



OxSpec: Occasional Papers
Oxfordshire Special Needs Research Project

August 1993

Number 4

"Special School Advisory Headteacher Scheme"

INTRODUCTION

Before the implementation of the 1981 Education Act in April 1983, Oxfordshire's special schools were developing models of integration and outreach. In 1990 this work was both acknowledged and encouraged by the introduction of an additional 0.2 fte or 20% of a Head's average salary, allowing flexible virement between teaching and non-teaching time, secretarial support or materials. This would give special schools more time to respond to mainstream requests for advice.

At the launch of the Scheme in June 1990 with HMI, Officers and other Professionals, it was advised that the beginnings should be modest. The work should not be widely advertised, raising expectations which could not be realised.

13 of the County's 15 special schools have taken part in the Scheme: including one school which has undertaken the work without additional resources. This will be extended to include all 15 schools in September of 1993.

To inform the future of the Scheme, the Inspector for Special Needs undertook the present survey. Each special school Head completed a series of proformas on the outreach work carried out by the school and made recommendations for the future of their work and possible funding arrangements. With the exception of two Heads not presently involved in the Scheme, all were interviewed using the proformas as the basis of the discussions. The third part of the survey, involved a conversation with the Head of a nominated mainstream school, where outreach work had been undertaken.

FINDINGS

This paper reports the findings of the survey, highlights common issues and makes possible recommendations for future practices. It demonstrates both a commitment on the part of special schools to continue to develop a resource model of working, and a welcome by mainstream schools of the part played by the scheme in sharing expertise. It also demonstrates the "value added" which is experienced by both special and mainstream schools.

RAISING EXPECTATIONS

Nine of the 13 Heads said that the Scheme was an extension or expansion of the work already undertaken. Integration, outreach and work with leavers was all seen as an integral part of a special school's role and "...not a bolt-on."

However, the initial suggestion not to advertise the Scheme caused problems for some Heads. "It got off to a very slow start." "...could do more if more knew." Most took advantage of the networks which already existed to talk to small groups and individuals about what they could offer. These included the Secondary Curriculum & Assessment and Primary Learning & Assessment meetings, Divisional SEN Forums, SNASts and Psychologists. One Head sent a letter to individual Primary schools, taking one at a time and responding to requests before contacting the next. In the end "...the word got round."

In a very few instances, there were misconceptions of the Scheme. Rather than assuming an advisory role to the staff, there was an expectation that the special school would undertake to make a regular commitment to working with individual pupils or small groups.

USE OF FUNDING

The additional funding was used in a variety of ways. (Table 1 - Staff Involvement) Most frequently it was the Head who made the first contact with a school, leaving the Deputy in charge. If a subsequent visit took place, another member of staff with a particular specialism might be involved. Funding would then be used to pay for supply teaching or learning support assistant (LSA) hours.

In one school, part of the funding was used to create a second Deputy with particular responsibility for External Services. In five schools the increased secretarial work was recognised.

The "OTHER" column in Table 1, includes the appointment of an N.N.E.B., LSA hours, equipment and resources for use in mainstream schools, and the development and organisation of a resource base in a special school for partnership use.

Table 1 Staff Involvement in the Advisory Headteacher Scheme

SCHOOL	HEAD	DPTY	TEACH	UPGD	SCRT	OTH
C			*		*	*
D	*	*			*	*
E	*	*	*			
F						*
G		*		*		
H		*		*	*	
I		*		*		
J	*	*			*	
K	*	*	*			
L	*	*	*			*
M				*	*	
N	*	*				

WORK UNDERTAKEN

Any statistical analysis would have proved unsatisfactory due to the variety of work undertaken by special schools and methods of recording. It was often difficult to distinguish between integration and outreach. One special school had visited 70 schools in a year, most others between 12 and 20. But these figures did not reflect the number of follow-up visits or the number of pupils. It was suggested however, that approximately 90% of the work was with individual pupils.

Typically, the Head of a mainstream school 'phoned the special school, sometimes at the suggestion of an Officer or Educational Psychologist, and asked for advice concerning a pupil. In nearly all cases this occurred at stage three in the County's assessment process; "...sometimes as a last resort". Some Heads would have preferred to have been called in at an earlier stage, but all agreed that they "...were not there to recommend a special school". They were there to give advice not "...as a tool to beat the LEA with."

