clarify whether the term was commonly understood and how it related to the role of independent special schools.

►*Inclusive Practice and its Meanings*

Interviews conducted with deputy heads and teachers revealed that there was a certain amount of confusion between what they perceived the official meaning of inclusive practice to be and the meaning they placed on it from their own individual perspectives. Typical of this dualised confusion was this response:

> *'inclusive education means students going to mainstream schools, in the wider term it means making education available to all students wherever the setting' (deputy head, Lord Radleigh:20/03/06).*

Many of the interviewees considered inclusion as a terminology which was applicable to mainstream education only and unsure of the term's connotations in relation to independent special schools. Some interviewees directly associated inclusive practice with '*equal opportunities for all' (headteacher, Amberleigh Court:28/03/06).* The terms equality and equal opportunities were raised interchangeably throughout the interviewee responses, but generally they spoke of equality in terms of the comparative quality of the curriculum that is offered to SEN students compared with mainstream students and equal opportunities in terms of the ability to access that standard of education. It was clearly apparent that interviewees placed great importance for SEN students to be allowed equal opportunities to access a full curriculum in their descriptions about inclusive practice. For example '*providing an education that includes everybody in everything' (teacher, Oakhammer:26/04/06)* and '*education for all – all pupils having the same chance' (deputy head, Hillcrest:06/03/06)* were typical examples of the language used when interviewees gave their interpretations of the meaning of inclusive practice.

More than just being included or having equal opportunities, inclusive practice was described by one headteacher as '*the quality of experience of the child in terms of how they engage with the educational process and whether their entitlements are as rich as they should be given their disability*' (headteacher, Newton Heights:20/04/06). To him, inclusive practice conjured a holistic image of how SEN students should be educated and hence involved creating practical opportunities for pulling the inclusive vision into practice. Another interpretation of inclusive practice was described in terms of '*offering education to every child, and in our case that's much more about individualized programmes and individualized education and learning for life*' (headteacher, Oakhammer:26/04/06). However, in order to achieve this objective this headteacher explained how she was presented with many daily practicalities in the running of individualized programmes due to staff absences, students' responsiveness to their programmes and collaborative decisions about the curriculum to be taught.

Some interviewees viewed inclusive practice as a philosophical idealism with a vision where all SEN children enjoyed equality, equal opportunities with their peers, and were completely happy. Thus one particular headteacher summarised inclusive practice as being '*wherever the child feels happiest and most supported*' (headteacher, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06). The headteacher further explained that he believed '*that students could not be successfully educated if they were unhappy at school*' and looked to parents and the expertise of his staff to make that decision as opposed to government officials. LEA Officers were also found to place utmost importance on the happiness of the child. The Coalburnshire LEA Officer, for example explained that the happiness of the child '*was [his] main objective when seeking to secure [his] children with appropriate school placements*' (06/06/06).

The findings of the research undertaken revealed that seventeen of the twenty-one interviewees viewed inclusive practice as a positive step in the education of SEN students, although two particular headteachers were concerned that the inclusive practice strategy had exposed them to a policy that they considered was steeped in the politics of government and its political agenda. For example inclusive practice '*has caused great difficulty to me as a leader because it has meant different things to different parties in parliament*' (headteacher, Hillcrest:06/03/06). Equally, from the

experience of another, inclusive practice had also meant '*meeting an appropriate political agenda*' (*headteacher, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06*). This he had found to be very controversial, insomuch as he believed there was a hidden agenda behind the policy and the terminology used to describe the term he viewed as being steeped with emotive language. The problem for the head was not that the phrase itself was emotive, but that in his view politicians had used it politically: not as a way of meeting needs; but actually as a form of slogan, thereby making the rhetoric of equality and inclusion both normative (value laden) and emotive to serve political agendas.

Interviewees suggested that the policy of inclusion has been incorrectly interpreted and implemented by LEAs. For instance, the code of practice for inclusion was '*really intended for those parents whose children were placed in special schools, having the opportunity to transfer to a mainstream school if that was their preference*' (*headteacher, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06*). However according to this headteacher, it has been used quite to the contrary. Instead LEAs have used it so that parents who want their children placed in special schools, actually have to have their children placed in a mainstream school. Consequently he believed that '*the true meaning of inclusion has been warped into a political agenda and to him the language that is used is hugely worrying*' (*14/03/06*). This account suggests there is a conflict between inclusive practice and children's rights since the policy being implemented by LEAs seems to lack consideration for the educational preferences of parents and their children. However, this was found not to be the case and all three LEA Officers notably included children's rights in their interpretations of inclusive practice. In addition, LEA Officers placed great emphasis on the need for the education of SEN children to take place alongside their peers in mainstream schools wherever possible. One illustration showed how '*all children have a right to education and they have a right to be educated alongside their peers*' (*Luggie, LEA Officer:02/06/06*). The right to have equal opportunities was also important to another LEA Officer who declared that '*inclusive practice means finding a school where my youngsters can have an equal opportunity with other people*' (*Coalburnshire, LEA Officer:06/06/06*). Although a certain degree of ambivalence was found to exist amidst what inclusive practice meant to interviewees, they were fairly uniform in their interpretations that inclusive education should mean meeting the needs of all SEN pupils and having the same chances as their peers to access to a broad curriculum. The only difference being was where and how this should

take place. Figure 4.1 below offers a visual picture of what inclusive practice was found to mean to the interviewees of this research.
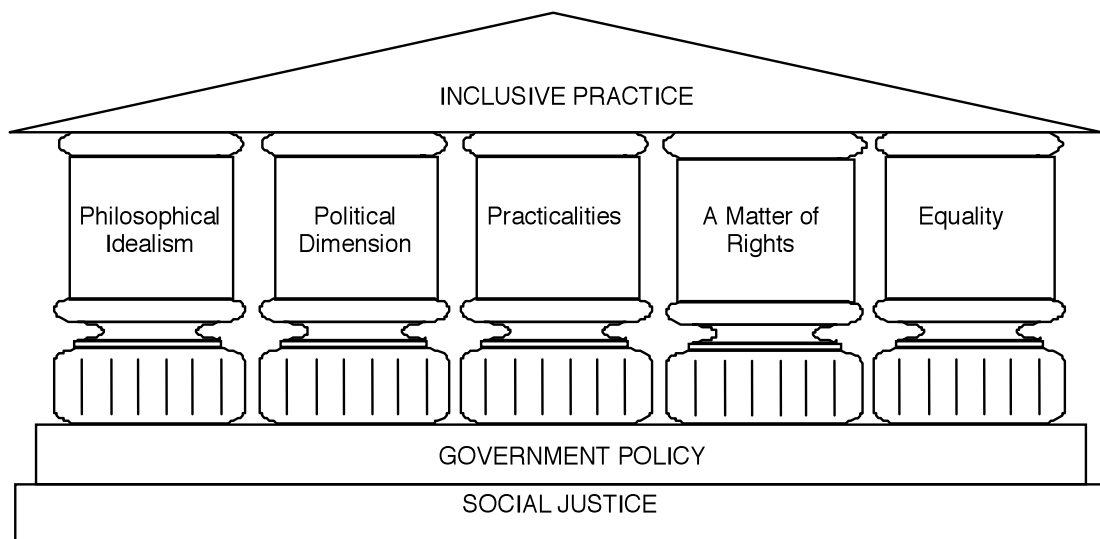
Figure 4.1   Interpretations of Inclusive Practice

From the findings it is apparent that there are four main themes which surround the interpretations of inclusive practice given by those interviewed in schools, which were namely, a philosophical idealism, its relation and impact to a political agenda, the practicalities posed by the implementation of inclusive practice, and gaining equality for all SEN children. A fifth theme, identifying children's rights was also added by the three LEA Officers interviewed.   Under these conditions, interviewees were of the opinion that the role of independent special schools has become:

- To educate where appropriate state provision is unavailable
- To educate where inclusion has failed
- To offer equal opportunities to all SEN students
- To offer a better service to SEN students than the service of the state.

Deriving from these four main roles, interviewees also suggested the offering of mixed placements, and working as an extension of state provision as roles that could support and benefit SEN children in state provision.   The next four sections will therefore explain the reasons why interviewees viewed these as being the key roles for independent special schools and how these roles were perceived to fit with the national inclusion strategy.

►*To Educate Where Appropriate State Provision is Unavailable*

LEA Officers viewed the role of independent special schools as being to educate where appropriate state provision is unavailable. The LEA Officer for Lallanshire described how '*we tend to look at our own local authority provision and if that does not meet the children's needs or we have schools but they are full up, it is at this point that we tend to look to the independent and non-maintained special school*' (30/05/06). According to the Officer, local authority schools tend to offer cheaper costs for meeting the same needs. '*Parents might not see it as being as good as what might be available in an independent school, but as long as we are meeting the needs of the child and they are making adequate progress then that fulfils the local authority's obligation*' (Lallanshire, Officer:30/05/06). However there was general uniformity amongst the LEA Officers that the key role of independent special schools should be to,

> '*make a provision that for whatever reason, the local education authorities are not able to make, either because it was impractical to meet the needs of what [the LEA Officer defined] as a small group of needs, of very highly complex children, or where it is not feasible for each authority to have maintained provision*'
>
> *(Luggie, LEA Officer:02/06/06).*

Conversely, the Coalburnshire LEA Officer saw the role of independent special schools as '*purely to provide beds*' (06/06/06). The Coalburnshire Officer described how his LEA had concluded some years back that they could not replicate the specialist provision offered by independent special schools, nor could they afford it. Instead the decision was made to develop as far as possible the LEA's own school provision. For those to whom state provision is unavailable, because of the cocktail of their educational needs, the complexity of their home backgrounds as well as health care problems, alternative provision is sought in the independent sector.

►*To Educate Where Inclusion has Failed*

Headteachers of Hillcrest and Greybridge Manor viewed the key role of their schools as being '*to educate where inclusion has failed*' (06/03/06). According to these headteachers they were regularly picking up children who had come to them after state

provision had failed to meet their learning needs. This key role also included *'recognising individual needs and providing a different curriculum to meet those requirements' (deputy Head, Hillcrest:06/03/06).* Furthermore, another interviewee suggested that *'the key role [of her school] was for every child to be included: and for every child to have an equal opportunity to get their needs met; and by the school knowing what those needs are' (Deputy head, Amberleigh Court:28/03/06).*

An interesting point was made by the headteacher of Greybridge Manor who suggested that *'if you substituted the term "meeting needs" for the word "inclusion" the whole thing [referring to inclusion] becomes much clearer' (14/03/06).* What he found was that the children who have come to his school from a mainstream placement had felt excluded in the mainstream provision, they had felt *'different, thick, odd, weird' (14/03/06)* and this had impacted on their self esteem and self confidence in a major way. He stated that *'we are now getting fairly regular contact with pupils who are starting self harm, who talk about suicide and so on' (14/03/06).* As a result of this predicament, the headteacher of Greybridge Manor viewed this as a *'deficit system'* insomuch that children were now only placed by LEAs in his school after children had been failed by their mainstream provision. Alternatively where parents had felt the need to alter their child's placement and afford the costs of an independent school because of an existing failure to fully meet their child's needs. Thus children had to be failed by the system first before an LEA would contemplate an alternative placement such as his school. This situation frustrated the headteacher enormously, because he felt if these children had been diagnosed and correctly placed in the first instance, so much more could be done to help them. He argued that his team could do so much more for a child that was placed in his school in the early years of their education as opposed to just before their GCSEs in years 9 or 10.

►*To Offer Equal Opportunities*

Providing SEN children with equal opportunities to access a full curriculum was an underpinning theme amongst deputy heads and teachers when asked what they considered the key role of independent special schools to be. This includes *'meeting their ever changing needs' (teacher, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06)* as well as being able to *'recognize the strengths and weaknesses of SEN students' (teacher,*

Hillcrest:06/03/06). Furthermore the role of the independent special school is also to *'bring back confidence and motivation to SEN students' (teacher, Amberleigh Court:28/03/06).* In contrast, the headteacher of Newton Heights, saw the key role of his school as being to *'champion the entitlement of deaf children' (20/04/06).* The teacher of the same school responded that he viewed the key role *'to offer [themselves] as a grammar school that educates severe and profoundly deaf children and to ensure that all pupils do everything within the curriculum and not taken out for anything' (teacher, Newton Heights:20/04/06).* The reference to being taken out was interpreted by the interviewee as to any extra help, such as occupational therapy or speech therapy that is required. Interviewees explained that at Newton Heights extra help is timetabled at the end of the school day, so children do not miss lessons, or feel singled out.

The reference to a grammar school concurred with the fact that Newton Heights, as a non-maintained special school, is structured to educate the more academic deaf child and therefore children applying for admission have to undergo a selection process. Consequently, critics of independent schools believe the seemingly high examination results achieved by a number of independent schools are only what should be expected given the selective composition of their student populations. LEAs seem to be supporting the selective ethos of the school by continuing to place children at the school, although staff reported that they are spending more and more time helping parents win Tribunal appeals and thus the naming and funding of a place at Newton Heights. However, out of the six participating schools in this research, only Newton Heights operated an admission selection process which was used as a way of maintaining themselves as a grammar school. The remaining five schools accepted students, either due to the categories of SEN to which they were approved to take under their approved status, or in the case of non-maintained schools by the type of SEN disability to which the school existed. So although the rhetoric spoken by the headteacher of Newton Heights was about equal opportunities, it appears that such equality at times is only afforded to an elitist selection which was a contrary finding to how the remaining five schools addressed equal opportunities and admissions to their schools.

►*To Provide a Better Service*

Another key role, according to some interviewees was to provide a better service to SEN students. Independent special schools are reliant on attracting parents of SEN children to purchase their educational service. In order to attract parents there must be something unique or better than the alternatives available. For instance, '*to be the best at educating SEN students*' (*headteacher, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06*).   This was likely to be achieved through an educational service which aimed to '*provide the provision where students learn at their own pace and not having to just cope – as there is a difference between achieving and coping*' (*deputy Head, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06*).   In this deputy head's view, this was one of the unique features about the educational service offered at The Lord Radleigh that was unlikely to be found within the limitations of state provision. Thus interviewees, both in schools and LEA Officers saw independent special schools as an extension of mainstream provision, as opposed to being an alternative to that provided by the state. By this interviewees implied that independent special schools should be viewed as an intrinsic natural progression from state education, although interviewees viewed any form of control by LEAs as being incompatible with the autonomy afforded by an independent status.

Accordingly, independent special schools need to look inward and be critical of themselves. They need to ask questions such as,

> *Are we good in the music curriculum which really enables you to work at that music? The euphuism being that it is better to be ordinary in a special school than special in an ordinary school. We are trying to get our kids to fit a mainstream framework and they just don't fit. I think we are missing the point which is that the child's experience may well be a more positive one in this setting. By definition, almost all are going to get a better service here. A day placement here could be as cost effective as a maintained supported placement in one of their own schools. (headteacher, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06)*

Figure 4.2 offers a visual representation of the key roles of independent special schools that are perceived to fit within the national inclusion strategy.
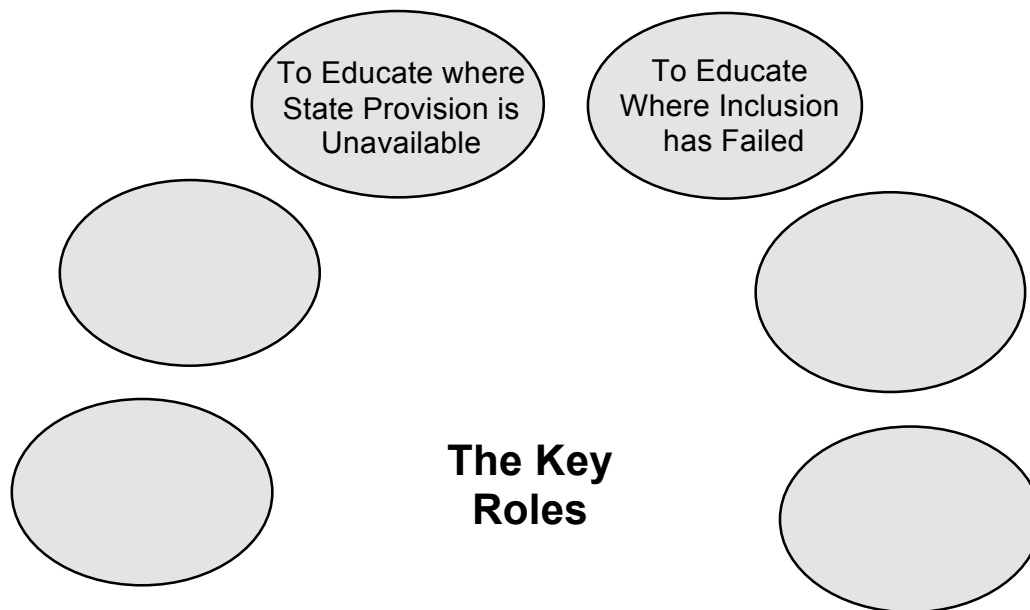
Figure 4.2 Key Roles of Independent Special Schools

►*Pupil Compositions and Change*

Interviewees confirmed that their schools had already been effecting changes in their role within the educational market due to its demands. A '*reduction in the number of SEN students with Statements' (deputy head, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06)* was suggested as one of the influencing factors that was affecting changes to the role of independent special schools within the educational market. Without statements, students are without the necessary funding to access independent education. The niche of independent special schools is therefore reduced to students from wealthier backgrounds. Hence, a consequence for the headteacher of Hillcrest was that inclusion '*had a negative factor on the social mix' of his school (06/03/06).* Due to inclusion, interviewees confirmed that in order to maintain their pupil numbers they were finding it necessary to accept students with greater complexities and with more associated difficulties than in the past. For some schools this also meant taking on children with greater physical and psychological disabilities. Social awareness was another influence upon the role of independent special schools '*because of how special schools are now seen*' by society. *(headteacher, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06).* Most interviewees had seen change in their schools, but the extent of change varied. According to one headteacher, '*if we had not changed, we would be dead' (headteacher, Newton Heights:20/04/06).* As a consequence of a changing educational market, he confirmed

they had changed the school's complete structure and applied for a specialist status as a training school. Other changes to the role of these schools included '*looking at mixed placements whereby students are with us for some time and in mainstream for some time.*' (headteacher, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06), and becoming more specialised in '*autism, severe learning difficulties and challenging behaviour*' (teacher, Oakhammer:26/04/06). Most of the changes referred to by these interviewees, ultimately related to their concerns about maintaining a steady intake of students and the performance of state provision, which in due course, was likely to affect the number of students seeking an independent education.

With regards to a changing pupil population, interviewees representing three approved schools and two non-maintained schools reported that their pupil populations were now more diverse than in the past. '*It has been very noticeable over the past few years having changed from having pure dyslexics to include a diverse range of associated difficulties*' (deputy head, Amberleigh Court:28/03/06). Another headteacher described how,

> *We have lost the more physically able disabled person and gained a*
> *cocktail of difficulties. Therefore we are taking on more complex*
> *students and consequently I have to hire more staff, which means I*
> *have to put up the fees to pay for it all.*
>
> (headteacher, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06).

