

Integration and Whole School Policies for Special Educational Needs

Developing a whole-school policy ensures that the school will take responsibility for its children with special educational needs. It allows each staff member to be aware of common goals and to work towards them with conviction and support.

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INTRODUCTION

The Metropolitan Borough of Calderdale is a small Yorkshire authority straddling the Pennine hills. The primary school population is approximately 19,000 of which approximately 12% are from ethnic minorities. There are 99 primary schools in Calderdale.

In late 1985 the council agreed a policy for the integration of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schools. The policy was influenced by the Warnock Report (1978) and the subsequent Education Act (1981) which was implemented in 1983. The policy statement set a long term objective to give all children some experience of the mainstream setting of education.

In order to implement such a policy successfully the authority recognised the need for certain conditions:

- Positive attitudes and expectations;
- Teacher support in meeting the needs of children;
- Necessary resources to support children.

Local education authorities (LEA) were given a duty to identify children with SEN through formal multi-disciplinary assessments which were to include parents as

THE ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING SUPPORT SERVICE

The Assessment and Learning Support Service (ALSS) was established in 1984 to support the practical implementation of the integration policy. The ALSS is a large generic service with teachers supporting children with learning, behavioural, physical, sensory and linguistic difficulties, in varying degrees, from infancy to the end of secondary education.

The service has gone through several changes and the main area of development has been in the primary phase. The two major roles are:

- To support children with SEN (mainly those with statements);
- To provide school-based in-service training.

DIRECT SUPPORT TO CHILDREN

The ALSS set out to promote and facilitate integration but now finds that the task is to prevent segregation. Many children with SEN now start their school careers in mainstream schools and so the aim is to assist in the curriculum development necessary to meet their needs.

The majority of children with statements in mainstream schools receive from support teachers within the ALSS and often one-to-one support for varying periods in the day from a special support assistant.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING OF TEACHERS

School based in-service training has always been a most productive way of assisting teachers to meet the special needs of children in their own schools. Recently these courses have been designed as modules and linked to local colleges of higher education so that teachers can obtain credits which can be counted towards a diploma or degree.

The first aim of the modular courses was to establish the role of the special needs co-ordinator and enable him/her to establish a 'whole-school policy for special educational needs'.

DEVELOPING A WHOLE-SCHOOL POLICY

Assisting a school staff to develop their own whole-school policy helps the school to take responsibility for their children with SEN needs and allows each member to

be aware of common goals and the need to work towards them. Often the arrangements made within schools for children with SEN are uncertain. Without a clear policy confusion occurs and children's needs are overlooked because staff are not sure about procedures. Questions such as: Should this child in a wheelchair be in my school?- What resources have we?- Who can help?- often these can have no answers. A whole-school policy needs to state the school's beliefs, aims and priorities from a philosophical statement to practical implementation.

ATTITUDES, BELIEFS AND SCHOOL ETHOS

It may take some time for members of the school to debate and finally establish their beliefs and attitudes towards integration. Once these are clearly stated for staff, governors, parents and children all those concerned with the school will be expected to work to support these beliefs. The school may consider:

- Issues of integration;
- Equal opportunities;
- Entitlement for children with SEN;
- Provision and resources within the school for SEN;
- The development of every child's potential;
- Physical access to the school;
- Health and safety.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The statement of attitudes and beliefs may emphasise the role of all teachers in supporting children with SEN as opposed to a separate department or individual teacher responsibility. One important feature of the in-service training which has been provided is to develop the role of the special needs co-ordinator. It is this person who would be responsible for developing a whole-school policy and for co-ordinating all aspects of work related to SEN in the school. The school may consider:

- The role of all teachers;
- Developing a role of special needs co-ordinator;
- The role of the deputy and head;
- The role of governors;
- Responsibility of school to fulfill the legal obligations under the 1981 and 1988 Education Acts in relation to Special Needs.

ASSESSMENT, MONITORING AND RECORD-KEEPING

Recent legislation emphasised the need for careful monitoring and record-keeping for children with SEN. Five stages of assessment were recommended by the 1981 Education Act. The first 2/3 stages were 'within school' stages and the remainder involved outside agencies. Establishing a practical way of co-ordinating the first 2/3 stages is a main feature of a whole school policy. Teachers need to know exactly what to do as soon as they realise there is a problem. As a result of work developed on courses many Calderdale schools now have a Special Needs Planning and Record-Keeping Register in a variety of forms but with common elements. The register records for each child:

- Personal details;
- The major areas of need, taken from curriculum-based assessment;
- An outline of work to be undertaken that term;
- A review of progress at the end of each term.

