

## Editorial

One of the 'hidden voices' in the debate on special educational needs in this country has been that of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities. Its report, due to be presented to the Government in April 1996, it is predicted, will have policy implications for education that will put the SERC Report and the Education White Paper into the shade.

Established in 1993 by the Minister for Equality and Law Reform, the Commission, chaired by Mr. Justice Feergus Flood, set about examining 18 areas of major concern to people with disabilities - each the province of an independent working party. The Working Group on Education, chaired by Dr. Sheelagh Drudy of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, presented a substantial report to the Commission in April 1995.

The Working Group on Education found many real barriers to the inclusion of people with disabilities. These included: lack of physical access to schools; lack of appropriate materials and equipment; lack of appropriate training of teachers; lack of special education facilities for children with severe disabilities; lack of speech therapy; lack of education for those with learning difficulties after the age of 18; and, lack of adult education for people with disabilities. The recommendations of the Working Party propose concrete ways of promoting inclusion at all levels of education, from preschool to third level. Most tellingly, it argues that it is the expectations of ordinary schools, their curriculum, methods and standards that determine whether or not people are educationally 'handicapped'. Schools as major socialising agencies, have important responsibilities here.

In addition to committee work, the Commission held thirty listening meetings around the country as part of an 18 month dialogue with people with disabilities, carers and service providers. Of the 600 submissions received by the Commission, over half are directly from persons with a disability. These have been carefully analysed by the Commission to ensure that the messages in them are articulated and taken on board.

What will make the Report of the Commission something more than the outcome of a worthy and formidable talking shop is the determination of the Government to form a statutory Council for the Status of People with Disabilities later this year. With the establishment of such a body, representing the views of 15-20% of the population, a voice will be given to the silent citizens of Ireland which will have major implications for educational provision in the years to come.

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Editor

Some errors inadvertently crept into the article *Local Education Boards: Implications for Special Education Policy and Provision* by Patrick E. O'Keefe in Vol. 9 No. 1. Corrected reprints can be obtained from the Editor or the author on application.