

Editorial

With the publication of the 16th volume of REACH, it is interesting to look back at the massive changes that have occurred in the Irish education system since the first issue of REACH in 1987. In particular, the area of special educational needs has experienced significant development. It seems as if an alarm bell rang and everybody woke up at the beginning of the nineties. Up to the mid-to-late 1980s, relatively little had been written by Department of Education officials about aspects of the education system in this country. Since then there has been an explosion of pronouncements, bills, court judgements, reviews of primary education as well as teacher training, revised curriculum guidelines for primary education, reports of working groups on dyslexia and on autism, new guidelines for Learning Support teachers and even an Education Act (1998), to name just a few of the recent developments. Schools will soon receive sets of guidelines for teachers of pupils with general learning disabilities.

For anyone involved with pupils with special educational needs (SEN), the most influential document of the nineties is most likely the *Report of the Special Education Review Committee* (SERC Report) in 1993. There were also a few high-profile court cases in the last decade which affected the type and extent of provision for children with various conditions and levels of learning disability. It was clear from the revised Primary Curriculum Guidelines that many more children with SEN should have easier access to the mainstream curriculum. The forthcoming guidelines for teachers of pupils with general learning disabilities should be an enormous help to all teachers and all schools in meeting these pupils' needs.

In recent years, the buzz words of *integration* and *inclusion* seem to have given way to 'partnership'. *Partnership for Positive Change* is the theme of the fourteenth annual conference (June, 2002) of the Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education. A paper drawn from the keynote address is included in this issue (Hornby, p. 3); it stresses the importance of various professionals working together toward common learning goals for pupils with special educational needs. While one would readily agree with the sentiment behind such a concept, implementing collaborative practice is another matter. Educators within the field of special education have been hearing, reading and talking about *collaborative consultation* for a number of years, but in this country there are still only a handful of examples where effective collaborative practice is taking place. As there has been no tradition in Irish schools of working in such a way, it takes initiative, commitment and perseverance from entire school staffs to ensure positive results which have been reported elsewhere.

These are fascinating times in the area of special needs education, given the scale and rapidity of recent positive developments. One can only hope that the partners in education can plan and work together more closely than ever before for the good of all pupils with SEN, their families and the wider community.

PATRICIA LYNCH

Editor