The Head visited, observed or worked with the pupil, discussed the observations with the Head, the class teacher and sometimes the parents. Suggestions might be made on classroom management, deployment of the LSA, appropriateness or differentiation of work and task analysis. Other professionals might be recommended. In some cases, a follow-up visit might be arranged for another teacher to take materials or resources.

Other work undertaken, included INSET on such topics as: management of behaviour, eating disorders, or the administration of rectal valium. All Heads had been variously involved in meetings, case conferences, report writing, providing information for multi-professional assessments and work on schools' special needs or behaviour policies.

CASE STUDY

Melanie was a 4 year old with Downes syndrome. She was disruptive in class and the staff felt that they had no expertise. Her parents were adamant that they would not have any professional involved as this might lead to a statement and Melanie transferring to a special school. At the suggestion of a primary inspector, the Head 'phoned the special school. The Head visited, observed, talked to the Head of the mainstream school and the parents. She was able to reassure the class teacher and the parents that Melanie was rightly placed. She made a follow-up visit with a Derbyshire Language test. Melanie has settled and is just completing Year 1.

CASE STUDY

Roger was a 10 year old boy of average ability who had suffered spinal injuries in an accident. The education social worker contacted the special school because she knew that they could manage a wheel chair. Staff visited Stoke Mandeville hospital and worked with Roger. It was agreed that a mainstream setting would be best and this was arranged. No follow-up visit was necessary after the transfer, but the special school is at the end of the 'phone.

RECORDING

Most schools kept careful records of the outreach work undertaken. During the first term of the Scheme, a County "Record of Visit" sheet had been produced and distributed. Four schools were still using this. In five other schools, it had been developed to better reflect individual circumstances, with letters and reports carefully filed. Three schools relied on verbal feedback and diaries of visits but no written records.

SPECIAL SCHOOL COMMENTARY

Eight Heads commented on the appreciation expressed by mainstream schools. "...much appreciated and needed." Nine commented on the enhanced links between special and mainstream schools, better communications, the strengthening of networks and the development of a truer continuum of provision. There was a better understanding of the role of special schools "...stops special schools becoming isolated..." "...stops the bad press..." "...enhances the profile..."

Four special schools commented favourably on the effect contact with mainstream schools had had on National Curriculum provision in their own schools.

The overall feeling was that "We (special schools) welcome the initiative." "...it offers a lot of advice for comparatively little money".

MAINSTREAM COMMENTARY

No guidance was given to special schools in their nomination of mainstream schools for inclusion in the survey. The subsequent distribution of schools was: FIRST 1, PRIMARY 6, MIDDLE 2, UPPER 3, SECONDARY 1.

12 of the 13 schools nominated responded that they "...welcomed the initiative", that they valued being "...able to talk to someone who works with such children all the time", "...no longer working in a vacuum..." and that they would "...like outreach extended." The value of communication and networks was stressed by most. If there was no such advice available, one Head remarked, "I would be jumping up and down asking for additional help."

Nine of the Heads however, felt that the Scheme was "...not well enough known" and that there was a "...need to advertise." Many had either received help as a result of an Officer or Psychologist suggesting contact with a special school, but did not realise that the help was part of a funded scheme. They wished to know what was offered, the amount of time available and whether additional time could be bought-in. There were suggestions for extending the scope of work to involve INSET for governors, visits by mainstream teachers to special schools, advice on building adaptations, and help with developing and reviewing special needs policies.

Minor problems had involved adverse relationships between individual staffs of schools: advice given which was contrary to County policy: and the promise of a return visit not being honoured. These however had not influenced future use of the Scheme.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Eight special schools saw their immediate target as "...more of the same". Now that they knew better what was needed and what they could realistically deliver, three of the schools were looking at ways of advertising the Scheme. Two were still reluctant in case they received a volume of referrals and were unable to deliver. On the other hand, one school had produced a brochure and another was developing a school policy on Outreach.

Four schools wished to be more involved in staff development in mainstream, in awareness raising and disseminating information about the role of the special school. One school wanted to be more involved in whole-school issues; equal opportunities, special needs and behaviour policy developments.