The consensus of opinion from interviewees was that they were now finding themselves dealing with the leadership, management and teaching of students with a far greater range of difficulties than in the past and a far greater depth of complexities regarding their educational and social needs. Interviewees at Oakhammer had experienced little change, and this they felt was due to the fact that they dealt with the most severe children anyway. Other interviewees identified that students attending their schools were currently more likely to be suffering from:

- Communication problems, behavioural problems and aspergers compared with the past where the majority of students at the school suffered from dyslexia. (Hillcrest).

- Children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and autistic based disabilities compared with the past where the majority of students were dyslexic or harboured single disabilities. *(*Greybridge Manor).
- A diverse range of associated difficulties rather than dyslexia alone. (Amberleigh Court).
- Severe medical needs, rather than in the past where children applying to the school were more physically functional. (The Lord Radleigh).
- More disabilities besides their deafness. (Newton Heights).

In comparison, two out of the three LEA Officers confirmed to the researcher that they had seen a change in the needs of the pupil population being referred by them to independent special schools. 'W*e are going down and down on sensory impairment like hearing impairment and visual impairment, but Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is just emerging, we are getting to enormous levels' (Coalburnshire, LEA Officer:06/06/06 date)*. According to the LEA Officer, mainstream schools are reluctant to take these children due to the behavioural problems associated with ASD and there is only limited availability in his own schools. The Officer for Lallanshire also reported '*I have seen a growing number of children coming to us with emotional and behavioural difficulties' (30/05/06)*. In her view local maintained mainstream schools were probably keeping more children in mainstream schools than they used to because of the government's policy of trying to reduce exclusions and putting all sorts of outreach facilities in place in order to retain them. However, it seemed to the Officer that maintained mainstream schools were finding it particularly difficult to accommodate children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Therefore more and more, these schools were referring such children back to the LEAs for more appropriate placements. The issue of having to deal with more children with behavioural problems was also of concern to ten of the twelve deputy heads and teachers interviewed who generally found that it made their lives harder. This issue was repeatedly mentioned across the range of interviews conducted.

Teachers talked about self confidence, motivation and being listened to as the main enablers that helped students to achieve. In contrast teachers spoke of hindrances that worked against students achieving as the experience of failure, the national curriculum and a lack of understanding by those involved in their education and named a lack of

understanding on the part of examination boards as one example. In difference to the teachers interviewed, LEA Officers viewed an ethos of inclusion as a main enabler that helped students achieve. One Officer explained '*I think a school needs an ethos of inclusion because if you have that ethic they will work towards meeting whatever needs the child may have to overcome*' *(Luggie, LEA Officer02/06/06)*. Superb links between teaching staff and care staff in schools was an enabler that the Coalburnshire LEA Officer looked for when placing students. Accordingly, '*when we go and look at the school, we also look at the culture of the school, in that I mean how welcoming it is*' *(Lallanshire, LEA Officer:30/05/06)*. When talking about the main hindrances that can work against students achieving, LEA Officers viewed these to be when everyone is not working together, a poor leader and an incorrect placement as the main inhibitors. For example '*if you have got a good manager, whatever that role, it will be fed down to staff*' *(Luggie, LEA Officer:02/06/06)*.

The role of independent special schools therefore seems to rest heavily with the capability of their leaders and managers to rise to the challenges as they are presented to them by a changing population of students and consequences from the national inclusion strategy. As implementers of national policy, LEAs also have the potential to impact on independent special schools in terms of the ways in which they perceive the role of independent special schools to be and their individual interpretations of the duties placed upon them through legislation. The next section therefore explains the findings in relation to the interactions between these two sectors.

►*State/Private Relations*

State/private activities were generally found to arise from the private sector as opposed to the state sector. Interviewees from independent schools were found to be receptive to the idea of dual partnerships between the sectors and believed partnership activities would be of value. Some schools had already embarked on joint ventures, some thought it to be a good idea, but were unsure what they could do, whilst one particular school had offered partnership activities with their local LEA who had dismissed the idea without further discussion. In contrast the interviewee from Oakhammer reported that they had just been recruited by Coalburnshire LEA to offer a service '*a sort of trouble shooting service, a rapid response team. So where they have difficulties with particular*

*children in schools, we can go in and do some observations and give ad*vice *(Headteacher, Oakhammer:26/04/06).* Amberleigh Court were also found to be involved in private/state partnerships in which they ran courses three times a year, offering support, guidance and professional development for colleagues in the mainstream.

Newton Heights was another school which was deeply involved with private/state partnerships in which they ran an MSc course in educational audiology for teachers, a trading company which repairs hearing aids and they also used some of their teaching fraternity to lecture in universities. Another already engaging in state/private partnerships was The Lord Radleigh. According to the headteacher the school holds *'three professional visitors days every year and we invite people into our school to see what we do, the equipment we use, the techniques we use and we do that free of charge'* *(20/03/06).* Hillcrest was alone in not having already established independent/state partnerships, although the headteacher remarked that '*we are just beginning to explore this' (06/03/06).* Although LEA Officers concurred with the view that state/private partnerships could be very helpful, they believed that '*there are some sectors where in fact the teachers in maintained settings with their continuing professional development programmes are in fact in advance of some of the staff that are employed in the independent or non-maintained sector' (Luggie, LEA Officer:02/06/06).* However, LEA Officers were of the opinion that if independent schools have got an expertise for a child's needs then it should be shared. *'I can't see there should be this artificial barricade between our own schools and independent schools' (Coalburnshire, LEA Officer:06/06/06*). The LEA Officer for Lallanshire also confirmed that in her county, they had an arrangement with their own special school staff, who are very experienced with working with children on the autistic spectrum to participate in outreach activities in the rest of the community. From the responses of interviewees and LEA Officers it appears there is considerable scope for improvement in the relationship between the two sectors.

LEA Officers reported that changing policies at national levels have caused an amalgamation of educational services with social services so as to form a new combined unit known as Children's Services Department. The government's drive to give maintained schools greater control of the money has forced LEAs '*to put the majority of*

school funding into schools and let them get on with it' (Luggie, LEA Officer:02/06/06) and according to LEA Officers, that has had a huge impact on the ways in which LEAs operate and seek to place children with SEN. LEA Officers did not perceive that these changes had affected their relationship with the independent school sector because they viewed it to be their job anyway *'to resist placements in the [independent sector] if [their] view is that the child's needs can be met by maintained provision'* (Luggie, LEA Officer:02/06/06). A final caveat regarding the relationship between independent schools and LEAs must rest with the Coalburnshire LEA Officer who remarked *'I think some of the independent schools are naïve. I get the distinct impression that some think they are on a gravy train*!' By this, the LEA Officer meant that in his experience there were some leaders of independent schools who viewed LEAs as a bottomless pit of financial support. Insomuch as they were inclined to increase costs for ease, rather than applying economical prudence in running their schools. Economical prudence was found to be a major consideration that was influential upon the working practice of LEAs. Therefore the next section of the study's findings moves on to detail LEA Officer's accounts of their working practices as they relate to independent special schools.

►*The Working Practice of LEAs*

All LEA Officers' concurred that it was very rare for pupils to go from a mainstream school straight into an independent special school. They explained that it does happen, but very rarely because *'they would still have to go through their normal provisions first before considering an independent placement'* (Luggie, LEA Officer:02/06/06). This point confirms the experiences of headteachers that generally, LEAs are reluctant to place students with them unless forced to do so, either through a lack of availability in their own schools or as a direct result of a tribunal judgement. In terms of moving a pupil from an independent special school back into mainstream provision it appears it *'would depend on the progress that the child has made'* (Luggie, LEA Officer:06/06/06). However, it seems that it *'is more likely that children move back from maintained special schools, where children might spend a certain amount of lesson time in a mainstream school and an amount of time in their special provision'* (Lallanshire, LEA Officer:30/05/06). This situation is slightly contrary to the experiences of the headteachers of Hillcrest and Greybridge Manor who described how

they felt themselves caught between imperatives, insomuch that if they did their job well, then LEAs sought to remove children back into their own maintained mainstream provision, because the child might have attained above the LEA criteria for paying fees. Similarly, if sufficient progress was not made, then again LEAs sought to remove the child back into mainstream provision, due to interpreting that the placement was not value for money. This situation therefore caused headteachers problems when ensuring the economic viability of their schools through full pupil rolls.

According to all three LEA Officers, the criteria for awarding Statements remains unchanged over the past few years. What has changed however is that government initiatives have given greater control of the money directly to schools. It appears that '*Statements are only a vehicle for delivering into the schools more money in order to provide provision and support for a child' (Luggie, LEA Officer:02/06/06)*. As inclusive practice requires such children to be accommodated in maintained mainstream schools, this can be achieved without the need of a Statement, because the money is already directly placed in these schools by the government. Therefore Statements are only really needed for fee charging schools, where LEAs are expected to foot the bill. As a result, LEA Officers appeared to be particularly belligerent on their interpretations of when and when not Statements should be issued and particularly critical of the process whereby they were required to defend their actions at Tribunals. According to one LEA Officer,

> *We have got another tier now of assistant education offers who work on difficult situations and who get caught up in the dreaded word 'Tribunals'. I don't know what the idea of a Tribunal was first, but it seems to me that we need to put aside people as specialists to fight tribunals and in a lot of cases we are actually instructing barristers because the families produce barristers"*
>
> > *(Coalburnshire LEA Officer:06/06/06).*

LEA Officers unanimously acknowledged that financial considerations were highly influential in relation to their decisions about where to place a child. One response suggested '*I would be a complete lair if I said they didn't. We only have a finite budget and it is never enough' (Coalburnshire, LEA Officer:06/06/06)*. However, in making

their decisions '*it is mandatory to identify clear audit trails as evidence as to why we have made the decisions we have*' *(Lallanshire, LEA Officer:30/05/06)*.

LEA Officers also acknowledged that they are not obliged to find the very best placement with an over abundance of resources, 'we *are only really looking for the most effective placement*' *(Lallanshire, LEA Officer:30/05/06)* and they usually find that their own maintained mainstream schools can usually meet most children's needs. According to one Officer, '*I think it is ghastly that a child has a physical defect, like a severe hearing loss and we say, sorry you can't be with your mates that you play with in the holidays*' *(Coalburnshire, LEA Officer:06/06/06)*. Thus the research findings showed that all LEA Officers questioned believed that children are best placed as near to home as possible. When questioned, all LEA Officers thought they had adequate influence and control over their placements in independent special schools. Although the reasons behind their thinking were varied ranging from having good relationships with the sector, control through being the ones to pay the fees, to direct and control measures through the Statement and Annual Review Process. In fact all three LEA Officers described their relationship with non-maintained and approved special schools as good. LEAs '*tend to stick to the same schools that [they] know*' (*Lallanshire, LEA Officer:30/05/06*) and do not like '*to be ripped off*' *(Coalburnshire LEA Officer:06/06/06)*. It was notable that no suggestions for improving the relationship with the independent sector were forthcoming from the LEA Officers interviewed.

On the issue of instigating LEA inspections, there was a tendency for LEA Officers to circumnavigate the question. It seems that LEAs do not undertake inspections in independent special schools per se, in the sense that OFSTED or CSCI undertake inspections. But instead LEA Officers acknowledged that their LEA will undertake a review where it is their first placement or when there is cause for concern. Under the terms of the National Association of Independent Schools and Non-Maintained Special Schools (NASS) contract LEAs have a contractual right to inspect. When questioned about whether LEA inspectors were sufficiently trained, all three LEA Officers were adamant that their inspectors were of the highest calibre and were sufficiently trained to understand the requirements of teaching SEN children and the context in which special schools operate. As explained by one LEA Officer,

Our inspectors are all ex-teachers and I think three of them are ex-headteachers. They have experience in a lot of different fields. In a lot of cases our inspectors have a lot more hours under their belts and know a damned sight more about what goes on in the classroom with these specific kids than schools have. Our inspectors are hot!

(Coalburnshire, LEA Officer:06/06/06)

Accordingly, the working practice of LEAs, is to '*review the situation with our own specialists when taking into account all the evidence and the professional judgement of the school. I think it is our duty to question*' (Lallanshire, LEA Officer:30/05/06). Hence, LEAs were found to verify any information coming from schools with their own professionals before making decisions rather than solely relying on the professional judgement of staff in special schools, which was concurrent with the experiences of other interviewees in schools.

Annual Reviews were viewed as being essential. '*They are essential for the child, they are essential for the parents, they are essential for the school and they are essential for the LEA*' (Luggie, LEA Officer:02/06/06). Annual Reviews offers all those involved in a child's education a chance to review the progress made in the year. The Annual Review will indicate to the LEA whether a child's Statement needs to continue and whether the level of support needs to increase or decrease. Accordingly, '*if a child doesn't need a Statement, you are not doing the child any favours by keeping them on a Statement when they don't need it*' (Luggie, LEA Officer:02/06/06). However, LEA Officers were saddened that it was impractical for them to attend every Annual Review and therefore prioritised their attendance at key stages or when there are concerns about a child's development. From detailing interviewees' responses regarding the role available to independent special schools in the educational climate of 2006 the next section of the research findings moves on to focus on the leadership and management aspects of the research findings. In particular, the ways in which being a leader or manager of an independent special school is different to leading and managing other schools and details the accounts of interviewees as to how this brings challenges for the leadership and management in these schools.

Leadership and Management Challenges

Interviewees responses as to their main challenges were found to be varied, although there was an underlying commonality of purpose in terms of their economic survival between them. Figure 4.3 on the following page was developed to show the analysis of the issues that emerged from the interviewees' responses and how the categories connected. Key themes in the research findings stem from the fact that the leadership role has become more complex and greater adaptability skills are required as their role become more specialist and each of these issues is discussed in the following paragraphs.

One of the main challenges in leading and managing independent special schools appears to be in the need to market the school in a different way than a mainstream school. The way in which independent special schools are perceived was of primary importance to all those interviewed. Therefore the concept of some challenges that present themselves '*are those of running any other business*' *(headteacher, Hillcrest:06/03/06)*. In addition there is a need to '*continually justify [a special school's] existence against a very bad press that special schools have had and with no support from the DfES*' *(headteacher, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06)*. This particular reference was made appertaining to the inclusive ideology where special schools had received bad press from those aimed at gaining momentum for the inclusion movement. Another of the main challenges was reported to be filling places. '*It is getting the 133 students through the door that I need to pay my fixed costs*' *(headteacher, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06)*. All six headteachers were of opinion that leading and managing special schools is different from other schools, in terms of focus, levels of staffing and delivery of the curriculum. According to the interviewees questioned special schools are different because '*they are much more focused on the individual and have much more time to deal with things properly*' *(deputy head, Hillcrest:06/03/06)*. Having a large range of staff was also one of the main differences for those leading and managing in special schools. The headteacher of the Lord Radleigh explained that '*out of 300 staff only 28 are teachers, which perhaps a head in a mainstream school will not have*' *(20/03/06)*. Likewise the headteacher of Oakhammer reported that for the 27 SLD children she had in her school, she employed 150 staff and those '*staff need managing and training and I think that is the main difference*' *(26/04/06)*.
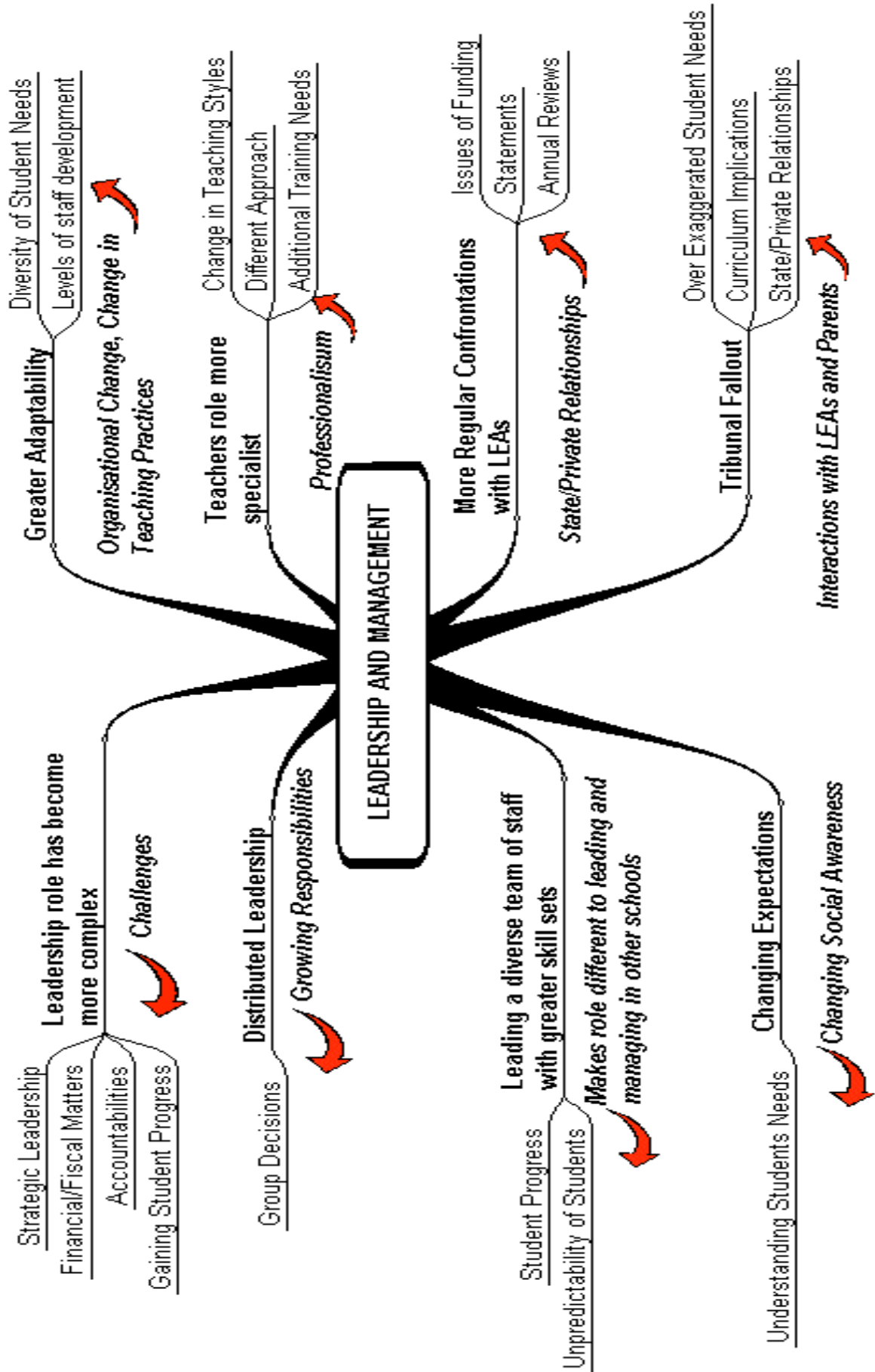
Figure 4.3 Leadership and Management Analysis

The unpredictability of children attending special schools in terms of their behaviour and understanding was another notion of difference. Accordingly, to some '*special schools are hugely different because progress is not a foregone conclusion. You have to work really hard for these children to make progress*' (deputy head, Amberleigh Court:28/03/06). Consequently a further point made by one deputy head described how '*special schools are different in terms of interpreting the right curriculum in a different manner so as to meet a diversity of needs without much support from the published text*' (Deputy Head, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06). A difference in the leadership and management function of independent special schools may therefore be that their leaders and managers may be inclined to '*try to be all things to all men*' (headteacher, Newton Heights:20/04/06).

