

EDITORIAL

A lot has happened in the decade since the Warnock Report inspired practically everyone with a fervour for integration to the point of it being almost a moral imperative - in theory at any rate. It was a word that echoed optimism, challenge and hope. Now the current word is "cutbacks". As the winds of disillusionment, frustrations and discouragement blow through our winter of discontent perhaps it is vital that we draw strength, support and faith from the achievements and creative developments of our colleagues in their professional response to children with special needs.

In this issue of REACH the focus on integration reveals encouraging and optimistic research findings regarding teacher attitudes (O'Connell) and an inspiring example of intergration in action as a result of sustained local concern, idealism and energy (Allen). Both of these articles feature projects in a Munster setting and we are pleased to emphasise this. In making the special class a bridge towards integration, the principal's attitude and approach is paramount and guidelines are given for leadership here (Newport).

For integration at any level to be effective, the crucial factor - over and above finances and resources - is the commitment of the teachers, parents and other professionals concerned. Writing in the *Journal of Learning Disabilities* (vol 18, 58-61, 1985) Professor Douglas Bilken of Syracuse University states that organisational factors prove to be more important for successful integration than individual enthusiasts or super-talented teachers. These factors include systematic parental participation in curriculum planning, teacher problem-solving groups and whole-school policies about pupil behaviours. Interestingly, Bilken's study also concludes that specialised in-service training for all teachers is a waste of resources. He argues that such training should be directed at teachers who have a proven interest in educational innovation. While this contradicts in this instance, the recommendations of the NAMHI Report (1984), the necessity of suitable staffing levels is accepted as a *sine qua non*.

And where does that leave us now that previously "unacceptable" pupil-teacher ratios have become "impossible"? Integration cannot be used as a device for saving money if that is what the Government means by calling it "the first option to be considered" in future provision (White Paper, 1980). On the other hand, do we forget the word "integration" and bury the term, either sadly or cynically, in the graveyard of lost causes? If we succumb to that temptation the ideals of quality education for children with special needs (and for all children) that the word "integration" evoked could be imperiled. The implications of such despair for organisations, individuals and inevitably for the children themselves, would be truly devastating. We must guard against this, come what may.

The reception given to the first issue of REACH, reflected in sales, subscriptions and reactions from readers, has been most encouraging. Indeed a reprint was required to meet the demand. REACH Vol 2 nos 1 and 2 will be posted to NATSE members as part of their 1988/89 subscription. May we remind other readers who wish to continue to receive the journal to fill in the subscription form included in this issue.

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