Many schools saw the future of the Scheme involving more staff for personal development and career opportunities. "Developing a network of trusting professionals..." was a theme of several schools involving Special Needs Advisory & Support Teachers (SNASTs) in their future role, Educational Psychologists and Pre-School Teacher Counsellors. Social Services and Psychiatry were also mentioned. The same theme was reflected by many in the wider issue of developing the special school as a resource to an area.

FUTURE FUNDING

All schools to some degree agreed that if the funding ceased, "...it will leave a void..." but the work would continue in some form. There would be more advice over the 'phone, there would be fewer visits and a greater time delay in responding to referrals.

What was sought, was a recognition that this was a County service and that funding should be secured. In recognition of this was the understanding "...it is important that we account for the work undertaken."

Two schools were adamant that the service was an "extra" and as such should continue to be funded externally. One of whom advocated that the funding be devolved to mainstream schools and that they "...buy-in at realistic prices...taking the pressure off special schools." The other considered pooling the Scheme's funds and creating a full-time post of special school outreach teacher.

Table 2 - Special School Options - sets out the ranked order of options. Clearly there is an almost unanimous feeling that to devolve the funds to mainstream schools would be to effectively lose the benefit. Reasons given were: all schools would receive so little it would not be sufficient to buy-in the support: some schools would not need the funding in a particular year whilst another might need support for more than one pupil: at a time of financial pressure, the funding, being open to virement, might be used in some other area of the curriculum. This was supported unanimously by the mainstream schools themselves (Table 3 - Mainstream Options)

Five special schools thought it both preferable and more professional to devolve the funds to them. The others on balance wanted some degree of direction and accountability and opted for either the status quo, or if delegated through the Formula, a notion of "earmarking". This too was borne out in the findings of mainstream Heads.

Table 2 Special School Option

SCHOOL	STATUS QUO	DEVOLVE SPECIAL SCHOOLS	DEVOLVE SPECIAL SCHOOLS (EARMARK)	DEVOLVE MAIN STREAM
A*	2	3	1	4
B	1=	1=	1=	4
C	3=	3=	2	1
D	1	3	2	4
E	2	3	1	4
F	3	1	2	4
G	2	3	1	4
H	3	1	2	4
I	1	3	2	4
J	3	2	1	4
K	1	3	2	4
L	3	1	2	4
M	1	2=	2=	2=
N	3	1=	1=	4
O	1	2	3	4

Table 2 Mainstream Option

SCHOOL	STATUS QUO	DEVOLVE SPECIAL SCHOOLS	DEVOLVE SPECIAL SCHOOLS (EARMARK)	DEVOLVE MAIN STREAM
"A"	2	3	1	4
"C"	2	3	1	4
"D"	2	3=	1	3=
"G"	1	3	2	4
"H"	3	1	2	4
"I"	4	3	1	2
"J"	1	3=	2	3=
"K"	1	3	2	4
"L"	1=	1=	1=	4
"M"	1	3	2	4

(* Mainstream school "A" was nominated by Special School A
"B" by B: and so on)

RECOMMENDATIONS

There was unqualified praise for the Scheme from both special school and mainstream Heads, to the extent that all said it would continue in some form even if there was no additional funding.

1. A mechanism to ensure the continuation of the special school advisory outreach needs to be agreed.
2. The Scheme needs to be agreed on a permanent basis, not on annual funding. The present arrangement makes forward planning difficult.
3. The future funding arrangement must ensure that the work is undertaken and that funding is not lost from the Scheme.
4. The Scheme must have regular evaluation and accountability built in.
5. A Countywide method of recording and reporting needs to be devised and agreed.
6. As part of the Divisional reviews of learning and behaviour support in 1993/94, the Advisory work of each special school, should be reviewed and agreed with mainstream schools and other special needs support services in the local area.

Howard Brayton

Inspector for Special Educational Needs

OxSpec is a joint venture between Oxfordshire Education Authority and Oxford Brookes University School of Education.

It undertakes collaborative research into aspects of provision for pupils with special educational needs and students with disabilities & learning difficulties.

OxSpec Occasional Papers are produced as a contribution to debate and discussion on SEN issues. They do not necessarily reflect the policies or practices of supporting institutions and Services.