As a result of ensuring economic viability, one of the main challenges is being able '*to make sense of what needs to be done within an organization that is no longer just a school*' (headteacher, Newton Heights:20/04/06). School activities are set to expand to meet the requirements of government legislation and market demand. The shape of schools therefore is likely to alter and this issue has already started to present challenges to leaders as they weave together the economical purpose and charitable purpose of their schools. Interviewees that were either deputy heads or teachers gave greater focus on student achievement and understanding the labelling of SEN as their primary challenge. Interviewees therefore spoke about the challenge of achieving consistency with a huge staff team and making sure that '*the children will be very confident to show their ability and achieve their full potential*' (deputy head, Newton Heights:20/04/06). The main challenge to one deputy head was '*in the support and training that is required to create good teachers and hang on to them*' (deputy head, Amberleigh Court:28/03/06).

Recent initiatives regarding inclusive practice were not found to have had a major impact on the leadership and management objectives other than to have '*slowed everything down more*' (teacher, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06) and '*make life harder due to a different clientele*' (deputy head, Appleford:28/03/06). Although in contrast one interviewee associated recent initiatives with the fact that '*LEAs are placing children elsewhere for financial reasons*' (Deputy Head, Hillcrest:06/03/06) and needless to say this would be a significant impact on a school. For one particular leader

the impact from the national policy of inclusion had caused him to accept a greater diversity of students into his school so as to maintain pupil numbers. Accordingly, he reported that he was now in danger of '*having to run two schools in parallel in order to meet the needs of each student due to the diversity of SEN that staff were now dealing with*' (Headteacher, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06). Interviewees had found that recent government initiatives had caused a change in teaching styles and caused additional amounts of paperwork, report writing, monitoring and evaluation to be incorporated within their already full workload. Equal opportunity and disability access planning were also reported to have added to the overloading of tasks that had to be completed. Some leaders believed that being child focused as opposed to being business focused had sheltered them from the full impact of the inclusion programme. Other suggestions related to the way that it had made them look at possible alternative sources of income.

Interviewees were divided when it came to considering whether inclusive practice had impacted upon their curriculum and pedagogy. There was a divide between those who believed there had been no impact because '*I am not trying here to prepare children to go back into mainstream – I will not offer that*' (headteacher, Hillcrest:06/03/06) and those who believed that '*the curriculum we offered in the past no longer fits the needs of all pupils. This has led to a revision of the way we have worked to date*' (deputy head, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06). In Greybridge Manor, the impact on the curriculum and pedagogy had been in the form of the teaching of PSHE and tolerance of different faiths. At Amberleigh Court the impact had been to modify the curriculum to the needs of the children, but continue to offer the full national curriculum in the correct key stages. The Lord Radleigh was another school which had felt forced to change due to its changing composition of students. According to its headteacher, '*the curriculum for 20/30 per cent of our students now looks very different than it does for the other 70/80 per cent*' (20/03/06). Oakhammer exclusively had thrown out the National Curriculum three years previously as being inappropriate for their composition of pupils and created their own curriculum based upon personal learning for living using supportive strategies (PLLUSS). The teacher of the school explained that it had been a big leap, a lot of work and there still work to be done. However, she reported that '*we have recently had OFSTED in and they think what we are doing is outstanding*' (teacher, Oakhammer:26/04/06). It therefore seems that leaders and managers in special schools are beginning to question the appropriateness of the National

Curriculum for meeting the needs of their changing populations and at the minimum level are using the National Curriculum as a basis from which modifications are being made.

Impacting Accountabilities

The extent to which interviewees thought themselves as being more accountable to external bodies than previously was varied. Opinions ranged from feeling much more accountable than in the past, to the fact that '*we have always been accountable, but I think that there is just an increased awareness now*' *(headteacher, Amberleigh Court:28/03/06).* Interviewees showed a willingness to be held accountable and suggested that they were not necessarily more accountable than in the past, '*but the intensity has increased and also it has got much more of a higher profile*' *(deputy head, Oakhammer:26/04/06).* The research findings revealed that the major impact from externally imposed accountabilities was from inspections. Greater regularity of inspections was one means by which interviewees did perceive themselves as being more accountable. '*I think we are probably inspected more than a number of maintained schools. It is part of constantly having to prove your right to exist*' *(headteacher, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06).* According to the headteacher of The Lord Radleigh, '*on my most disparaging days I think how much individual leeway do I have left?*'*(20/03/06).*

Figure 4.4 on the following page offers a visual illustration of the impact of accountability as interpreted by the interviewees questioned. To the left of the illustration are issues that relate to the internal factors of schools, including their strategic objectives, curriculum and pedagogy, the balancing of accountabilities and issues of finance, staffing and children's needs.

To the right of the illustration are the external accountability issues. These include matters such as the growth of accountability, its control, the degrees of freedom from which leaders and managers operate as well as the effects of accountability upon innovation and creativity. In addition it identifies issues that are perceived to be affecting state/private partnerships.
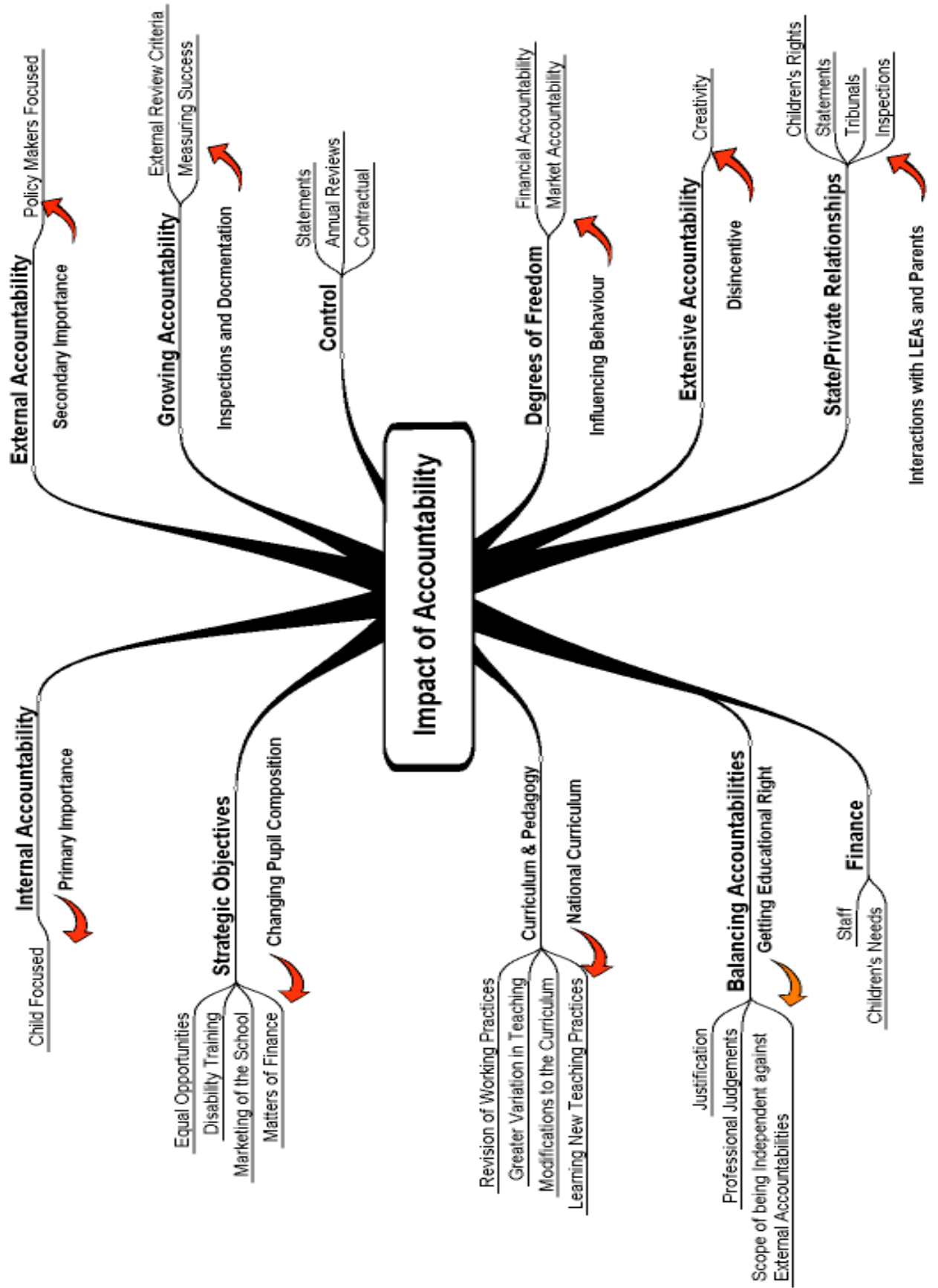
Figure 4.4 Impact of Accountability Analysis

Recommendations from inspections were found to be a primary source of contention amongst the leaders and managers interviewed. Accordingly, a typical response suggested '*the impact on the leadership and management of this school is the accountability to those who inspect us but don't understand the context of the school*' *(headteacher, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06).* The headteacher of Newton Heights regarded the impact as not only having to focus on the children of his school, but also having '*to turn 180 degrees around to see the view of the body that regulates me in this sphere*' *(20/04/06).* From a middle management point of view, the impact from externally imposed accountabilities was in terms of implementing inspection recommendations. According to one interviewee's response '*the impact on the leadership and management of this school is in the sense that the accountability element is just there the whole time for us. We are very aware of legislation*' *(deputy head, Amberleigh Court:28/03/06).* Interviewees viewed external accountabilities as often conflicting with internal measures and mentioned a number of different issues for the reasons behind their thinking. The time taken up to deal with externally imposed accountability was an underlying theme amidst many of the issues raised. For example, one interviewee described how time was needed so as to be '*careful that it doesn't take away from your planning or delivery of the lesson*' *(teacher, Hillcrest:06/03/06).* By this the teacher was referring to the fact that the National Curriculum can have the effect of blinkering staff towards the national guidance requirements as opposed to being totally focused on meeting the individual needs of students. For another interviewee there was a conflict between accountabilities because she had found that '*authorities don't necessarily know the nature of our children and there becomes a conflict because they are not always willing to accept our professional opinion and judgemen*t' *(headteacher, Oakhammer:26/04/06).*

The need to create policies where there is no need in the school to do so was a further issue raised. To one interviewee the time taken in arranging the installation of lifts in buildings, signs and planning for the disabled student that they did not have was frustrating, it inflicted unreasonable financial penalties on schools and was viewed by interviewees as a prime cause of taking leaders and managers away from what '*we should be doing which is administering time to children*' *(headteacher, Newton Heights:20/04/06).* However, in the view of the headteacher of Oakhammer '*the*

biggest conflict is where LEAs are trying to save money and that causes the placement not to be settled' (26/04/06). Solicitors who rack up student's needs for the purpose of discrediting maintained schools so as to win at Tribunals was also one of the issues raised. Invariably it had the effect of '*actually disguising the curriculum that doesn't work' (headteacher, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06).* This reference was made to the fact this headteacher had found that children coming to his school as a result of a Tribunal judgement often had vast amounts of therapy requirements. In his view, these were sometimes unrealistic, and if strictly adhered to would leave little time for the delivery of the curriculum. A particularly pertinent comment from one deputy head described how '*I believe that we need to fight our corners. If necessary in certain situations, I think you need to go with non-compliance if it is in the best interests of your pupils' (deputy head, Amberleigh Court:28/03/06).* The findings therefore suggest that conflict between internal imperatives and external accountabilities is most likely to arise when school staff perceive there to be a significant lack of understanding from those who are imposing their requirements from external quarters.

The review of OFSTED and CSCI inspection reports appertaining to the six schools which have participated in this research was therefore a further source that offered examples of how external accountability was imposed on schools. For instance, Amberleigh Court's OFSTED report, with Approved status, identified it to be a good school and stated that 'the curriculum is well planned and successfully meets the needs of dyslexic pupils. A significant strength was the pastoral care of pupils.' Yet the report's main findings determined that in order to comply with the regulations, the school should ensure that a). 'a full employment history is obtained for all prospective employees and b). the school must prepare an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of any pupil registered at the school who is wholly or partly funded by the local authority, and submit that account to the local authority, and on request to the Secretary of State.' Whilst not required by the regulations, the report recommended that the school might wish to consider the following points for development: (i) 'a review of its marking policy and (ii) an extension of its monitoring of teaching and learning.'

External accountability therefore existed for Amberleigh Court School outwardly to portray evidence of what it did well, comply with legislative requirements and consider

the inspection recommendations. Their CSCI report conducted under the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools had produced twelve action points that must be taken so that the school meets the Children Act 1989. These twelve points included the in-depth training of the Head of Care in child protection matters and appraisals, sanction recording and the minuting of meetings, medication administration recording, privacy issues, fire doors and the requirement that 'hard copies of references must be obtained for all new staff and retrospectively for the house parents. The report identifies that 'this is the second report to state this recommendation.' The report there seems to suggest that the recommendations of the report should be read as the actions required by the report, thus imposing an external accountability on schools to comply not only with requirements but also a subtle conformity to recommendations.

Similarly, Greybridge Manor School, with Approved status, according to the OFSTED report is a 'highly effective school. The standard of teaching and learning is good and staff are totally committed to ensuring that the pupils grow in independence and ability. Areas that could be improved are a) the teaching of language and literacy skills consistently across the curriculum and b) the consistency with which pupils' learning targets are identified and communicated to parents.' The report identified that the school had responded very well to the findings of the last inspection in 1995 and found that 'it has addressed all the key issues and maintained the high standards of teaching and learning found then.' Their latest CSCI report found only seven recommendations to make in order for the school to fully comply with the Children Act 1989. These recommendations included the need to 'repaint sick bay and restrict the window opening,' care staff supervision of boarders to be reviewed and 'care staff are given training in listening to children.' Other recommendations centred upon the keeping of specific records and the 'recruitment checks to fulfil the requirements of 27.2 of the National Minimum Standards.

Hillcrest School's OFSTED inspection with Approved status, identified it as being an excellent school. The quality of education, particularly the curriculum is outstanding and it is equally well supported by its boarding provision. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is supported by teachers, boarding staff and governors in meeting the school's aims. The school meets all the statutory requirements. OFSTED

suggest that the school should 'extend and formalise the procedures for the self-evaluation of whole school effectiveness.' However, their CSCI report identified twelve recommended actions points and seven advisory points. Recommended points included 'the anti-bullying policy should additionally detail how to respond to bullying by staff,' as well as child protection review of policies and the recording of training. Medical requirements included the requirement for a thermometer to be kept in the medication refrigerator and daily temperature records to be taken, as well as requiring 'a system of auditing actual usage of medication against recorded use be implemented in order to detect any losses of Controlled Drugs, including Ritalin, held in the school. Other requirements included the review of the qualifications of all care staff, a documented risk assessment for those who administer their own medication and the requirement that 'the school should ensure that written references are completed before members of staff take up their post.' Furthermore advisory recommendations formed requirements for clarification of admission criteria, a sanctions log, a review of the school's physical intervention policy and the recording of medication on pupil specific charts. There is evidence therefore that external accountability has impacted upon Hillcrest School in numerous ways, from staff recruitment, the keeping of records through to the appropriateness of school policies.

The latest OFSTED report described Oakhammer School with Non-Maintained status, as 'a highly effective school, which has some outstanding features. The report established that 'this is a compassionate school with a positive ethos, in which the needs of learners are paramount and fully achieves its statement of purpose. The school provides an outstanding level of care and welfare and a good quality of education. It meets all the requirements of the regulations.' The latest CSCI report was free of requirements but under the heading "What they could do better" recorded that 'the organisation has policies and procedures in place for all aspects of care provision. The documents have been developed by the NHS Trust and would benefit from regular review by the registered manager to ensure they meet the needs of the staff and the people supported.

A recent OFSTED report carried out in April 2005 identified Newton Heights, with Non-Maintained status, as being an excellent school. 'Pupils and students are happy, confident and have high levels of self-esteem. They achieve highly because of the

skilled support and rich experiences they receive. Overall the school complies well with the National Minimum Standards for boarding.' Since the last inspection, improvements have been seen in medical and recruitment records, training for the heads of houses, stability of care staff and staffing levels at the primary centre.' Their CSCI report stated the school has taken measures to reduce bullying, paperwork has improved and there are now more care staff. The report suggests under the heading "What they could do better" is better staff training, care staff to have greater knowledge of the school day and to help with schoolwork and boarding houses to be made safer. This report therefore indicates that the school has responded to the previous set of requirements laid down by CSCI inspection and it is therefore likely that they will also respond to the new set of requirements based upon inspectors' interpretations of what they have found during their inspection and their interpretation of legislation standards.

The Lord Radleigh School also has Non-Maintained status, and is identified in their OFSTED report as an effective school with some very good features. Good leadership is supported by a staff committed to ensuring every pupil has access to all school activities. 'Improvement since the last inspection in May 1999 is good'. According to the report the most important things the school should do to improve are, a) ensure that there is a focus on a coordinated approach to long-term subject development with clear targets for improving subjects, b) provide clear and measurable success criteria for school development planning.' Likewise, the CSCI inspection report confirms The Lord Radleigh School as 'extremely good at providing an environment for students within which they feel safe, where they feel listened to by staff caring for them and where they can express their views.' Since the last inspection the school had responded by improving the number of staff undertaking their National Vocational Qualifications and have increased the number of assessors on the staff group. The frequency of staff supervision had improved and there is an initiative to recruit more bank staff. The school achieved the 'Healthy Schools award' during the course of the inspection.' Under the heading "What they could do better" the report recommended that 'the school should ensure that no staff must commence employment prior to CRB checks having been undertaken. Secondly, medication transportation practice could improve to enhance safety such as to prevent loss and spillage, allow nurses to attend to any sudden needs of individuals. Thirdly, medication records should be signed after administration of each individual's medication.' The administration of medication was an issue that

was raised by the majority of inspections, along with staff recruitment, the recording of information, the review of policies and staff training. From reviewing a primary source of how external accountabilities, such as OFSTED and CSCI inspections are impacting upon independent special schools, the next section will move on to review the literature about how differing aspects of accountabilities may need to be balanced.

Balancing External/Internal Imperatives

Challenges in respect of balancing accountabilities were found to derive mainly from issues of education as opposed to matters of finance. Accordingly interviewees suggested that there is the balance between *'getting the education right and meeting the needs of our students' (headteacher, Amberleigh Court:28/03/06)*. It is the balance between *'children's rights and an ever increasing volume of paperwork' (headteacher, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06)*. Balancing what is viewed as being right, with something that is disagreed with was another area which presented dilemmas for the leaders and managers interviewed. Accordingly one interviewee spoke of how *'it is important that we prioritise and sometimes you have to stick to your principles, but our priority is always to the pupils' (deputy head, Newton Heights:20/04/06)*. Interviewees also indicated that there was a practical tension and balance where *'parents want something, the LEA demands something else, social services require something else and staff feel that none of the three are right' (headteacher, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06)*. To the deputy head of the same school, her interpretation of the tensions involved with balancing accountabilities related to the demands of staff, the needs of the student and the demands of the Trust. In contrast the teacher of the same school could not relate having any experience of having the need to balance external accountability with what she felt was necessary to do in the classroom. This finding revealed fairly different interpretations from the different layers of management within this one particular school and was fairly typical of the varied perspectives shown by interviewees' responses to the research questions generally in the other participating schools.

