

Editorial

Unquestionably, adequate resources and sufficient Departmental funding are prerequisites for any serious national policy on the integration of children with special needs. Yet it must be said that unlimited resource backing in itself, would not bring about integration.

Elementary schooling in this country, while dependent on centralised funding, was built on local initiative. The concept of the school as an expression of community endeavour is firmly established. The role of the school in influencing community attitudes has had perhaps, an impact that is underexploited. More crucially, the potential of the school to develop itself internally through creatively exploring new approaches to the task of education as a collective endeavour, has yet to be realised. Special schools have, by and large, led the way here, faced as they are with the challenge of a needs-based curriculum and a changing pupil population. If ordinary schools are to manageably meet the challenge of local children who have special educational needs, the school itself - not the pupil concerned - will have to change. Meeting special educational needs in the ordinary school "involves a radical re-examination of what all schools have to offer all children" (Brahm Norwich (1990). *Reappraising Special Needs Education*. London: Cassell Education Ltd.).

The development of a whole school policy is an undertaking that the entire school will take responsibility for its children with special needs, not just the remedial or special class teacher (Shoemith). Teachers themselves, supported by a whole school policy can become agents of change in this process, utilising their own expertise in the school setting (Metcalf). A fundamental attitudinal change which recognises special needs in the context of cultural and social diversity can contribute greatly to curricular enrichment for all children (Kenny). A successful whole school approach will also create structures for constructive parental involvement (McCarthy and Lawless).

Our eagerness to look outwards, reflected in our continuing review of perspectives on integration in other countries, must lead us to critically examine not just our own national policy (or lack of it), but also the policies and practices of our own individual schools. These are the issues which will be addressed by the Third Annual Conference with its theme: **Special Education in the 90s - the Classroom and Beyond.**

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