

REACH Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland, Vol. 24 No. 2 (2011), 123–127.

BOOK REVIEWS

Inclusion or Illusion? Educational Provision for Primary School Children with Mild General Learning Disabilities

By Paul Stevens and Mona O' Moore

Reviewed by ROSEMARY FAHEY, principal of St. Ultan's Special School for children with mild general learning disabilities, Navan, Co. Meath.

The purpose of the book *Inclusion or Illusion? Educational Provision for Primary School Children with Mild General Learning Disabilities* is to document current practice and to examine the key issues regarding the educational provision for children with Mild General Learning Disabilities (MGLD) in Ireland. In order to fulfil this purpose, the authors, Stevens and O' Moore report the findings of three sequential research studies involving 900 teachers undertaken in the years 1989, 2004 and 2007. The longitudinal nature of this research is a rare but particularly welcome addition to the relatively small but growing body of research into special education in Ireland. Its contribution is made even more valuable in that the period of this particular longitudinal study closely spans the two decades of the most significant developments and reform relating to special education in Ireland.

The greater proportion of the book (Chapters 4 -8) is concerned with reporting the research findings. The 1989 study involved teachers in special schools and classes and allowed for the examination of provision within the largely segregated system that had existed for many years in Ireland. The 2004 study involved teachers in special schools and classes and also resource teachers and thereby enabled comparison between the special education provision in both mainstream and segregated settings following the 1993 report of Special Education Review Committee (SERC, Department of Education, 1993) which signalled the move towards the policy of inclusion. Learning support teachers and teachers in special schools and classes participated in the 2007 study thus allowing for a new perspective on provision for pupils with MGLD after the introduction of the General Allocation Model in 2005.

The main issues examined in Stevens' and O'Moore's research include pupil

enrolments, inclusion practices and policies, curriculum, support services, resources and facilities, teacher qualifications and professional development. Previous research associated with each pertinent issue, particularly from the Irish context, is reviewed and considered. The findings of each survey are comprehensively and thoroughly presented and discussed with continual comparisons between special schools, mainstream schools with special classes and those with learning support teachers. Presentation of the data is aided and enhanced by a large range of tables and figures. For readers wishing to take the fast track route through the research findings the authors have very helpfully summarised their key findings in bullet point format at the end of each chapter.

The composite of findings from the trio of studies provides an illuminating picture that reflects the many changes over the last two decades of reform and development in special education in Ireland. Stevens and O' Moore conclude that much progress has been made, most noticeably in relation to the financial investment into educational resources and facilities and the increase in the number of special needs teachers. More significantly, they also conclude that despite the promotion of inclusion, levels of integration and inclusion have dropped significantly over the eighteen year research period across all three forms of provision. Special schools as well as special classes report being more isolated in terms of interaction and linkage with their mainstream counterparts. The authors argue that this is symptomatic of the haste with which inclusion was implemented in mainstream schools without the pre-requisite planning and training. They seek a continuation of the debate on inclusion leading to strategic planning for special education for the future. They identify the barriers that have beset the path of successful inclusion thus far and propose 43 recommendations that would lead to more effective inclusion into the future.

As part of a review of this book, it is also important to note that the authors, in contextualising and providing a backdrop to their research, give a comprehensive and informative historical account of the evolution of special education services in Ireland since the eighteenth century along with a detailed account of the contemporary dual system of special education provision. These are provided in the first and second chapters of the book. Chapter 3 is devoted to the examination of the evolution of the three current forms of educational provision for pupils with MGLD and also gives consideration to the integration and inclusion debates both internationally and in Ireland. In these, as in all other chapters of the book, the issues are thoroughly researched and comprehensively discussed.

In conclusion, I believe that this book will prove to be a highly valuable and informative resource for teachers, parents and all other professionals with concerns and interests relating to special education and specifically, to the development of

educational provision for children with MGLD. Researchers and post-graduate students too are also likely to be highly appreciative of the extensive bibliography contained in this book that includes a large number of research studies (particularly from the Irish context), national and international reports and policy statements and documents.

The publication of this book is timely as it coincides with the current debate and discourse on the future of special classes and schools. One would hope that the policy makers currently involved in any review of special education would also refer to this book as part of their deliberations in order to identify the pitfalls of the past and the necessities and challenges for the future in the quest for a continuum of provision that meets the needs of all pupils with special educational needs.

INCLUSION OR ILLUSION? EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN WITH MILD GENERAL LEARNING DISABILITIES by Paul Stevens and Mona O' Moore is published by Blackhall Publishing, Dublin, 2009 and costs €35.00.

Martian in the Playground: Understanding the Schoolchild with Asperger's Syndrome (Revised Edition)

By Clare Sainsbury

Reviewed by ALICE O'DONNELL, a learning support/resource teacher in St. Cronan's B.N.S., Bray, Co. Wicklow and parent of a child with Asperger's Syndrome.

This book would provide an excellent introduction to the world of Asperger's Syndrome for teachers and parents. The author, Clare Sainsbury, has Asperger's Syndrome. She draws on her experience of education as well as accounts from a range of friends and acquaintances, thus giving the reader an array of diverse experiences and views.

This is a revised edition of this book, which was first published in 2000. It now includes updated research information and a comprehensive introduction by Tony Attwood in which he outlines the core difficulties faced by children with a diagnosis

Copyright of Reach is the property of Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.