The findings also revealed there to be a pragmatic balancing when it came to the daily management and leadership functions in terms of resolving problems, dealing with parents, phone calls, messages and the like due to the volume of tasks to be undertaken within the time that was available to them. Teachers from Hillcrest, Greybridge Manor

and Amberleigh Court alike associated the National Curriculum as a primary cause for the need of balancing internal imperatives with external accountabilities. In this regard teachers talked about their anguish when balancing the needs of individual students with a curriculum generally designed for the more capable student. Thus one interviewee described how '*there is a lot of guilt, a lot of frustration and a huge amount of things to deal with*' *(teacher, Oakhammer26/04/06).* According to interviewees, maintaining good communication levels with their large staff was another way in which they had to balance time and their duties. The deputy head of Oakhammer explained that '*there are so many people involved in the education of one child, I need to ensure that I am clearly communicating to all parties in order to develop good working relationships therefore I have to balance my day with all my other responsibilities*'(26/04/06). Although many of these issues could similarly relate to state special schools, the different perspective of these issues comes from '*balancing the scope that I have from being independent to the accountability of prescribed processes and procedures*' *(deputy head, Hillcrest:06/03/06).*

External accountabilities are particularly influential on the decisions made in independent special schools. According to interviewees, external accountabilities are influencing decisions '*because you have to be seen to be doing what is required*' *(headteacher, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06).* The headteacher of Amberleigh Court related that recently, whilst preparing for an OFSTED inspection she had been required to change some of the school's working practices in order to meet the inspection criteria. Limiting freedom was named as one way in which external accountabilities were found to be influential on the decisions taken in schools. One headteacher explained that,

> *External accountabilities are influencing our decisions because you don't have the latitude. You work within degrees of freedom, but you need to know what those degrees of freedom are and I think that is negative really. (headteacher, Newton Heights:20/04/06)*

A similar account was given by the headteacher of the Lord Radleigh who had found that external accountability had increased year by year. He believed he was therefore less able to be innovative across the school, because as a result of externally imposed

accountability, change had become a cumbersome procedure. Thus the headteacher questioned whether creativity in schools was being stifled by trying to fit in with the requirements of LEAs. However, rather than influencing decisions, the headteacher of Oakhammer believed '*it was more about being aware of external accountabilities and making sure there is more justification for doing things*'(26/04/06).   External accountability in the sense of DFES approval was also noted by those in approved schools as influencing every decision. Government policies and children's Statements were other forms of influence noted by the interviewees questioned. One interviewee's account explained how children's Statements influence decisions because they describe what the needs of the individual are. Although '*it is questionable whether it is really a true reflection of what the child's needs are*' *(deputy head, Oakhammer:26/04/06).* From the perspective of classroom teaching, all teachers but one, admitted that external accountabilities influenced what they did in the classroom. This was in terms of the ways in which problems were resolved, and goals were set so as to be seen as being better than state provision. Interviewees were also keen to note however, that parents too have considerable influence on the decisions made about their children.   The research findings have therefore shown that staff employed in independent special schools are mindful of their external accountabilities: but at times disagree with what they are required to do; and as such situations arise they are not afraid to fight their cause if it is in the best interests of their students to do so. Therefore educational issues were found more likely to present dilemmas which needed to be balanced by these leaders and managers rather than financial matters, and their external accountabilities are very influential upon the decisions taken. The final section of this chapter moves to show what interviewees perceived as the implications for independent special schools in the years ahead.

Implications for the Years Ahead

LEA Officers believed that independent special schools will continue as they are. '*Parents will continue to choose an independent school without regard to the fact that they are tax payers and that their fellow tax payers are paying more for their child*' *(Luggie, LEA Officer:02/06/06).* According to the LEA Officers interviewed, there will continue to be a niche in the market for independent special schools as LEAs will continue to need the independent sector for some placements. But this niche '*depends*

how far LEAs can make local provision available to children with very significant difficulties' (Lallanshire, LEA Officer:30/05/06). LEA Officers generally agreed that it is impossible for any LEA to make provision for every child who has special educational needs within their boundaries, given the severity and complexity of some needs. There will always be some who are not going to be able to be supported in maintained mainstream or their special schools. Therefore the implications for independent special schools over the next few years will be *'dependent upon whether inclusion is working or not' (Lallanshire, LEA Officer:30/05/06).* In addition, the implications for independent special schools will also depend on the category of child that they set out to meet. The Lallanshire LEA Officer admitted that she did not think that her authority will open up any more special schools, because every time her LEA had consulted with consultants, they had concluded that it was not a feasible proposition for the authority. In fact she remarked that *'most authorities I know of are actually closing [their special provision] rather than opening it' (Lallanshire, LEA Officer:30/05/06).*

The Code of Practice under the 1996 Education Act was found to have given LEAs huge problems as it made reference to parents having choice about their children's placements. This perceived right of parents to choose seemed to fit uncomfortably with how LEA Officers interpreted their financial responsibilities insomuch as needing only to find an appropriate placement to meet a child's needs rather than the very best one. According to LEA Officers this issue was expected to continue to cause conflict and consequently the conflict surrounding Tribunals was also expected to persist for the foreseeable future. The conflict surrounding Tribunals was described by one LEA Officer as *'the biggest bane of our life, because it sets us and parents on either side of a barricade' (Coalburnshire, LEA Officer:06/06/06).* However, in the LEA Officer's view *'both are trying to get the best for the child'* and he explained that parents actually get to the stage of getting to see the LEA Officer as the enemy. *'When the Tribunal is over and the dust has settled we have to work with that family and that child – that is my job' (Coalburnshire, LEA Officer:06/06/06).* Accordingly, the Officer explained that it would make his life so much easier if he did not have Tribunal cases to deal with, but he couldn't see that happening as he knew that the government at this time are playing up parents' rights to choose. Thus *'parents will always have rights and we will always have a fairly limited budget to administer'* and *'so I think we will continue to find*

ourselves in the situation of trying to avoid making one very costly placement, in order that we can help many more' (Lallanshire, LEA Officer:30/05/06). Interestingly, LEA Officers reported that this situation can also work in reverse. For example, there are occasions when parents choose a mainstream placement, in preference to an independent sector placement despite the mainstream school openly admitting they cannot meet the child's needs. In this situation LEA Officers believed that '*it is nearly impossible for a mainstream school to prove that it cannot make provision. So Tribunals just tell mainstream schools to get on with it' (Luggie, LEA Officer:02/06/06).* National policy therefore presents itself as a double-edged sword which causes a system of both winners and losers. Thus this investigation revealed that there are ramifications for the state sector and independent sector alike and LEAs interpretation of their duties under the inclusion programme seem central to the arising issues of conflict.

Interviewees employed in schools were also of the opinion that there would be a continuing need for special schools and specialized teachers, although the niche of these schools would move towards educating more problem type children. Implications relating to the raising standards in SEN education was described in terms of how '*special schools will have to achieve something that mainstream schools cannot to remain in the market place' (headteacher, Greybridge Manor:14/03/06).* So this particular headteacher thought that special education is always going to be very intense. Other implications, as suggested by the interviewees were likely to be dependent upon '*the ever increasing pressures from LEAs and what they claim is their provision in mainstream schools' (headteacher, Amberleigh Court:28/03/06).* Interviewees also described how, in the next few years, there was likely to be pressure throughout the majority of mainstream schools to have provision for pupils with behaviour problems. However it was evident to some that '*mainstream just cannot cope with those types of children in a large class setting' (Deputy Head, Newton Heights:20/04/06).* A huge issue appears to be that the move to inclusion for some children has not worked. Although inclusion was described by one interviewee as being fantastic, he believed that '*there will be implications eventually because a lot of children won't achieve' (teacher, Newton Heights:20/04/06).* It seems that 'a*t the moment mistakes are being learnt, and I expect that there will be a move certainly back, if not to special schools, to support agencies' (headteacher, Oakhammer:26/04/06).* Accordingly, one teacher spoke of '*the difficulty of parents finding the right school will continue and in the future*

special schools might be viewed as more inclusive than realized' (teacher, *Hillcrest:06/03/06).* In reality, politics and issues of conflict never seem to be far apart. Implications for independent special schools arise from the fact that the major political parties are dodging the SEN issue because they do not represent a large proportion of the population. One suggestion to reduce the amount of conflict surrounding the state funding of independent placements was for '*special schools to be centrally funded'* *(headteacher, Newton Heights:20/04/06).* The main objective of centrally funding SEN placements would be to ease the financial burden and thus even out the disparity between the numbers of SEN children within LEA regions. Nevertheless interviewees did not commonly expect this to happen and generally considered that the '*funding issues will continue to be a problem'* *(deputy head, Hillcrest:06/03/06).*

It was expected that the Statementing saga and funding issue would continue as would the need for fighting at Tribunals. Due to its emotive nature '*the government is always going to want to do something on inclusion'* (teacher, *Newton Heights:20/04/06).* Interviewees believed that '*the government will try different ways of meeting the needs of students, but not necessarily be successful'* *(deputy head, The Lord Radleigh:20/03/06).* Thus '*government having realized that total inclusion is impossible will continue to want special schools'* *(deputy head, Newton Heights:20/04/06).* One teacher remarked that '*inclusion in the classroom is a cop out. I don't think we are doing SEN children any favours at the moment'* *(teacher, Amberleigh Court28/03/06).* It is evident that the numbers of children with disability is not going to diminish and those with cerebral palsy, according to the headteacher of The Lord Radleigh, will rise. Thus '*independent schools will continue to develop due to the lack of LEA provision'* *(teacher, Oakhammer26/04/06).* Although interviewees believed that for the next few years the uncertainty surrounding the role of independent special schools in educating SEN children was expected to continue. That said, one of the major dependencies only briefly touched upon by interviewees is likely to be in terms of '*whether parents or LEAs can afford the charges of independent special schools due to the labour intensive dynamics of special schools'* *(deputy head, Hillcrest:06/03/06).*

Conclusion

The findings of this research study have revealed that the national inclusion strategy has effected impact on the market niche of independent special schools by causing schools to make a paradigm shift towards catering for the more complex SEN student which in the past would not necessarily have been admitted. Thus the role of independent special schools has shifted and key to their role of educating SEN students is propping up and compensating for the deficiencies in the national inclusion strategy. Whilst LEAs viewed their relationship with those employed in independent special schools as good, they were found to be reticent regarding the promotion of state/private partnerships. In contrast, however, independent schools were found to be deeply involved in promoting and participating in such activities. Nevertheless, when it comes to placing children with SEN in an independent special school, LEA Officers viewed it to be their duty to resist such placements.

The findings have also shown that leading and managing independent special schools is different to leading and managing other schools in two ways, namely, the levels of staffing and the delivery of the curriculum. It appears that the levels of staffing in independent special schools is usually large and often contains a diversity of specialists including care workers, nurses, therapists, educational psychologists as well as the usual complement of teaching, admin, boarding and maintenance staff. Progress for SEN children is not a foregone conclusion and therefore the challenges for leaders and managers of these schools are associated with interpreting the right curriculum in a different manner and marketing the school accordingly.

The feeling of interviewees is that they are subject to a heavy and growing weight of external accountability, but it is the internal factors, including their morale and professional accountability which concerns them most. External accountability impacts upon the leadership and management of these schools by creating many differing challenges. Some are complementary, some are conflicting and some cause frustrations, tensions and annoyance which arise from anomalies appertaining to the inspection system. Interviewees were of the opinion that inspectors lacked perspective about the context under which independent special schools operate, and in contrast this point was hotly refuted by the LEA Officers questioned. External accountabilities are particularly

influential on the decisions taken in schools and the prime cause for the need to balance accountabilities is more likely to evolve from matters of education as opposed to matters of finance. Although implications for independent special schools in the years ahead is likely to depend on whether inclusion is made to work or not, the main challenge for them will ultimately rest with themselves in terms of being seen to achieve something that mainstreams schools cannot.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter serves to analyse and introduce points for discussion from the main findings of this research study. The format of this chapter follows the same format as the research questions identified at the end of Chapter 1 and therefore commences by considering the key role of independent special schools in view of conflicts which surround the government's national inclusion strategy. Appertaining to this point the this chapter considers whether independent special schools should be deemed as being inclusive and therefore part of the inclusion system as opposed to being external to it. In addition, analysis is drawn from why key roles for independent special schools at this time appears to be propping up a failing government strategy, compensating for a deficit system and being specialists in the field of special needs education.

From considering the key role of independent special schools from these perspectives, the analysis of the findings leads on to consider the nature of the current challenges that exist for their leaders and managers. Fundamentally, the challenges of leadership and management in independent special schools derives from emotive, social and ethical dilemmas associated with internal visions of what good SEN education is about which is put under threat by those external to the school community who interpret good SEN education differently. This basic occurrence, however appears to have the potential to develop into intricate and complex webs of challenges: which are associated with leading and managing a diverse workforce, gaining student progress and resolving differences when professional judgements conflict; and these points serve as the main points of the analysis and discussion in this section.

From considering key aspects of the role of independent special schools and the challenges relating to their leadership and management, this chapter develops to consider the main areas where external accountability causing challenges for the leadership and management of independent special schools. This includes how extensive accountability can impact negatively on the creativity of staff, the impact upon leaders and managers by being limited to working within degrees of freedom and the consequences of being inspected under inappropriate inspection criteria. Arising

from the impact of external accountability, the analysis looks at how sets of imperatives, such as external/internal imperatives are balanced and considers why internal factors are much more important to leaders and managers of these schools than those derived from external sources. Emerging from the data the balancing of accountabilities appears to stem from doing the right thing, reducing conflict and increasing compliance and balancing the skill sets of staff with students' needs. These three points form the basis of discussion in this section regarding the challenges that arise from the need for leaders and managers to balance sets of accountabilities.

The final section of this analysis looks towards the implications for independent special schools for the future in terms of their marketing and the impact of political agendas. In keeping with the format of this chapter, the first section of this analysis of the study's findings will commence with a discussion concerning the key role of the independent special school.

Key Roles for Independent Special Schools

The ability and performance of state provision to meet the needs of children with SEN is enormously influential on the types of SEN students that are applying for placements at independent special schools. It is apparent that some children with SEN cannot be adequately accommodated in a mainstream environment and for those a special school still appears to be the better option even though this is seen by some as being contrary to the national inclusion strategy. However, whether it is contrary or not depends on how society views inclusion and the extent to which special schools and those that are independent can be considered as being inclusive and therefore integral as opposed to external to the inclusion system. Concurrent with Wearmouth's (2001) findings, those that place an egalitarian, philosophical interpretation upon inclusion are inclined towards a meaning of greater equality and equal opportunities for SEN students. Others feel that inclusion should mean much more. To some inclusion means the quality and the richness of the educational experience, insomuch as how students engage with the educational process, and changing the term from 'inclusion' to 'meeting needs' is likely to make the meaning of inclusion clearer. Thus if the meaning of inclusion is translated purely in terms of meeting needs, then special schools can reasonably argue that they should be regarded as being as inclusive as mainstream provision, because staff in

independent special schools unsurprisingly view themselves highly competent in meeting the diversity of needs harboured by the growing complexities of their student populations.

According to Rix et al (2005) inclusive practice is a strategy for responding to diversity. However, the weakness of the inclusion strategy appears to be that it is interpreted as a 'one size fits all' strategy (Sorrells et al, 2004) that is directed at a composite of children with special educational needs that are particularly individualistic. And it is the very nature of that particular individuality that sets them apart and from which the inclusion strategy sets to bring SEN children back from being apart and into mainstream provision by including them in an education alongside their peers. Thus akin to Allan & Brown (2001) this study has revealed that there is a certain amount of confusion between what inclusive practice theoretically means and what it means in a practical sense to both LEA Officers and those who work in independent special schools. Thus, the survival of independent special schools in the educational climate of 2006 is dependent upon the way they are perceived by society generally (cognitive orientation): a lack of state provision (competitor resources related); and attracting purchasers of their service (desire for the product). This situation corresponds with Tapper (1997) who views change as an interactive process among the schools, the purchasers of their product and the evolving character of state and society.

Cheminais (2003) predicted special schools would need to refocus their role and this appears to be happening to a certain extent. However, rather than refocusing their role the schools that participated in this research were readjusting their role, and mainly driven to do so to maintain pupil numbers and thus their economic viability. Hence the more able SEN child who in the past would have been placed in a special school is now accommodated in a mainstream school, and those who have complex SEN who might have gone to a specialised form of special school are now being accommodated within the special school that in the past has catered for the less severe forms of SEN. In effect there has been a shift in the structure of SEN education. Due to inclusive practice, students applying to independent special schools are now from the more wealthy type families who either choose a private education or have been failed by the state system. There are also the students who are placed by LEAs as a last alternative, after the student has been subject to the failings of the national inclusion strategy.

►*Propping Up a Failing Government Strategy.*

The inclusion strategy seems to be failing in three main areas. Firstly, due to a lack of funding on the part of government, secondly due to unrealistic expectations placed upon mainstream teachers and headteachers, and thirdly due to making idealistic assumptions that all SEN children are at their most happiest, when being educated in a mainstream environment.

Although by 2006 there has been a change in government thinking and it is not their policy to close special schools, the number of closures in previous years coupled with a rise in recent years of pupils with SEN has significantly contributed towards a lack of state provision in some regions. Efforts by LEAs to correct this situation by creating additional special state provision have been thwarted due to it being financially uneconomic to do so. Sharing the costs of new provision with other LEA regions has also come up against the problem of where new special provision should be located. According to LEA Officers, children are best educated in schools near their homes. But if students are going to travel outside their LEA region, it may be of little significance to them if they are travelling to a state or independent special school, unless of course the education they are receiving is inferior. Thus assuming that independent special schools can deliver a standard of education that is specialised and meets the needs of SEN children to which they cater: key roles for independent special schools as suggested by the interviewees questioned, feature the offer; to educate where appropriate state provision is unavailable and to educate where inclusion has failed. By implication this finding infers that one of the key roles for independent special schools is therefore to prop up a failing government strategy. It appears that inadequate funding and weak administration of the government strategy seem to be two of the most notable failings that are having impact on the education of SEN students as well as impact on the role of independent special schools.

►►The Financial Influence

Financial considerations are very influential on the decisions made by LEA Officers and the fact that some placements are highly expensive is a determining factor that causes LEA Officers to resist one high cost placement, in favour of affording a greater number

of lower cost placements. This of course could be argued as being financially prudent as even the public purse is not a bottomless pit. Nevertheless, through the neglect of government to rationalise the effects of multiple high cost placements in one LEA region compared with another, LEA Officers themselves are needing to balance one individual child's needs against another. Justification for this stems from legislation which requires LEAs to make adequate provision and this they interpret as not necessarily having to secure the best provision. This situation therefore mirrors Archer (1979) who argues that political struggle is at the centre of the change process in which political and economic resources are used to determine outcomes.

