Editorial

In the sections dealing with students with special educational needs in the White Paper *Charting our Education Future* the term integration is not mentioned. This is not a bad thing. Integration - that buzz word of the 1980s - as a concept, is now dead.

Integration focused on the modification of programmes and methodologies in order to accommodate children with disabilities into the mainstream. Lack of resources, in the form of personnel and professional expertise was frequently, and appropriately, pointed to as an impediment to this kind of transition. Unless children's needs could be sufficiently met (by prior placement in Special Schools, for example, or through extraordinary levels of parental involvement) integration could not be effected. The system could not stand it. Now it is recognised that schools, and not the pupil, must change. *All* schools must restructure themselves in order to respond to the needs and abilities of *all* children. The word for the 1990s is inclusion.

What makes an inclusive school? In June 1994 a UNESCO Conference in Salamanca issued a Statement of Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education agreed to by representatives of 92 governments. The statement argues that ordinary schools with an inclusive orientation are: "the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all".

The White Paper, although it does not speak specifically of the inclusive school, points in the right direction when it declares that all schools should have "a sustaining philosophy (that seeks) to promote equality of access, participation and benefit for all in accordance with (pupils') needs and abilities" (p.7). In proposing provision for special needs, however, the White Paper fails to avoid the incongruity inherent in adopting uncritically the SERC Report's recommendations "in meeting the needs of students in each category of disability". The SERC Report, unfortunately, was not a charter for inclusion.

Ireland's education system is in a process of re-appraisal. Whether it will truly undertake the task of transition from categorical structures to inclusive communities is a question which must be presented as a challenge to us all.

SEAN GRIFFIN
Editor