

A national approach to developing support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND): Challenges and successes

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Background

Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) pose many challenges to the education system. Traditionally these have been dealt with as additional, even separate initiatives from mainstream policy and practice. The development of a policy of inclusive education has refocused attention on the need to consider the total education system, from national policy down to classroom practice. This paper focuses on the system by which support of the teaching workforce is enhanced through a national policy and multi-faceted approach seeking to achieve both individual and systemic change

Supporting pupils with SEND depends ultimately for its success on the positive attitudes (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), skills and knowledge (Lindsay, 2007) of the teaching workforce, including teaching assistants (Blatchford et al, 2009) but teachers often feel un-skilled to support pupils with SEND (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2001, TDA, 2008)). This requires systemic attention from initial teacher training (ITT) and continuing professional development (CPD) supported by appropriate organisation of both the training and the SEND support system per se - see *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DFES, 2004). Inclusion as a policy must be reconciled with other drivers, not least currently in the UK and other countries, the 'standards agenda' focusing on improving general pupil attainment and behaviour. These can be in tension as exemplified by *Can effective schools be inclusive schools?* (Lunt & Norwich's, 1999).

Research Questions

The UK government through the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Training and Development Agency for Schools set up a multi-faceted initiative over the period 2008-11. This is an ambitious programme to engender major positive changes in the teaching workforce to support more effectively pupils with SEND throughout the whole of the English state system. Work in this area was identified as a key Government priority in the Children's Plan published in December 2007.

The programme includes for ITT, supported by the TDA

- the roll out of new study units on SEND, developed for providers of primary undergraduate and then primary/secondary PGCE teacher training;
- the promotion of extended placements for trainee teachers in special schools or other specialist provision;
- new electronic and other facilities to help tutors network effectively;
- the introduction of DCSF-funded places on mandatory qualification courses for specialist teachers of children with sensory impairments;

And for qualified teachers, under the National Strategies:

- The Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) - CPD training materials - produced and disseminated by the National Strategies, rolled out in three phases: Pupils with dyslexia and

those with speech, language and communication needs (2008); those with autistic spectrum disorders (2009) and finally behavioural, emotional and social difficulties(2010

- Support provided for the embedding of IDP through DCSF-funded Regional Hubs and Pathfinder activity involving specialist voluntary sector organisations;
- The Stammering Information Programme; resources produced by the Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children with DCSF grant;

Methods

A combined methods approach is being undertaken for this complex multi-faceted programme, comprising large scale surveys, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, including examination of the support materials. For the ITT strand, samples include all providers of primary undergraduate (N = 40) and primary/secondary PGCE programmes (for 2010) - interviews, plus annual samples of 500 trainees in each cohort - surveys. For qualified teachers a sample of 30 LAs was constructed to reflect different engagement with the IDP dissemination model and national demographics. Interviews have been held so far with 28 IDP leads, 25 SENCOs, 16 CPD managers, 22 experienced and 18 newly qualified teachers; surveys have been conducted with staff from 1000 schools (same professional groups. Data from further surveys and interviews will take place up to June 2010 will be incorporated.

Frame

All interviews are analysed thematically, against pre-determined themes (deductive analysis) and emergent themes (inductive). The development of the coding system is a recursive (iterative) process, with interviews being read and a coding system constructed; transcripts are re-read to identify which elements fit the initially identified themes, which themes are emerging and hence new patterns re identified in the data to produce superordinate main categories with subordinate themes. The questionnaires are analysed using SPSS. This paper draws upon data presented in the accompanying papers and further analysis, to propose implications of the findings of the total DCSF programme to date for national policy development in SEND.

Research findings

Initial findings provide a strong steer but caution is needed as the essence of the overall programme is that it is phased, multi-faceted and holistic. Data to be collected until June 2010 are important for exploring the findings to date, including trajectories of development. For example, the Stammering Information Programme penetration and influence will be explored over this period. Some specific findings will be presented in papers 2 and 3; initial, indicative findings overall suggest the following:

- Reconciliation of the inclusion and school improvement agendas can be achieved by engaging leaders from each domain and developing the dissemination locally (LA, school) as a joint initiative, but this challenge requires active joint engagement.
- National policy dissemination for CPD must fit into the natural rhythm of the school year if it is to capture the moment
- National and regional support systems, including Regional Hubs and the National Strategies, can provide a positive framework for national dissemination to schools
- A 3-phase 3-year approach for different materials, with opportunities for review/amendment, is a sound basis for a large-scale dissemination programme addressing different domains (in this case types of SEND); but the quality of the support materials, and their user friendliness is crucial: voluntary bodies have an important role but the importance of an up-to-date evidence base, implying university level research input, should not be under-estimated

- It is essential to build in methods to avoid losing momentum as other initiatives occur, especially at school dissemination level

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