According to staff interviewed some of the biggest conflicts arise from LEAs trying to save money which causes a placement not to be settled. LEAs perceive that a placement in their own schools is considerably cheaper than a placement in an independent school and therefore LEAs place children to meet their financial obligations as well as the educational ones. If independent special schools are to have a meaningful role then they must be mindful that their costs are comparable with the cost of state provision, and this must be made clearer through comparable trustworthy analysis. Comparisons are most meaningful when like for like is compared. The purchase of a similar educational service to the one that has failed to meet the needs of an SEN child is unlikely to achieve the desired outcome. Therefore if a different educational approach is needed, then consequently, it is likely that costs will also differ. The funding of SEN education is therefore one of the main battlegrounds in which the equation of the educational service, divided by the meeting of students' needs and multiplied by the cost of doing so is fought. Thus, winners and losers of the system derive from unrealistic expectations placed upon those who have the responsibility of implementing government strategy without realistic funding and realistic resources to determine outcomes.

►►**Unrealistic Expectations**
Inclusion has presented difficulties to mainstream schools in respect of accommodating all children with SEN as well as presenting issues of resolve in respect of the greater complexity of student needs in both non-maintained and approved independent special schools. It is generally recognised that there is a difference between teaching a child who wishes to learn as his/her peers and teaching a child who has learning difficulties

where their needs will not be met by a common approach. Under these conditions it is seemingly unrealistic to expect teachers to cope with all children with SEN in a large class setting, without it affecting the education of others in the class in any way, especially with regards to those children with unpredictable behavioural tendencies. Although most of the participating schools of this study were using the National Curriculum as the basis of their teaching, it was being modified in many varying ways so as to be more meaningful and appropriate to the needs of their new more complex set of learners. Possibly, therefore one of the major flaws in the inclusion strategy is that it has not been thought through coherently enough and places unrealistic expectations on professionals that are good and possibly excellent at their jobs, but not necessarily able to produce the miraculous outcomes that would negate the strategy from failing.

Each LEA Officer is responsible for a large case load of students and they informed the study that it was unrealistic for them to attend all Annual Reviews. In order to meet their responsibilities LEA Officers generally try to attend at an Annual Review at key stages. Thus from the perspective of LEA Officers the system in place where all stakeholders get together once a year to annually review a student's progress is unrealistic due to their workload. LEA Officers have the authority to withdraw a child's Statement and this is usually decided on cold statistical grounds of their progress. The withdrawal of a child's Statement has significant impact on the student as in most situations, the student will be withdrawn from the school where they have made such progress and placed back into unfamiliar surroundings and it is debateable whether this is purely for academic reasons in the best interests of the child or financial reasons, being in the best interests of the LEA purse. It appears the pressures placed on LEAs is therefore possibly too great and too restrictive. Children learn better when they are happy and government policy must build in some leeway into their national strategy that addresses the influences that finance has on gaining the correct placement for the SEN student as well as their happiness.

►►Where Children are Happiest

Interviewees informed the study that children learn and achieve more when they are happy. The national strategy of inclusion makes an important and not necessarily right assumption that all children will be happiest in a mainstream setting. By inferring a child will be happiest in a mainstream setting by default implies that a child is less

likely to be happy in a segregated setting. However, SEN children included in mainstream schools are likely to be segregated into special units, or segregated from their class whilst having specialised help. Therefore those that argue that segregation is wrong, and view special schools as the cause of segregation are viewing only one aspect of the segregation debate.

According to the interviewees questioned children who had come to them from mainstream schools had felt different, thick, odd, and weird compared with their contemporaries and this feeling in itself is likely to have been as segregating to these children as the more widely acknowledged form of segregation, segregated by location. Therefore in its present state inclusion could be likened to a fisherman's net where children of different shapes, sizes and complexities are falling through the net of state provision and are being caught in the nets of independent special schools. However, this situation is likely to become a social travesty for society when there are no more nets in which children with SEN can fall and be caught. Therefore although LEA Officers remarked that they saw it as their duty to resist a placement in an independent special school, the non-existence of these schools would take away a fairly regularly needed back up service, a wealth of expertise and reduce choice within the educational market. However, the wealth of expertise is exactly the resource needed for compensating for a deficit system which determines that, whether it is an appropriate placement or not, all students must first enter mainstream and suffer failure before other alternatives can be considered.

►*Compensating for a Deficit System*

The value of a correct diagnosis and placement as early as possible seems lacking amidst the inclusion policy strategies. Thus all children must first go through the usual channels of being educated in mainstream. It is only when LEAs recognise that the mainstream school is failing to meet a child's needs that a special school can be considered by them. Accordingly this is viewed by some as a deficit system because for the children that have been incorrectly placed, failure has to occur first so as hopefully, success can be achieved later on. Time is of the essence if SEN children are going to achieve. With learning difficulties, children often take a longer time to learn and an incorrect placement is likely to leave a disastrous legacy in terms of achieving their full

potential in life. Therefore, from the point of leaders and managers in independent special schools it is very important that children are placed with them as early as possible. Thus this situation was found comparable to Miles (2004) who named discourses arising from inclusive practice as being from a rights perspective as well as from an economic one.

Either parents have the right to choose, or they haven't and the espoused statements from government need to clarify this point. Until such time LEAs will continue to resist placements outside of mainstream provision for policy and economic reasons and parents will see no other option other than to call LEAs to account at a Tribunal. The existence of independent special schools serves to allow parents a greater choice of schools from which to choose. The LEA Officers questioned in this study placed great importance on children's rights to be educated alongside their peers, but this was not seen by them as working in reverse insomuch as children having the right to be educated in a special school, state or independent, if that was their wish and the wish of their parents. Thus the need for Tribunals appears to be growing as parents challenge the decisions of LEAs to deny them their perceived rights.

►►**Tribunal Appeals**

Tribunals are the bane of LEA Officer's lives. Parents employ barristers to fight their cases at Tribunal hearings, and this necessitates LEAs to also employ solicitors/barristers to defend their actions. Best intentions therefore invoke best intentions. Actions necessitate additional actions. The judgements of Tribunals are not a foregone conclusion and it appears that often these judgements go against the LEA and in favour of parents and the school of their choice. In some situations judgements can go against a mainstream school who although acknowledging their incapability of meeting a child's needs are ordered by a Tribunal judgement to accept the child, because it is the parent's choice.

One of the main discourses that lead to Tribunals is the choices made by LEAs relating to their interpretation of when children with SEN should or should not be awarded a Statement. LEAs have criteria from which to judge whether a child is eligible for a Statement and this criteria has not changed in recent times, but possibly their interpretations of the criteria have. However, Statements are not needed the same as in

the past because funding now goes directly into schools, and LEAs are now able to place children with SEN directly into state schools without the means of a Statement for the funding. Thus Statements are now associated by LEAs as a vehicle for funding a placement into the independent sector. LEA Officers seem therefore to be caught up in a painful exercise implementing what they believe is government policy and then finding their interpretation of national policy in conflict with Tribunals' understandings of national policy. LEA Officers who participated in this research came across as caring professionals who were particularly knowledgeable in their field of expertise. However, the constraints under which they work seemed to necessitate them to walk a path that is balanced between national policy and parents perceived rights to choose and this situation brings into play the need for greater collaboration between the state and independent sector in terms of meeting the needs of all rather than many SEN students.

►►**State/Independent Collaboration**

The relationship between the state and private sectors was found to be a contentious one. Those employed in independent special schools were found willing to be involved with state sector partnerships and many such partnerships are already in existence. According to Nightingale (2003) there are benefits to be gained through working collaboratively and developing partnerships, however, the LEA Officers questioned could see little point in such partnerships. An invisible, at times imperceptible barrier seems to exist between the two opposing sectors. The term opposing was chosen carefully because this term best described how those employed in independent special schools and LEA Officers were perceived to view each other. This view however, did not preclude them from working collaboratively for the benefit of the children but instead made them more sceptical of each others motives and intentions.

There are many joint state/independent partnerships in existence, and it appears from the staff interviewed that the majority are generated from the independent as opposed to the state sector. To improve the quality of SEN education we must build upon the knowledge and build upon the experience of ourselves and others. As special education is of a particular individual nature, the greater knowledge and experience is shared, the greater both sectors will be able to be of benefit to the SEN student. One particular LEA Officer commented that she thought that the standard of teacher training in the state sector was higher than that of the independent sector. If this is indeed the case,

then possibly independent schools could benefit from state-run training courses and the state could benefit from additional revenue and by creating greater continuity of thought and approach towards gaining the sort of student progress that is hard to gain. However, at this point in time, the state remains somewhat elusive to partnerships with the independent sector, although visibly growing in influence.

Therefore under the auspices of meeting a child's needs, LEAs have influence and a certain degree of control at the point where choices are made as to where the most appropriate placement should take place, issues of funding, and at the point where Annual Reviews consider the benefits of a continuance of the placement. In contrast independent special schools have high dependency on LEAs as purchasers of their service, but enjoy a high degree of autonomy in their pedagogy and the way in which they deliver the curriculum. Strengthening this inter-dependency relationship and persuading LEAs of the benefits of collaborative working is thus, key towards independent special schools being seen as bringing benefit to the community, benefit to SEN children and the benefit of choice in the educational market. Perhaps retaining choice in the market place may therefore be one of the most redeeming qualities for independent special schools besides offering a service that is better than the state alternatives.

►*Being Specialists in Their Field*

Providing a better service than the state is likely to provide public benefit. To be the best at educating children with a complexity and co-morbidity of SEN is a particularly challenging role for independent special schools and one that requires additional staff training and development. Thus serving as a centre of excellence in the teaching of SEN children, independent special schools would also be providing the footing for SEN students to receive equal opportunities as their peers without SEN, to access a full appropriately translated curriculum in which they can learn and achieve. Likened to Rose (2002) staff have already seen a changing composition of students. Even though these schools have been retaining their main focus on their particular specialism, such as children suffering from dyslexia or deafness, many staff have recognised that children coming to them are now harbouring many more additional SENs on top of their fundamental dyslexia or deafness. The consequences of independent special schools

becoming centres of expertise and sharing that expertise must surely be beneficial to local communities and society generally. It seems to be a win/win situation from both perspectives. National strategy remains intact and independent special schools continue to have a niche in the educational market.

To be the best, leaders and managers of independent special schools will need to put in strategies that aid students in becoming self confident and motivated individuals: and ensure that the delivery of the national curriculum is appropriate for the learning needs of their students; so as these children are not likely to be de-motivated by failure. Accordingly, from the perspective of LEAs they are looking for schools where there is an ethos of inclusion, good leadership and management and a culture that is welcoming. Therefore as sellers of an educational service, independent special schools will, to a certain extent, need to heed the requirements of their purchasers, which in the case of independent schools will be parents as well as LEAs. Offering mixed placements, whereby students are educated for some time in state provision and part time in the independent school is the route that some leaders are considering at this present time in order to bridge the gap between national policy and national provision. However, in doing so the leadership and management of independent special schools is likely to become even more complex and challenging as they weave together timetables and curricula.

The Main Challenges

In addition to the normal challenges of running a school (NCSL, 2005) challenges arise due to the need for independent special schools to take a different approach to education. This difference includes their perspectives on education, their expectations and the ways in which they achieve. Therefore the holistic profile of an independent special school is likely to look very different from an academic mainstream one. The delivery of education in a special school takes on both academic and social meaning. Family issues often need to be resolved before education can commence and the bonding between the broad relationship between schools, students and their parents came across most strongly in the interviews conducted. The difference in expectations and achievement is not that they are perceived to be greater or less in special schools, but were viewed by the staff interviewed as being more appropriate to the

individualistic nature of their learners. As a result, the leadership and management function in independent special schools has become more specialist and more complex in recent years. Out of this complexity leaders and managers are faced with multifaceted challenges (Harris et al, 2003) as they endeavour to address a wider range of SEN amongst their pupil populations.

Bennett et al (2003) argues that people need to develop socially understood interpretations, so they can work together as an effective group and generally those interviewed implied that this was the case in their schools. A reference back to the literature (Deal & Peterson 1999) informs us that the way in which people conceive their roles, shapes how they think, act and feel. Thus those who were found to be well informed and to an extent angered by political connotations were also more likely to associate political inferences to the challenges of leading and managing their schools and perceive them as barriers against achieving their visions. Challenges for leaders and managers of independent special schools are therefore ultimately entwined with emotive, social and ethical dilemmas associated with their vision of what good SEN education is about. These include the pressures associated with leading and managing a diverse workforce, dimensions of complexities involved with identifying, understanding and then ensuring students' progress, in conjunction with the restraints imposed by their financial limitations.

►*Leading and Managing a Diverse Workforce*

The growing complexities of the pupil population in independent special schools translate to challenges regarding staff recruitment and staff retention. Growing complexities require increasing specialism and additional training. Training good staff and hanging on to them therefore presents a major challenge to the leaders and managers of these schools. According to interview responses, SEN students respond best when there is continuity amongst staff. However, ensuring continuity amidst a large and diverse workforce can be challenging. Good communication between staff aids such continuity and the professionalism of staff also facilitates a continuity of resolution. Both teachers and deputy heads alike were found to share the strain of delivering an education that was meaningful to their students. Job satisfaction arose from resolving what was deemed to be the un-resolvable and in contrast, feelings of

guilt arose from failure. SEN education is thus filled with emotion and emotive language as successes and failures are experienced.

The commitment staff showed to their responsibilities in it self is likely to retain them in the special needs sector. Additional training will improve the rate of success and further aid staff retention. Therefore feelings of failure and guilt are the likely pressures that may sway staff away from the sector. Variables cause uncertainty because to an extent they are outside of internal controls. Thus under these circumstances independent special schools will be subject to variables in the form of the new recruitment of staff in terms of the ability to recruit staff varies from one geographic location to another. Further variables exist in terms of the experience, qualifications and training of those applying for employment. A significant challenge to the leadership and management function of independent special schools is therefore to moderate the flow of staff within their schools and increase their skills sets so as to ensure students meet their utmost potential.

The difference in the leadership style within the schools studied seemed to be dependent upon three main characteristics. Firstly, in terms of humanistic tendencies, for example, the natural style and charisma of the headteacher. Secondly, in the sense of adaptability tendencies, having the ability to adjust and change to the developing leadership role. Thirdly, in the form of knowledge base tendencies, being supported from the experience and competence of staff. Accordingly degrees of distributed leadership were evident amongst the varying levels of staff interviewed in terms of the way in which they sought collaborative decisions (Tucker 2002) and took ownership of their growing responsibilities. Thus a good team of staff who work together well, tendering continuity of approach and imaginative vision in their teaching, appears to be an essential element in the push to gain student progress, albeit, even with such a smooth running system, gaining student progress is, at times, particularly difficult and challenging to attain.

►*Gaining Student Progress*

Challenges arise as student progress is not a foregone conclusion due to the unpredictability of students with SEN. Teachers therefore spoke of how they had to work very hard for progress to be made and appeared to be taking the brunt of the

associated consequences of the growing complexity of their pupil populations. As a result they viewed their role as becoming more specialist than in the past and consequently the daily fulfilment of their responsibilities has become harder. Wearmouth (2001) and Fullan (1992) both warned of a tendency for insufficient note to be made of current practices and the needs of those teachers who are expected to put the consequences of change into effect. The call from teachers interviewed is for a reduction in the volume of paperwork required to prove evidence of progress by inspection criteria. This they viewed only exacerbated their problems and took their focus away from what they should be doing, which is administering time to their students. Due to the diversity of students' needs, greater adaptability is needed by all those with the responsibility of ensuring student progress. In forming strategies to meet their students' needs, teachers are changing their teaching styles and taking a different approach to the delivery of the curriculum which in most cases is a slightly modified version of the National Curriculum. By catering to an extended range of SEN there becomes a divide between the appropriateness of the curriculum for one set of SEN students and the inappropriateness of the curriculum for others. In catering for an extended spread of SEN, schools are at risk of the challenges associated with running two distinct curriculum and this situation causes implications for the logistics of staffing, causes expectations to be modified, and a greater need for differentiation and possibly even segregation. As a result, if all else fails, there comes a point where the egalitarian concept of equal opportunities and equality gives way to a more pragmatic and deliberate approach that centres upon the child's ability to learn and the school's ability to educate. In probing more deeply, the ability to educate often consists of financial constraints which operate as hidden agendas which at times exist under the disguise of being in the best interests of education and this may not necessarily be so.

►*When Financial Limitations Conflict*

There can be no doubt that there are many different agendas at large in the world of SEN education. For example, the headteacher who explained that he often 'fudged' a student's progress at an Annual Review so as the child would not be returned by the LEA to a mainstream school did so under the auspices that it was in the best interests of the child. The LEA Officer who wished to return a child back into mainstream school also did so under the auspices that it is in the best interests of the child. For, in the

professional judgement of the Officer, it is a disservice to the child to remain on a Statement if it is not needed.   Assuming that both parties are faultless in their professionalism, it still remains that each carry their own financial agenda, one agenda being to fill a costly placement, the other to avoid a costly placement.   Generally, interviewees were found to be child-focused as opposed to being financially driven. However, when schools are purely reliant on fee income, it is virtually impossible for matters of finance not to have some bearing on matters of education. Hence challenges arise for leaders and managers of independent special schools to retain their child-focused positioning whilst interlacing a financial framework that matches step by step their educationally lead objectives.   Out of these agendas however, leaders and managers of independent special schools must unite their internal interests together with accountabilities that derive from sources that are external to the organisation.

Comparable with Rayner & Ribbins (1999) financial issues were also found to present significant challenges to the leadership and management of independent special schools with regards to contractual obligations.   The exchange of money for an educational service forms a contractual obligation and an accountability to be fulfilled.   However, challenges arise when a student's needs are exaggerated to meet the agenda of winning at Tribunal and schools are left to implement an unworkable curriculum due to the hours of therapy called up in a child's Statement.   Whilst there are some Statements where students' needs are over exaggerated there are others where student's needs are not fully identified.   This situation is a prime source of confrontation with LEAs as schools argue the case for amending students Statements so as to match their actual needs more closely.   In this instance, the challenge for leaders and managers of independent special schools is therefore in fulfilling their contractual obligations to LEAs as well as their professional obligations to deliver an education that is appropriate and understanding of their students' needs.

The next section links the role of independent special schools and the challenges that arise for their leaders and managers with the impact of external accountability. This chapter therefore moves on to analyse and discuss points from the study's findings regarding the impact of external accountability, namely its negative affect on creativity in schools, how it reduces leaders and managers to work within degrees of freedom and

the impact upon independent special schools by being inspected under inappropriate criteria.