The work for the children would often be planned collaboratively between the class teacher and the SEN co-ordinator. If children made acceptable progress over the term their work might continue to be planned and monitored for a longer period of time within the school without any involvement from agencies outside the school. For children who continued to show cause for concern the school needs to move on to involve the support services. For efficient procedures for monitoring and record-keeping schools need to consider:

- The five stages of assessment (1981 Education Act);
- The first 2/3 stages (within school);
- Practical implementation of the first 2/3 stages (assessment, planning and evaluation of progress);
- Assessment in relation to the National Curriculum;
- Parental involvement.

THE ROLE OF SUPPORT SERVICES

The support services consist mainly of teachers from ALSS and psychologists working with Calderdale Psychological Service. Each term both of these services are represented at a 'planning visit' held at every primary school in the local authority area. This is the main point of referral of children from schools to the supporting services. The agenda for this meeting is largely in the hands of the school which is

expected to gain parental consent to discuss children at the meeting. The school completes an initial information form for every child referred. This form will give an overview of the work they have undertaken with the child and will help to clarify the issues of concern. The meeting allows support services to:

- Give support to individual children (or teachers);
- Give support to the whole school;
- Provide in-service training if needs are identified which can be met in this way;
- Generally encourage change in the school.

It is often possible for support service members to see children and by advice or direct assessment and/or teaching to enable children to make progress. The monitoring would continue in the register. For a small group of children it will be necessary to move on to stage 4 which is formal assessment under the 1981 Education Act which would usually lead to the writing of a statement of SEN. When schools are asked to write educational advice about a child's special educational needs they have detailed information collected over a period of time. A key concept of this process is the assessment and monitoring over time which gives good information about the rate of learning, actual progress and therefore an indication of the kind of special provision needed. Within their policies schools need to consider their use of:

- Termly planning visits;
- Parental involvement;
- Stage 3/4 and 5 assessment;
- The use of initial information forms;
- Formal assessment and the statementing procedure;
- Modifications to the National Curriculum.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Planning to develop the skills of the staff may be a consideration left to the co-ordinator. The co-ordinator may provide some staff training herself or may invite others to provide school-based training. There may be a longer term plan to let as many teachers as possible take part in authority-wide training. The policy document may include some guidelines on:

- School-based training;
- Authority wide training;
- Interest groups;
- Role of the co-ordinator;
- Role of non-teaching staff.

CURRICULUM AND RESOURCES

There are many considerations to make about teaching methods and arrangements in the school. If classes are taught using common set books then the curriculum by its very design will create special educational needs. The National Curriculum has gone a long way towards alleviating these problems in school as individual levels of development need to be accounted for. The programmes of study within the N.C. promote thematic or topic based teaching which is more likely to accommodate wider needs within a class. It is for these reasons that many special educators feel that the N.C. is the best chance children with SEN have ever had. Schools will need to consider:

- Development of a curriculum for all;
- Teaching methods and approaches;
- In-class support/withdrawal teaching;
- Use of additional staff;
- Co-operative teaching;
- Resources for learning and teaching/special equipment;
- Tackling issues related to disability.

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT AND PASTORAL CARE

Part of the policy needs to address the issue of behaviour although this may be the subject of a separate policy document. A separate module of 30 hours training is provided for developing positive social behaviour as part of training in Calderdale. The school may consider behaviour within the special needs policy including the development of a pastoral system, up to now only really found in secondary schools. The issues to discuss are:

- Whole-school behaviour policy;
- How to tackle issues which affect children (divorce, separation, living in care, handicaps, child abuse);
- Individual counselling;
- Group counselling;
- Self esteem enhancement;
- Valuing/friendship.

PARENTS

Parents have become important partners in the educational process over the last ten

years. The Warnock Report referred to parents as partners and they were given an equal role in assessment procedures alongside the professionals. Parents can give vital information about their children and they can be a hitherto untapped resource which educationalists have tended to overlook. Parental optimism can be a force which makes significant difference in the lives of their children. It is important that schools recognise and value this. Schools therefore need to address the issue of

POLICY REVIEW

The policy will need to be reviewed regularly. This is most likely to be carried out by the special needs co-ordinator but will need to include others, perhaps a governor may take a leading role.

The area of special educational needs in education has changed fundamentally over the last twenty years and at the same time important changes have taken place in society. The changes for children and teachers cannot be isolated from the wider issues. Attitudes towards the rights of children and the expectations we have of them have accounted for much of the developments outlined in this paper. We have learned a lot about the potential of children with disability and the power of optimism especially when it is held by their parents and teachers. There is every indication that this optimism will continue to achieve positive change.