Challenges from Accountability

Concurrent with Kearns (1996) who stated that accountability has many dimensions and means different things to different people this study has also determined that external accountabilities are effecting challenges upon independent special schools in varying ways and to varying degrees. One of these ways is the influence generated upon their decision making. Besides compliance with government legislation, external accountabilities are most prominently having influence upon independent special schools through children's Statements, at Annual Reviews, in school policies, and as a result of inspections and their recommendations. Staff described how external accountabilities are there for them the whole time, in what they seek to do and what they needed to do to remain compliant. Most commonly, conflict from external accountabilities arise from educational matters and school policies rather than financial accountability. Albeit, many issues raised by inspection recommendations have financial implications. Generally the consensus of opinion is that schools have been subject to an increasing weight of external accountabilities in recent years although to some it is just the intensity of them and the social awareness which has changed. However, to some the extensiveness of accountability has tended to make change in schools more difficult and therefore at times, the option for creative change is discarded due to its associated volume of paperwork and gaining permission complexity.

►*Negative Affect upon Creativity*

The intensity of external accountability is impacting on independent special schools by serving as a disincentive to creativity, because according to the staff interviewed this makes the change process cumbersome. At this stage it is important to consider the inputs and outcomes of the accountability process in order to fully evaluate the purpose it serves. According to Koestenbaum & Block (2001) accountability cannot be imposed, but occurs as an inevitable outgrowth of freedom. Leaders informed the study that they are only afforded limited freedom in which to operate, due to external controls, yet all those interviewed acknowledged that external accountability was necessary and of benefit to maintaining standards. It appears that leaders have no problem with being

called to account, but it is the extensiveness of it which is causing them problems. Fundamentally, external accountability in education is used as a way to maintain standards within schools and call those to account for their responsibility to educate students to their full potentials. Market forces can also have this same outcome as schools strive to market the uniqueness and specialist nature of their educational service to the open market. Adding to this drive for quality is the commitment, imagination and expertise of their staff. Amongst the interviews undertaken as part of this study, not one interviewee lacked these characteristics. Thus, independent special schools seem fortunate to have three major influences working together to drive up standards.

SEN education is extremely individualistic. It is based on individual needs, an individual approach and an individual plan of action for each child. Thus creativity is an essential component of good leadership and management in special schools as individual approaches are devised to match individual needs. External accountability becomes dysfunctional to outcomes when it results in a cumbersome process where the effects of creativity are outweighed by the time taken to inform and gain the permission of those who are externally exercising power and control over the organisation. Currently, the masses of growing accountability upon independent special schools is therefore having the effect of encouraging staff to close down the shutters and get ready to do battle, if that is perceived to be in the best interests of their students. Thus the power relation appears to be influencing behaviour in a way not necessarily intended.

►*Working Within Degrees of Freedom*

External accountability is also challenging the leadership and management of independent special schools through the imposition of contractual obligations. LEAs are beginning to share information so as to have greater influence on the independent sector. In the south of England, LEAs have gathered together a collective of regions which they call the south east region of special educational needs (SERSEN). Under this collective, one region can represent the many and impose contractual obligations on the part of the school in return for an LEA placement. Whereas leaders were found to be accepting of the need for external accountability they found the restrictions placed on them by contractual accountability in the form of the NASS contract to be objectionable. The NASS contract adds a further layer of external accountability to

schools by restricting ways of working and also attempting to restrict fee increases to a level determined by government, rather than by the school. Thus the increasing imposition of contractual accountability placed on these schools together with a greater imposing influence has sought to reduce still further the autonomy of schools, and the inclination of these schools is to fight back.

LEAs exercise power and control of SEN children's education through their Statements. They are involved with their issuing, their funding, their continuance, their withdrawal, and their review. Accountability is further enforced at annual reviews where the interactions are described by LEA Officers as being essential for the child, essential for parents, essential for the school and essential for the LEA. The annual review is a time for questioning. LEAs Officers considered it to be their duty to question and likewise school staff considers it to be their duty to argue their case accordingly. Thus with the inclusion of parents to make up a triangle of accountability, a healthy dialogue is brought into play with outcomes that serve to give greater benefit to the SEN child.

One of the main purposes of imposing external accountability is to exercise power and control over those who are seen as having the option to perform independently. Whilst from the perspective of LEA Officers independent special schools can in part just do what they want, this was very different from the perspective of school leaders and managers who considered that they are reduced to working within degrees of freedom and it being important to know what those freedoms are. The limiting of freedom is perceived as an ill-deserved annoyance to school staff and an encroachment on their professionalism. Thus there are two very different pictures appearing out of these two perspectives. Different perspectives also arise from the criteria from which inspections are undertaken and from which judgements are made about the quality of the educational service offered by independent special schools.

►*Inspection Criteria*

The inspection process appears to be a hindrance rather than of benefit to the leadership and management of independent special schools, and this situation is mainly due to the standard of the criteria under which they are inspected. At present independent special schools are inspected by CSCI under criteria that are applicable to children with SEN

who reside in care homes full time as opposed to children in boarding schools who out of term time reside with their parents/guardians. As such, a significant amount of the information requested as part of the inspection process is either not applicable or not in existence. Staff were found to be emotive that they should be inspected under the criteria for normal boarding school accommodation rather than special needs care homes. In common with Fuhrman & Elmore (2004) conflict was therefore found to exist under the conditions where external accountabilities are not contextual, nor sympathetic with what they seek to have influence over. Thus consequences of external pressures produce an outcome of compelling schools' vision of what special education should be to be replaced by the dominance of external ideology. External accountabilities also involve measuring success. The inspection process is constructed from a form filling mentality which involves self evaluation and performance factors. As a result, one of the major complaints from staff stems from the growing volume of paperwork and auditability that is required from them. The weight of paperwork can outweigh the time required for the delivery of education. In order to meet inspection criteria, where necessary, working practices are changed, school policies are created despite there being no internal need to do so, and actions are carefully plotted so as to justify the worth of the educational service which is under continual scrutiny.

From the LEA perspective, there are some independent schools who fully exploit their independent status and because of their independent culture feel they don't have to be accountable to the LEA. Although there are other independent special schools who were described by LEA Officers as willing to work their socks off to maintain a good relationship. MacBeath (2000) suggests that external pressure will always be necessary to maintain attention to an internal concern for quality. However, those who operate within a free market are reliant on the quality and standard of their education for their economic survival. Therefore the quality of education can be attributed as much towards internal accountabilities as from external ones.

From raising the main issues regarding the challenges arising from the impact of accountability upon independent special schools, the next section moves on to analyse and discuss the extent to which it is necessary for leaders and managers to balance accountabilities. The main issues emerging from the research data involve the situations when there are deliberations and challenges regarding doing the right thing,

achieving the balance of reducing conflict and increasing compliance and balancing the skill sets of staff with students' needs.

The Balancing of Accountabilities

The extent to which accountabilities need to be balanced in independent special schools ultimately depends on how independent they perceive themselves to be or how dependent and aligned with state education they wish to become. The findings of this study are concurrent with Bottery & Wright (2000) who found that staff in schools rated internal factors more highly than any of the external factors, including legislative influence. It appears that internal factors are rated more highly, because they generally have greater individual child-centred focus than external accountabilities. Guilt and frustration arise most notably from internal factors but the same feelings were found absent in discussions regarding external accountabilities, where staff are ready to go with non-compliance rather than go against something they know is the right thing to do. Balancing accountabilities therefore is fundamentally about paying service to both internal priorities and external ones and moulding them into the correct solution for each individual plan of action for each individual student that will meet and address children's rights to have their particular individual needs met. It is therefore about doing the very best for each student, but determining what is best for each student in view of prevailing restrictions is often difficult to resolve.

►*Doing the Right Thing*

The need to balance accountabilities seems to arise from the contentious issue of who knows best. The internal justification from staff is that they know their children better than external bodies, as they deal with the daily matters that build one from another towards the progression of their children's learning. Senses of seeing, hearing, feeling and virtually smelling what children's needs require, places them in a better position to do the right thing than external bodies, which centre upon best practice processes. Thus accountabilities in schools are balanced from an internal perspective as opposed to an external one.

Leaders and managers are not necessarily influenced against their professional and morale judgements and the majority of interviewees were found ready to fight their

corner against external sources and go with non-compliance than action something they judged not to be in the best interests of their students. Thus the messiness of the realities appertaining to accountability in schools arises from staff's commitment to get the education right for their students. To staff, the government rhetoric on education talks about the voice of the child, but it appears it is the leaders and managers in schools who are doing the listening, not necessarily persons in government. For those who continue to teach to the National Curriculum, the challenge involved in balancing accountabilities relates to balancing the education they offer with the accountability imposed by the National Curriculum requirements. It appears that educational issues are becoming more complex and their resolutions often match this complexity. Thus there is a practical tension for staff working between their freedoms and the external constraints of compliance which is a similar finding to that of McKinney & Howard (1998) who described how the imposition of external constraints: and the internalization of norms; and the problems associated with each of these dimensions consequently result in tensions.

►*Reducing Conflict and Increasing Compliance*

Some of the staff interviewed regarded their external accountabilities as being double-edged, in the sense that they found them to be both conflicting and complementary. External accountability conflicts with the internal interests of schools in terms of the time taken up with form filling, inspections and other mandatory paperwork. However, external accountability is viewed as being complementary in the sense of promoting thought and making staff think twice about what they are doing. Thus external accountability in schools has both positive and negative connotations. Whilst external accountability is effective in influencing the decisions made in schools it cannot prerequisite outcomes because the internal vision of what special education means outweighs the external one. Thus the internal impetus which appears to be driven by a mixture of morale and ethical professionalism gains greater momentum in the dilemma solving arena than the perceived weaker rationale of external accountability. However, the authoritative power of the perceived weaker rationale promotes contemplation and within that reflection external accountability inspires solutions. It is under these conditions that accountabilities are balanced and the politics of the organisation reflects, as suggested by MacBeath (1998) the macro problems of state and society.

Akin to Harris et al (2003), the positioning of leaders between internal and external accountabilities appears to be set in strategic issues involving parents, LEAs, Social Services and staff. However, problems arise when differing stakeholders advocate differing solutions, and none of these solutions appear to be correct from the perspective of the leader. Thus, rather than conflict being a continuing characteristic of the school leadership role (Begley & Johnansson, 2003), it appears to be a growing one. Under these circumstances, leaders need the capability to deflect such conflicting views into positive actions. Balancing accountabilities for the leader of a school appears to consist of reducing conflict and increasing compliance. However, this study has revealed that because internal factors are weighed so highly by leaders in independent special schools, that the balancing of their accountabilities is quite likely to engage them in reducing compliance with external requirements as opposed to increasing it when securing their remedies to conflicting educational matters. Under such circumstances collaborative decisions utilise the knowledge and experience of staff to secure such solutions and thus within the process accountabilities are balanced.

►►*Balancing the Skill Sets of Staff with Students' Needs*

For the leader of the independent special school it is about getting the education right for the pupil population. In addition to educational issues, for the leader this also includes strategic issues and well as financial ones. Leaders are therefore finding themselves having to balance the need for the skills and experience of a large and diverse workforce with the implications it creates for their fees and the consequences of their affordability in the open market.

At the level of middle management, balancing accountabilities appears to be more pragmatic in terms of the daily operation and management of the school. To deputy heads the balancing of accountabilities means the balancing of available staff with the teaching timetable. This includes balancing their time and the skills sets of staff with the meeting of students' needs, interactions to share information with their colleagues and dealing with parental concerns in conjunction with the restraints placed upon them by the Governors and headteacher of their schools. Thus the challenge of balancing accountabilities was for deputy heads, of a more social rather than strategic nature.

In the classroom the balance of accountabilities takes on a quite different meaning. For teachers, balancing accountabilities denotes the balancing of the curriculum with the teaching in the classroom. The main thing for some teachers is how they are going to get the child to read and write. An axis therefore arises from the extent the curriculum can be modified and the extent it can be made to meet the learning comprehension of students. Thus the experience and conscience of staff becomes balanced against criteria which is reflective of societal objectives. Thus balancing accountabilities was found to have different meanings to the differing layers of leadership and management in schools.

The next and last section of this chapter moves on to link the previous analysis regarding challenges from the impact of accountability for independent special schools with analysis and discussion of the implications that may need to be addressed in the years ahead.

The Implications

The main challenges and implications for the leadership and management of independent special schools in the years ahead will arise from the extent to which they move towards an interdependency relationship with the state: there being greater clarification and a reduction in the conflict regarding the Statementing saga; and the rethinking of government towards its policy of inclusion. The perplexity surrounding the inclusion policy is likely to continue as the government are expected to try different ways of meeting the needs of SEN children and not necessarily succeeding. From the perspective of LEA Officers independent special schools will continue very much as they are, however, in contrast the perspective of those leading and managing independent special schools feel that a certain amount of change is necessary in order to decrease the amount of uncertainties surrounding the continuance and nature of their role. The context from which implications may arise in the years ahead for independent special schools are likely to originate from the uncomfortable fit between the perceived rights of parents and LEAs' interpretations regarding their financial responsibilities. As a result consequences will come about from matching a political rights issue with a fairly limited government budget. Independent special schools might therefore need to

move from being independent to being interdependent with the state, so as to provide public benefit whilst also providing a unique educational service.

►*Interdependency With the State*

The extent to which independent special schools continue to prosper in the educational market will somewhat rest with the failure and inadequacy of mainstream provision to cater for the rising number of SEN children and the general increasing complexity of special needs schooling. Thus matching with Ainscow (2002) the role that will be available to independent special schools in the future is likely to be that of centres of excellence which will require continuing development of the expertise of the staff they employ. Ramifications will therefore stem from recruitment issues in terms of the ability of independent special schools to recruit as well as their ability to retain members of staff that are competent enough and willing enough to support the rising standard of the expertise required. In addition the future success of independent special schools will also be dependent on how they market themselves and how they are perceived by government and society in general. In contrast the positioning of independent special schools in the educational market will also be reflected in the government's willingness to use this national resource. Accordingly, to ensure their economic survival, independent special schools will need to proactively market themselves as a national good, offering educational opportunities within their establishments, as well as offering outreach services elsewhere. Outreach services appears to be a key area in which special schools could excel in the future, but is likely to bring additional leadership and management challenges with regards to the operational logistics of such an operation. If independent special schools' marketing is successful, parents will want to buy into the educational service on offer. However if government policy cannot be swayed and if there is no change in government thinking, accountability challenges will continue to be fought as part of the Statementing saga. Thus the continuance of the Statementing saga will continue to breed scepticism and conflict from all parties involved in special needs education.

►*The Statementing Saga*

Political agendas arising from inclusion will continue to have impact on independent special schools as the saga regarding the Statementing process is expected to persist. It

seems that the extent to which parents have the right to choose will remain ambiguous as government sways their pendulum for political gains. Consequently, the exercising of perceived parental rights will continue to lead to conflict with LEAs and in turn this is expected to lead to greater debates at Tribunals, as two opposing interpretations of one government policy clash. Inevitably, it signifies that government will need to rethink what they want their policy of inclusion to mean if the weight of conflict at present is to be avoided in the future. Currently trust between the independent sector and LEAs is disappointingly lacking and this lack of trust is likely to add additional layers of conflict and external accountability upon independent schools in the future as mistrusts by those in authority continue to resist placements in such schools whilst also attempting to bring independent schools under tighter central control. Therefore concurrent with Harris et al (2003) independent schools are expected to be under ever-increasing scrutiny. Decreasing accountability is only likely to occur when independent schools are less insular and there is an increase in the maturity of the relationship with government and LEAs. Thus despite the talk from government about a slimmer accountability regime, independent special schools are expected to remain under extensive/intensive accountability from government policy.

►*Government Policy*

Most importantly however, SEN children's education will remain at risk as long as they are used as puppets in order to publicly show that LEAs are fulfilling their duty in resisting all placements in independent special schools for policy and financial reasons. The repercussions of such action is that independent special schools are now picking up children much later than they would have in the past and this consequence is likely to hinder rather than aid those not fitting within the inclusion structure. Ultimately, in the future, independent education will likely depend on its affordability compared with state provision and the category of SEN independent special schools set out to meet.

It appears that some independent special schools are in grave danger of pricing themselves out of the market. Hence in the future a balance may need to be struck between offering the best educational service possible at whatever the price may be (possibly unaffordable to many) and offering an educational service that compromises education and cost (probably more affordable to the many). If schools insist on offering

a gold star service that only a few can afford, it is likely their role will become elitist, selective and of little public benefit to the larger community or the national inclusion strategy. It is therefore highly probable that the government and LEAs will continue to view independent special schools as an inefficient use of public resources. Likewise independent special schools will always be under a lot of pressure to demonstrate that they are good value for money in terms of their ability to accelerate educational progress. Thus the funding issue is expected not only to continue but possibly grow in vigour. Nevertheless, at the end of the day parents will either choose an independent special school or not and therefore they will continue to have a considerable voice in the service that independent special schools offer.

Conclusion

Independent special schools will need to choose their specialism most carefully to ensure their economic survival, as it appears there will be no stepping back from the national strategy of inclusion. However, it seems likely there will be some side stepping and readjusting to the government position that inclusion, as it is currently interpreted does not work for all children and therefore a niche for independent special schools will remain. Under these conditions leaders and managers are facing the challenges associated with dealing with greater SEN complexities and a greater diversity of staff and their skill sets. External accountability is with them the whole time, in everything they do, but internal imperatives are of greater importance. Thus the balancing of accountabilities at times has the reverse effect by making schools less compliant, rather than tightening control. External accountability is inclined to bring into play political agendas which result in injustices to SEN students as opposed to equality and equal opportunities. Thus the implications for independent special schools in the future is not to operate quite so independently as they have in the past, but to spread their expertise into the wider community for the benefit of all and thus become part of the unified inclusion programme as opposed to being external to it.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This study has been an investigation into the nature of challenges that arise for the leadership and management of independent special schools in the UK to resolve. This investigation has therefore sought to ascertain a comprehensive understanding of what it is like to be a leader and manager of an independent special school. Conclusions have been drawn from the literature and the knowledge of interviewees working in independent special schools as well as from the interviewees employed by LEAs and the experience of the researcher as a school bursar.

The conclusion of this research study is that the challenges for leaders and managers in independent special schools derive as much from internal factors as externally imposed accountabilities. External accountability does not appear to be a major problem to leaders and managers of independent special schools as they do believe they should be held to account. Accountability per se was generally noted by the interviewees as being essential in order to ensure the quality and standard of education. However, frustrations arise when external accountability is perceived to be unjust or contrary to the context in which the school operates. Too many layers of accountability can have the same effect as too little accountability with regards to improving the quality of education and raising standards as it can have the effect of suppressing innovation and change. However, external accountability seems to be filtering into schools in a way that is influential on the decisions made by staff, influential on school objectives and controlling of their curriculum and pedagogy. However, if the balance is too much in favour of external control, particularly if it is not contextual, it creates the conditions under which staff are inclined to rebel. As such, getting the right balance between pressure and support is crucial if external accountability is going to have maximum impact. Hence the controlling mechanism known as external accountability which calls schools to account for their educational actions as well as their financial ones serves to either push up standards or pull down morale. The format of this chapter follows the same format as the research questions identified in chapter 1 and therefore commences with conclusions regarding the challenges from the key role of independent special schools, followed the general challenges presented to their leadership and management. The chapter then

moves on to conclude regarding the challenges that arise from the impact of accountability, the extent to which balancing accountabilities present challenges to the leadership and management of independent special schools and the challenges which are likely to arise in the years ahead.

The Role

Rather than being independent, the role of independent special schools in the overall scheme of education in the UK is principally dependent on the outcomes and failings of the national inclusion strategy. Filling a void left unfilled and making up for a deficiency of state provision will not be a sound enough footing from which independent special schools can make sound judgements and plans for the future. Variables which are outside of internal controls can lead to uncertainties and uncertainties can cloud visions. To leaders and managers of independent special schools this means restraints upon their individual visions of what good SEN education should mean in their schools.

The key role of independent special schools is changing in accordance with a changing society and their views on special education. The philosophical position where there is a rosy picture of all students working together and united under a mainstream banner has flaws. Thus the repugnance of segregation may well have to be mellowed as independent special schools are used to prop up a seemingly failing national strategy. Being included as opposed to being inclusive may be the marketing slogan that circumvents and draws together government political gains with the opposition activists. There appears to be a win/win situation on the table in terms of additional provision for the government and additional placements for schools. However, because of traditional prejudices and preconceptions, those in authority who have the responsibility of implementing the national strategy are likely to miss the bigger picture.

The notion of children's rights and those of their parents to choose their education is also a determining factor for independent specials schools and to which they are particularly sensitive. Much of the basis of conflict between schools and LEAs is associated with the confusion regarding whether children and their parents have a right to choose or not. Such conflict leads to tribunals, tribunals can often lead to greater

magnification of students needs, and the cost to LEAs generates financial conflict as they are reduced to balancing one high cost placement against the many, due to the limited funding they receive from government. Therefore if government were to give clear direction on this important issue, the spiral of events would likely cease and thereby enable a greater focus on education as opposed to conflict and subsequently precipitate the raising of educational standards, rather than the raising of temperaments.

It is important for government to take into consideration the happiness of the child under their national inclusion strategy. It is clear that social integration is as important as academic integration if students are going to reach their full potential and it appears that academic integration is far easier to deal with than social integration. The argument seems to return to the difference between being inclusive and being included. Being part of inclusive education in a mainstream school does not necessarily preclude some SEN children from feeling excluded, in terms of their social ability, physical ability and mental ability. One of the key challenges for leaders and managers of independent special schools is therefore to offer an education to those who feel excluded in mainstream schools, which provides the environment whereby they feel included and not set apart by their difficulties. Inclusion works for many, but not all and it is important for government to publically address this fact. Equal opportunities must mean equal opportunities for all and not for the selected few that fit within the inclusion programme. Thus key for independent special schools is building a bridge between the theory of the national policy and the practicalities of its implementation and the realities of truly ensuring that every child matters and matures to their full potential.

Key to independent special schools changing role are the perceptions borne by parents. Ultimately, parents of SEN children are the most invested stakeholders and as such, it is important that independent special schools take notice of the educational service that private fee-payers wish to purchase. Independent special schools are sellers of an educational service and parents, like LEAs, are the purchasers of the service. Reconciling this seller/purchaser relationship is important to the economic survival of independent special schools. In the end it is all about inputs and outcomes. In education the full outcome of a child's learning is longitudinal and often only visible when a child is of age to follow their career path. The placing of SEN students in mainstream schooling where there is a strong suspicion that it is an incorrect placement

must stop.   Children can no longer be used as statistical evidence of LEAs accountability to implement national policy. This wait and see mentality is more akin to the best interests of political gain as it is to SEN children because it serves as a dysfunction to those children who do not fit within the inclusion strategy, by robbing them of their equal opportunity to learn. Thus delivering quality education in less time to those who need a far greater learning period often brings complex challenges for leaders and managers of independent special schools to resolve.

The Challenge

The challenges of leading and managing independent special schools stem from arising restraints that form emotive barriers against attaining their visions of what good independent special education is all about.   Challenges incorporate the emotions, certainties and quandary betwixt what is the right and what is the wrong thing to do. The fact that some children are now arriving at independent special schools much later after they have experienced failure in a mainstream setting necessitates staff to overcome the barrier of failure, before positive learning can take place. To staff, the experience of failure to a child is one of the greatest hindrances to them achieving and therefore the scope for independent special schools to fail is particularly limited.

Challenges and their resolve consist of overcoming external accountability in a way that has least detrimental impact on the school. As the complexity of their pupil population change, so must the skill sets of the staff that they employ. This situation presents challenges in terms of staff recruitment as independent special schools need to be seen as being a more attractive setting than state provision if the competent worker is to be enticed into the independent SEN sector. This is likely to mean schools offering greater financial rewards, better environmental conditions, smaller pupil teacher ratios, additional resources and other benefits such as enhanced pension contributions and maternity/paternity leave. Under these circumstances additional staff training will be required to keep staff at the leading edge of special education in terms of understanding the varying categories of SEN. This situation will undoubtedly create the impetus for an increase in school fees which, as suggested by LEAs will put independent special schools at risk of pricing themselves out of the market place. Thus there are challenges for leaders and managers to find solutions that have maximum educational effect and

minimum financial impact. The difference in the diversity of the workforce in independent special schools compared with the workforce in mainstream schools will necessitate their leaders and managers to have wider skill sets and knowledge than in the past. This difference is expected to become more intense as the complexities of student needs develop. Thus the role of leading and managing in independent special schools will necessitate their leaders and managers to develop new specialisms and greater human resource management skills as one of the main challenges will be to match the co-morbidity of students needs with the expertise and skill sets of staff. As a result staff will be in a better position to make informed professional judgements about how students' needs are best met.

One of the main complaints from schools is that their professional judgements are not taken into account because LEAs perceive themselves as the ones who know best. If independent special schools become centres of excellence which are supported by qualified staff, then their credentials will have added weight in conflicting educational issues with LEAs. However, the schools that continue to keep costs down by employing unqualified staff, and undertake only limited training cannot expect to be given credence over the professional judgements of LEAs, nor should they. In fact it is highly contentious as to whether anyone truly knows better than anyone else. However, a collective of professional ability and parental understanding is the most likely source from which questions are proposed and answers may spring. Challenges thus occur at the time of the Annual Review when evidence of too much accelerated progress will put children over the criteria for having a Statement and cause LEAs to consider removing the student back into the mainstream. Too little evidence of accelerated learning will have the same outcome as the situation reinforces LEAs' estimation that the placement is not an effective use of public resources. However, out of this equation, it is important for LEAs to make allowances for the catch-up time needed by the child. Despite the fact that some SEN children only start making progress at a later age, they are still required to sit GCSE examinations at the same time as determined by external criteria. Thus children need and deserve as much support in this catch up time leading to examinations as before. Hence it seems ludicrous at the time that they are making most progress to return them to where they have made the least. Hence there is a compelling argument for LEAs to allow children to remain in the supportive environment of the independent special school if that is the wish of the child and the desire of their parents.

Ultimately many of the issues surrounding debates on SEN return to the extent to which children and their parents have a right to choose. The rhetoric of government implies there is a cosiness in which everyone is working together, but in reality collaboration is more likely to occur between one government department and another as it is between government department and the school community. Situations such as these present emotive and strategic challenges to leaders and managers of independent special schools as they decide their measured response to the external accountability to which they are accountable.

The Impact

External accountability impacts upon the staff of independent special schools in ways that bring political pressures to bear upon their professionalism and in ways that attempt to secure contractual accountability. The collective sharing of information by LEA regions, grouping together under one voice, is serving to strengthen the accountability to which independent special schools are under and by doing so serves to reduce their autonomy. The relationship between LEAs and independent special schools is central to the extent in which external accountability impacts upon schools. Whilst generally the relationship on the personal level appears to be fairly good, this did not preclude LEA Officers from relating both good and bad experiences of dealing with independent schools. It seems that bad experiences are more vivid than good experiences and it is the bad experiences that are likely to colour perceptions more intensely and financial bad experiences appear to be amongst the most vivid. According to LEA Officers their major criticism of independent special schools is that some charge unjustifiable and hideously expensive fees. This seems to occur when some headteachers do not respond to falling pupil rolls with a similar decrease in costs. In this situation LEAs are seen as the soft touch, insomuch as it is easier to make LEAs accountable for the inflated cost of their education than it is for the school to uphold the responsibility. As a consequence, this situation often leads to an even greater decrease in pupil numbers because of the affordability of the education and consequently generates the need for yet another highly inflationary rise in the following year. Hence, external accountability backlashes on LEAs by putting them under emotional pressure to pay highly inflationary increases year after year. Thus LEA Officers, at times feel that they are being ripped off and

naturally those that feel they are being ripped off are not predisposed to enter into true meaningful relationships with the perpetrators of such actions.

External accountability is impacting on schools through seeking measurement of achievement (what schools do well), the auditability of decision making (what schools could do better) and justification for the content of the educational service (what schools are required to do). This measured accountability causes the burden of paperwork to which staff in schools find the time element difficult to accommodate. A recent move towards self regulation seems not to have thwarted the increasing volume of paperwork that is required by external accountability. Thus when inspectors come into schools to ascertain the extent of compliance, a mixture of tensions and exuberance already exist. Whilst tensions are most likely to have arisen from ensuring all the correct documentation is in place, exuberance is most likely to stem from staff's passion and commitment to meeting the needs of their children and their desire to show publically how this is being achieved. The impact of external accountability therefore causes conflict when schools view some inspectors as not understanding of the context in which independent special schools operate, and the inspecting authority view their inspectors as being hot on the ball. Under these conditions, these two very different perspectives need to appear as one force with the common purpose of securing good SEN education as opposed to fuelling internal/external debate.

Inspection recommendations are far reaching. They extend into every dimension of school life and the ways in which the educational experience is lived. Sometimes this happens through subtle undertones, with suggestions of ways in which schools should or could improve, at other times they are in the form of brutally blunt mandatory requirements. Therefore not only is it important to get education right but it is also important to get the criteria right from which those external to the school judge the level of compliance and educational quality to be. The term, independent appears to be misleading, as these schools are far from being independent from government legislation and the impact of external accountability as SEN education is too close to the hearts of those who seek social justice and those who envisage political gain. Thus those in authority seem to be weaving a blanket of national policy using the threads of what is perceived to be social good, but what this means in reality for the education of SEN children is highly contentious and open to multiple interpretations. Complying

with government legislation appears not to be problematic for leaders and managers of independent special schools as long as the requirements are clear. The periphery between freedoms and constraints is the void in which independent special schools operate and which allows them the synergy to work independently. However, the boundaries of the void are constantly changing and mirror new legislation as well as the changing perspectives of those having judgement upon them. It would be helpful to those working in independent special schools for the government to clearly spell out their intentions as they apply to independent special schools and re-examine the criteria under which these schools are inspected. In doing so, the boundaries under which leaders and managers operate will have clearer definition and inspection recommendations would become more purposeful.

Contractual accountability is also purposeful as it is a method by which both parties spell out their obligations, one to the other. Its intended purpose is to negate conflict however, between independent special schools and LEAs it is a main source of conflict as it appears to inflict undue determination over internal matters. There appears to be a certain amount of sense in having contractual accountability as in theory it allows for clearer definitions of the accountability placed on the independent special school in exchange for receiving an LEA placement and the payment of public money. However conflict seems to arise when the contractual obligation is based upon the child's Statement and that appears by staff as incorrect. Flaws in the process appear to be in the Statements of children coming directly from Tribunals where educational need is often exaggerated and children coming directly from mainstream schools where their educational need may be under embellished. Flaws in the process also derive from Annual Reviews which is the time when all stakeholders get together and review progress. However because of their limitations LEA Officers get to attend only a limited number of Annual Reviews, which are generally targeted at key stages. If LEAs want to be involved in crucial decisions then perhaps they should have greater involvement in the Annual Review process as opposed to swooping into debates as the drift takes them. But this situation will only be remedied by central government allowing more expenditure on staff costs so as to increase the number of LEA Officers available. Good SEN education appears to involve remarkable creativity, innovation and ingenuity. Anything that precludes this from happening in special schools is likely to serve as a dysfunction to SEN children's education as it is to maintaining standards.

Therefore to some such interactions may present themselves as lose/lose situations, in the sense of the outcome for students from balancing LEAs perspectives with that of their teachers. Headteachers may also face a lose/lose situation in terms of balancing external restraints with their particular vision of special education, and LEAs may also be faced with a lose/lose situation if student progress is not maintained in line with their own accountability.

The Balance

Balancing accountabilities is fundamentally about getting education right. It is about the humane responses of those who are child focused and those who are process driven. The double-edged effects of external accountability complement and conflict, they produce positives as well as negatives, they add to special education but are also inclined to take away the specialist touch to special education by suppressing creativity. Professional and morale accountability appears to be the more attuned form of accountability as it consists of personal victories as well as public ones. Thus the internal vision of meeting a small group of students' needs often has disparity with the vision of those who are focused on the masses. Under these conditions it should not be surprising that leaders and managers of independent special schools rate internal factors such as their professionalism higher than any form of external accountability. Therefore the extent to which internal/external accountabilities need to be balanced is not extensive, because balancing accountabilities has greater association with viewing how external accountability blends with internal visions as opposed to how internal visions blend with external apparitions. Staff informed the study that they are always ready to do battle and go with non-compliance if they consider it to be in the best interests of their students. Tensions between internal and external ideologies are therefore as likely to cause confrontation as they are appeasement. It appears that all stakeholders are looking for social justice and enabling students with SEN to have an equal opportunity to learn in a way that is achieving of their full potential. The point at which external accountability strikes across internal visions and limits the professional judgements of staff is the point of conflict. It is the point of debate as to where the best source of justice lays and the debate regarding the realisms of SEN education in view of internal/external accountabilities. In this sense it is also the point at which debate

ensues as to the extent to which one National Curriculum can be balanced in a way that meets the differing needs of many.

In practical terms the balancing between internal with external accountabilities is associated in schools with balancing the learning needs of students with the prescriptive manner of the National Curriculum and often this occurs without the support of published text. The quality and appropriateness of SEN education is an issue that causes discontentment to children: concerns to their parents, disorder to the school's reputations; it causes staff's professionalism to be examined and brings about cynicism regarding the duty of LEAs for the implementation of government policies. In addition it triggers scepticism of government's motives due to them needing re-election. Maintaining standards does not necessarily have to mean that everyone must do the same thing, at the same time, and in the same manner. To an extent preserving standards can relate as much to difference as it does to sameness. Only one out of the six participating schools had been bold enough to ditch the National Curriculum and they had done so in a particularly successful manner which was fully endorsed by their recent OFSTED inspection. Possibly other special schools also need to rekindle a new enthusiasm into the learning process in a way that brings vibrant new ideas and skilful teaching styles into the classroom. Rather than ditching the National Curriculum in its entirety, possibly a balance of new and traditional ideas may be the way ahead. Parents align their aspirations with the National Curriculum as it is used as a benchmark with the teaching of others without SEN. As such the discarding of the National Curriculum may not necessarily outweigh any new benefits. However, prescriptive measures appear to be at odds with special education, as flexibility rather rigidity is sought by those having the task of determining educational dilemmas.

There appears to be a lot of guilt and frustration in schools as they deal with social as well as academic responsibilities. Special education is intense and time consuming at all layers of the school organisation and therefore it is important for constraints to be slim-lined to the minimum. Paradoxically, a slimmer form of accountability is as liable to effect greater accountability upon independent special schools rather than less, as external accountability that is contextual and sympathetic to SEN schooling is more likely to complement and be accommodated within school policies and their teaching. Both internal and external accountabilities seek quality and standards of education and

the balance is purely the ways these objectives will be achieved. The collaborative working between all stakeholders serves to give SEN students the best educational opportunities. Working independently offers schools the scope to be more creative and innovative, but working within the national framework should let them tap into a greater range of knowledge and skills. Special education would thus benefit from lesser restrictions from external accountability and the community would benefit from the greater innovation and creativity of the skill sets of independent special schools. Getting the right balance therefore has repercussions in terms of independent special schools' willingness to become part of, rather than external to, the national inclusion strategy and will have bearing upon their attitudes towards authoritarian control.

The Implications

It is envisaged that special education is always going to be very intense and independent special schools will continue to be needed to educate children with SENs that are complex and severe. However, mainstream schools are likely to try and improve the extent to which they can accommodate special needs students and the extent of this improvement, if successful and effective, will probably nudge independent special schools further towards a new paradigm of special education. Nevertheless, government may choose to circumvent the making clear about children and their parents' rights to choose their education and thus allow the conflict surrounding the rights issue to continue. If this happens Tribunals will continue to be used extensively and LEAs will spend valuable time and energy in defending their actions and resisting the Statements which may lead to placements in independent special schools. If this is the case, and government policy fails to change, then the current situation of conflict will remain and the motives for letting the conflict remain may well be political rather than educational.

Leaders and managers of independent special schools will need to decide whether they move direction towards greater independency, or move towards greater interdependency with the state. For this to occur, however, attitudes will need to change and barriers will need to be removed. In place of mistrusts there will be a requirement for trust between the independent sector and LEAs, and where there is scepticism there must be beliefs in national policy. The merging operations of LEAs and Social Services into Children's

Services may give the impetus for this change. Mistakes are being learnt and as a consequence there may be a rearward step back towards special schools. Thus independent special schools may wish to become part of the national educational service as opposed to the independent one, although making sure that they continue to reside with a considerable amount of scope to be innovative and scope for making their own choices. The government and LEAs' attitude will also need to change in order to realign their prejudices for the benefit of national good.

There are dangers for independent special schools in catering for too wide a spectrum of SEN: as this will put them at risk of running two different curriculum in parallel; and due to the appertaining costs associated with the labour intensive dynamics of special schools their service may become unaffordable. Implications for independent special schools in the years ahead will derive from the extent they can keep their fees affordable to the general public and LEAs. If costs are significantly increased it will create the impetus for government to seek the funds necessary to build additional special provision. Implications for independent special schools therefore depend on the balance that can be maintained between an exceptionally high service to SEN children and an exceptionally low charge to LEAs and parents. Rising numbers of SEN students in the years ahead are likely to exacerbate the limited state provision situation and give independent special schools a weightier argument for their existence and their service. It may possibly take an urgent situation such as this to remind government that independent special schools are an under used national resource. Whilst government policy is inclined towards inclusion, the potential challenges to the leadership and management of special schools will be to ensure that fitting SEN provision is made for every child who needs it. Potential challenges will also arise from layers of accountability that serve to limit the ways in which SEN provision can be offered. However, until such times as this happens, the role of independent special schools will continue to readjust so as to gain the pupil numbers required for their economic viability.

Table 5.1 identifies a business plan of action to address the prime sources of challenge that exist for the leadership and management of independent special schools. The plan consists of three main actions for schools and six actions for government.

ACTION PLAN: PRIME SOURCES OF CHALLENGE

SCHOOL ACTIONS

Issue 1.	Establishing a sound market niche.
Reason	So as to ensure the economic survival of the independent special school.
Purpose	Maintain pupil numbers.
ACTION:	Move from an independent position towards interdependency with the state by improving the relationship with the state by greater collaboration and effective marketing. Independent special schools should market the uniqueness of the educational service they offer whilst also marketing the ways that they are part of the inclusion programme. A growing relationship between the sectors will occasion a growing respect between the sectors for their professional judgements and thus reduce uncertainties by emitting greater understanding.
Issue 2.	Becoming more specialist.
Reason	So as to educate children with a greater complexity of SEN.
Purpose	To serve as centres of excellence.
ACTION:	Adjust market niche through strategies that involve making working in the independent special needs sector attractive and supportive for staff. This may include the increase of staff training, the review of staffing remuneration structures and pay scales.
Issue 3.	Achieving maximum educational effect and minimum financial impact.
Reason	In order to reconcile the seller/purchaser relationship of an educational service.
Purpose	To maintain fees at an affordable level.
ACTION:	Grow internal visions of what good special education means in conjunction with external ones. Independent special schools need to be

	mindful of the service their purchasers seek and as sellers of an educational service the strategies that are employed must address an inclusive and including ethos. Thus achieving maximum educational effect and minimum financial impact is about gaining a balance between these two essential sets of accountabilities.

ACTION PLAN: PRIME SOURCES OF CHALLENGE **GOVERNMENT ACTIONS**	
Issue 4.	The National Inclusion Policy has shortfalls in meeting the needs of all SEN students in a mainstream setting.
Reason	Teachers find social integration harder to plan for than academic integration. Inclusion must therefore be as much about a child being included as it as about being inclusive.
Purpose	To rethink the inclusion policy so as to address the issue of SEN children who currently fall outside of the state capabilities to educate and the inclusion strategy.
ACTION:	The happiness of the child in their placement needs to be given extra weight in the list of priorities. The inclusive strategy which determines the deficit system whereby a child must go to mainstream first and be seen to fail before alternatives can be considered must change. The strategy should also be reviewed regarding the progress of students and the most beneficial location for catch up time before taking examinations.

Issue 5.	Confusion exists regarding whether children and their parents have a right to exercise choice regarding the location of a placement.
Reason	Contradictions appear due to the interpretation of LEAs that it is their duty to resist the choice of parents, only to find Tribunals interpreting it their duty to find in favour of parental choice.
Purpose	To mitigate the ambiguity surrounding the conditions under which

	children's and their parents have the right of choice and for this to be disseminated clearly to all.
ACTION:	The government need to produce a clearly defined policy on this subject.

	ACTION PLAN: PRIME SOURCES OF CHALLENGE **GOVERNMENT ACTIONS**
Issue 6.	External accountability is too extensive/intensive
Reason	External accountability when it is extensive/intensive and is perceived as being unjust or not understanding of the context in which it exercises authority results in mollified impact, as it limits choice, professionalism and pulls down morale by denying or restricting the internal vision.
Purpose	To maintain quality and standards in education by applying a slimmer accountability regime.
ACTION:	External accountability requirements need to be lessened, made simpler, made clearer and made more appropriate to the context under which they are exercising authority. Self regulation must be progressed further, but not in a way that will take staff even further away from tending their student's needs. The boundaries need to be clearly defined and schools given greater scope to work within those boundaries to capture a more synergistic approach to SEN education. This must also include greater flexibility in the National Curriculum so as SEN education can become more vibrant with new ideas and teaching styles.

Issue 7.	Inspections are being carried out under inappropriate criteria.
Reason	Independent special schools are currently being inspected under criteria appropriate for children in care homes rather than appropriate for students in boarding schools. Inspections are therefore creating an additional unnecessary volume of paperwork, tensions and conflict and thus are not impacting to their potential benefit on schools.

Purpose	To ensure the criteria under which independent special schools are inspected is appropriate, meaningful and helpful in maintaining the quality and standards of their educational service.
ACTION:	A change or adjustment to the criteria is needed so as to reflect the activities of a boarding school rather than a care home. A change towards simpler key measurement criteria would bring the knowledge capital of professionals towards greater harmony by aiding schools in pre-inspection tasks and encouraging them to view inspections and their inspectors as being beneficial as opposed to intrusive.

ACTION PLAN: PRIME SOURCES OF CHALLENGE **GOVERNMENT ACTIONS**	
Issue 8.	The Statementing process is becoming obsolete.
Reason	Statements are no longer needed for SEN students placed in mainstream schools, but Statements are required for the funding of SEN students in independent fee charging schools.
Purpose	To stop the spiral of events leading to Tribunals by reducing the conflicts that surrounds the Statementing process.
ACTION:	To initiate a new strategy that brings students' needs to the forefront by dividing the funding of SEN students away from the educational matters regarding their special educational needs. Thus this approach would likely reduce the conflict and need for Tribunals and the tensions surrounding the Annual Review of students' progress.
Issue 9.	The Funding of SEN students.
Reason	Differing LEAs have varying numbers of SEN students at varying costs. The number of high cost placements vary from LEA region to another.
Purpose	To equalise the system by negating the inconsistencies between different LEA regions.

| **ACTION:** | The government should undertake a feasibility study as to implementing the central funding of SEN students. |
| | **Table 5.1 Action Plan** |

The Conclusion

Challenges arise for the leadership and management of independent special schools to mediate external policies in a way which complies with their accountabilities but does not necessarily detract from the internal vision of what they seek to do. If there is something good out there, then they are welcoming for it to be entwined with their own working practices. However, if the balance between accountability and autonomy is weighted too much in favour of external control this is perceived to be a threat to their professional integrity as teachers and a threat to the greatly valued nature of their independence. As such staff noted that at times it feels like it is a battleground for them as they follow their own consciences in terms of their professional and morale accountabilities. Hence special education in independent special schools appears to be particularly emotive, and filled with passion, commitment, guilt and frustrations. Government policy has left independent special schools with an uncertain future and uncertainty as to whether they are part of the inclusion drive or external to it. This situation is exacerbated by LEA interpretations of government policy that it is their duty to resist all placements in independent special schools. As such, there are students that are being incorrectly placed and as a consequence are being failed by the inclusion system. As a result independent special schools are being used to place children with SEN where there is a lack of state provision. However, these children appear to harbour more complex SENs and the challenge, if accepted, is for leaders and managers to develop their specialism so as to ensure these children have access to the widest curriculum and ensure they achieve in the shortest amount of time. Surmounting barriers to attainment is always going to be challenging, whatever the sector may be thus it is important that children are at ease with their environment and happy if they are going to learn and achieve. Education is not an end, it is a beginning and therefore until the barriers are removed and every child truly matters to the government, the challenge for leaders and managers of independent special schools will be to offset the shortfalls of the national inclusion strategy and bridge the gap between differing ideologies and differing SENs' complexities.

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AUDIT TRAIL OF EVENTS

TIMESCALES	ACTIVITIES
1st September 2005	• The planning of the research commenced.
Sept – Dec 2005	• A review of the literature was undertaken and the methodology for undertaking the research was developed.
Jan – Feb 2006	• Interview schedules were prepared. Respondents were initially chosen. Letters went out to headteachers of schools and followed up with telephone contact. Letters were sent confirming dates and times.
6th March 2006	• The first interviews were conducted with the deputy head, headteacher and then the classroom teacher of Hillcrest. Interview schedules were tested and language that was not clearly understood was changed.
7th March 2006	• Transcription of the initial interviews conducted with Hillcrest staff.
14th March 2006	• Interviews were conducted with the headteacher, deputy head and classroom teacher of Greybridge Manor. The headteacher of this school was particularly informative and therefore there was a considerable amount of data deriving from this interview.
15/16th March 2006	• Transcription of interviews conducted with Greybridge Manor staff

TIMESCALES	ACTIVITIES
20th March 2006	• Interviews were conducted with the headteacher, deputy head and classroom teacher of The Lord Radleigh school. This was a particularly welcoming school and a great deal of time was afforded towards the research questioning.
21st March 2006	• Transcription of interviews conducted with The Lord Radleigh staff.
28th March 2006	• Interviews were conducted with the headteacher, deputy head and classroom teacher at Amberleigh Court. The deputy head of this school was most inspiring and knowledgeable about accountability issues and how they were impacting, which made up for the deficiency of the head who found the questions difficult to answer.
29th/31st March 2006	• Transcription of interviews conducted with the staff at Amberleigh Court.
26th April 2006	• Interviews were conducted with the headteacher, deputy head and classroom teacher at Oakhammer. The visit to this school gave the researcher a different insight into SEN education from the perspective of educating very disturbed children.
29th -30th April 2006	• Transcription of interviews conducted with Oakhammer staff.
1st May 2006	• Selection of LEAs. Document analysis of OFSTED and CSCI reports was undertaken.

TIMESCALES	ACTIVITIES
5th -10th May 2006	• Interview schedules for questioning of LEA Officers was developed and informed by the data gathered from schools. LEAs were contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the research.
2nd June 2006	• Interview with Luggie LEA SEN Case Officer, in regional office.
6th June 2006	• 10am interview with Lallanshire LEA SEN Case Officer at Hillcrest. 2pm interview with Coalburnshire LEA SEN Case Officer, in regional office
10th – 18th June 2006	• Transcription of interviews conducted with LEA Officers
1st September 2006	• The writing up of the findings and the analysis of the data was commenced.
Sept 2006 – Aug 2007	• Drafts and Revisions
31st August 2007	• Completion.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
HEADTEACHERS

Introduction

Set against a background of growing accountability, mainly due to government legislation, the purpose of this research is to investigate how externally imposed accountabilities are impacting upon independent special schools, and in particular the extent, if any, to which they are impacting upon the internal interests of these schools.

Protocols

Interviews will be approached using a semi-structured form of questioning and as interviewee [you] will be at liberty to enlarge upon answers as you feel is necessary or appropriate. Interviews are expected to take no longer than 30 minutes each. There are four sections to the interview questions. The first section will centre upon the current role of independent special schools since the inception of inclusive education introduced by the Education Act 1996. The second section builds upon the first, by giving focus upon the leadership and management of these schools, and the third section of enquiry draws attention specifically on the impact of external accountabilities upon you and your school. The fourth and final section of questioning is designed to ascertain what any future implications are likely to be. All information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The writing up of the research findings will use pseudonyms so as to protect the school and prevent traceability. At the end of the interview a few minutes will be spent recapping on the interview answers so as to ensure the information gathered is presented as an authentic account.

Context

At the start of the interview the headteacher will be invited to give background information on the school, and explain the categories of SEN within the student population.

The first section of questioning will ascertain what the interviewee believes is the role that independent special schools are fulfilling within the educational market place in which the concept of inclusive education for all pupils has gained ground.

1.   How would you define and what would you understand by the term inclusive education?

   a).   What do you consider the key role to be of this school in bringing about inclusive education for all pupils? ~ *inclusive in the sense of equal chances for all pupils to participate and learn in schooling activities.*

   b).   In what respect do you think that inclusive education has, or has not changed the leadership and management function of independent special schools?

   c).   How and to what extent are independent special schools effecting changes in their role within the educational market? What is the nature of these changes? How and to what extent do changes relate to developments in inclusive education?

   d).   To what extent has there been a change in the school pupil population in recent years? If so, please comment on the form this change has taken.

The second section of research questions will focus on establishing what it is like to be a leader and manager of a special school.

2.   To what extent do you consider leading and managing special schools is the same as, or different from, leading any other school?

   a).   What do you consider are the main challenges in leading and managing special schools?

   b).   How have recent initiatives regarding inclusive practice impacted upon the strategic objectives of your school, including those of pupil placements?

c).   In what way, if at all, have initiatives regarding inclusive practice impacted upon your curriculum pedagogy?

d).   With regards to state/private sector partnerships, to what extent do you feel that you and your staff are trained and equipped with skills that could be of value and offer support to mainstream schools on areas of educating children with SEN? If so how might this be achieved? If not, are there other areas to which your knowledge capital or resources could be shared?

The third section of research questions will ascertain the effect of external accountability upon such independent special schools, and the extent to which this issue may be influencing decisions on how these schools are lead and managed.

3.   As headteacher of this school, to what extent, if at all, do you think you are now more accountable to external bodies than previously?

a).   To what extent, and how do externally imposed accountabilities impact on the leadership and management of your school?

b).   In what way, if at all do external accountabilities compliment or conflict with internal demands from within the school?

c).   To what extent, if at all, does balancing accountabilities present challenges to you as leader and manager of your school?

d).   To what extent, if at all, are external accountabilities influencing your decisions? -and if so how?

The concluding part of the research questioning will establish the emerging issues that may have significant impact on independent special schools in the foreseeable future.

4.   What do you consider to be the implications and possible consequences for independent special schools from developing or currently unfolding issues?

a).   What issues remain the same, if any?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
DEPUTY HEADTEACHERS

Introduction

Set against a background of growing accountability, mainly due to government legislation, the purpose of this research is to investigate how externally imposed accountabilities are impacting upon independent special schools, and in particular the extent, if any, to which they are impacting upon the internal interests of these schools.

Protocols

Interviews will be approached using a semi-structured form of questioning and as interviewee [you] will be at liberty to enlarge upon answers as you feel is necessary or appropriate. Interviews are expected to take no longer than 30 minutes each. There are four sections to the interview questions. The first section will centre upon the current role of independent special schools since the inception of inclusive education introduced by the Education Act 1996. The second section builds upon the first, by giving focus upon the leadership and management of these schools, and the third section of enquiry draws attention specifically on the impact of external accountabilities upon you and your school. The fourth and final section of questioning is designed to ascertain what any future implications are likely to be. All information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The writing up of the research findings will use pseudonyms so as to protect the school and prevent traceability. At the end of the interview a few minutes will be spent recapping on the interview answers so as to ensure the information gathered is presented as an authentic account.

Context

At the start of the interview the deputy headteacher will be invited to give background information on his/her role within the school.

The first section of questioning will ascertain what participants believe is the role that independent special schools are fulfilling within the educational market place in which the concept of inclusive education for all pupils has gained ground.

1. How would you define and what would you understand by the term inclusive education?

    a). What do you consider the key role to be of this school in bringing about inclusive education for all pupils? ~ *inclusive in the sense of equal chances for all pupils to participate and learn in schooling activities.*

    b). In what respects do you think that inclusive education has, or has not changed the leadership and management function of independent special schools?

    c). Do you perceive that the role of this school within the educational market is changing? What is the nature of these changes? How and to what extent do changes relate to developments in inclusive education?

    d). Have you noticed a change in the diversity of SEN among children who are attending the school? If so, please comment on the form this change has taken.

The second section of research questions will focus on establishing what it is like to be a leader and manager of a special school.

2. To what extent do you consider leading and managing special schools is the same as, or different from, leading and managing any other school?

    a). What do you consider are the main challenges in leading and managing special schools?

    b). How have recent initiatives regarding inclusive practice impacted upon the strategic objectives of your school, including those of pupil placement?

c). In what way, if at all, have initiatives regarding inclusive practice impacted upon your curriculum pedagogy?

d). With regards to state/private sector partnerships, to what extent do you feel that you and your staff are trained and equipped with skills that could be of value and offer support to mainstream schools on areas of educating children with SEN? If so how might this be achieved? If not, are there other areas to which your knowledge capital or resources could be shared?

The third section of research questions will ascertain the effect of external accountability upon these independent special schools, and the extent to which this issue may be influencing decisions on how these schools are lead and managed.

3. As deputy headteacher of this school, to what extent, if at all, do you think that you are now more accountable to external bodies than previously?

a). To what extent, and how do externally imposed accountabilities impact on the leadership and management of your school?

b). In what way, if at all do external accountabilities compliment or conflict with internal demands from within the school?

c). To what extent, if at all, does balancing accountabilities present challenges to you as leader and manager of your school?

d). To what extent, if at all, are external accountabilities influencing your decisions? -and if so how?

The concluding part of the research questioning will establish the rising issues that may have significant impact on independent special schools in the foreseeable future.

4. What do you consider to be the implications and possible consequences for independent special schools from developing or currently unfolding issues?

a). What issues remain the same, if any?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
CLASSROOM TEACHER

Introduction

Set against a background of growing accountability, mainly due to government legislation, the purpose of this research is to investigate how externally imposed accountabilities are impacting upon independent special schools, and in particular the extent, if any, to which they are impacting upon the internal interests of these schools.

Protocols

Interviews will be approached using a semi-structured form of questioning and as interviewee [you] will be at liberty to enlarge upon answers as you feel is necessary or appropriate. Interviews are expected to take no longer than 30 minutes each. There are four sections to the interview questions. The first section will centre upon the current role of independent special schools since the inception of inclusive education introduced by the Education Act 1996. The second section builds upon the first, by giving focus upon the leadership and management of these schools, and the third section of enquiry draws attention specifically on the impact of external accountabilities upon you and your school. The fourth and final section of questioning is designed to ascertain what any future implications are likely to be. All information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The writing up of the research findings will use pseudonyms so as to protect the school and prevent traceability. At the end of the interview a few minutes will be spent recapping on the interview answers so as to ensure the information gathered is presented as an authentic account.

Context

At the start of the interview the classroom teacher will be invited to give background information on his/her role within the school.

The first section of questioning will ascertain what the interviewee believes is the role that independent special schools are fulfilling within the educational market place in which the concept of inclusive education for all pupils has gained ground.

1.   How would you define and what would you understand by the term inclusive education?

   a).   What do you consider the key role to be of this school in bringing about inclusive education for all pupils? ~ *inclusive in the sense of equal chances for all pupils to participate and learn in schooling activities.*

   b).   Has inclusive practice affected your role and teaching practice as a teacher of SEN students? If so, why? What is the nature of these changes? If not, please give the reasons to which your opinion is based?

   c).   Are you aware of any changes in the categories of SEN students who attend this school, or a change in the diversity of SEN among children who you teach? If so, please enlarge upon the impact this has effected in the classroom.

   d).   As a teacher of SEN students, what do you believe is the major enabler of student achievement and likewise, what do you believe has been the biggest hindrance to student achievement?

The second section of research questions will focus on establishing what it is like to be a teacher in a special school.

2.   To what extent do you consider teaching and managing in special schools is the same as, or different from, teaching and managing any other school?

   a).   What do you consider are the main challenges in teaching and managing special schools?

b). How have recent initiatives regarding inclusive education impacted upon the strategic objectives in your classroom, including those of pupil placements?

c). In what way, if at all, have initiatives regarding inclusive practice impacted upon your curriculum pedagogy?

d). With regards to state/private sector partnerships, to what extent do you feel that you are trained and equipped with skills that could be of value and offer support to mainstream schools on areas of educating children with SEN? If so how might this be achieved? If not, are there other areas to which your knowledge capital or resources could be shared?

The third section of research questions will ascertain the effect of external accountability upon such independent special schools, and the extent to which this issue may be influencing decisions on how these schools are teach and are managed.

3. As a classroom teacher of this school, to what extent, if at all, do you think that you are now more accountable to external bodies than previously?

a). To what extent, and how do externally imposed accountabilities impact on the teaching and management of your school?

b). In what way, if at all do external accountabilities compliment or conflict with internal demands from within the school?

c). To what extent, if at all, does balancing accountabilities present challenges to you as a teacher and manager of your pupils' learning?

d). To what extent, if at all, are external accountabilities influencing your decisions? -and if so how?

The concluding part of the research questioning will establish the emerging issues that may have significant impact on independent special schools in the foreseeable future.

4. What do you consider to be the implications and possible consequences for independent special schools from developing or currently unfolding issues?

a). What issues remain the same, if any?