



Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity



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BRIEFING
CREID

LITERATURE REVIEW OF PUPILS WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

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This CREID briefing summarises the findings of a literature review that examined issues in relation to pupils with additional support needs in Scotland. A comparison is made between the Scottish experience and five case study countries: England, Sweden, Belgium (Flanders), Greece and the USA. Drawing on international research it explored the extent to which definitions and placement patterns differed in different countries. It also considered variation in pedagogy and curriculum for this group of pupils.

Main findings

International comparisons of special educational needs provision

- There appears to be an international move away from medicalised categories and towards inclusion. However, the difficulties of managing inclusion effectively are acknowledged, with primary schools having greater success than secondary schools.
- Most countries appear to favour multi-track systems, with parallel developments in inclusive education, special classes or units in mainstream schools and special schools.
- World-wide, boys appear to have more difficulties in coping with mainstream education than girls, and across the world attract a greater proportion of additional resources.
- There are intriguing differences between countries, with very different local practices in relation to inclusion and decisions on additional resourcing. In relation to disabilities such as blindness, whether a child is educated in a mainstream or special setting depends on local custom and practice. Children experiencing social disadvantage, often associated with emotional and behavioural difficulties, are almost always educated in mainstream schools.

Comparisons of the five case study countries

- The five case study countries (England, Sweden, Belgium (Flanders), Greece, the USA) exemplify different approaches to special needs provision. Whilst the USA, England and Sweden run multi-track systems, Greece is much closer to a one-track system, with very little investment in its special sector, whilst Flanders features many characteristics of a two-track system, with strong insulation between special and mainstream schools, including separate curricula.
- The USA has the strongest rights-based provision, with strict qualification criteria for additional provision. Whilst children with Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) in the US benefit from relatively generous additional funding, until recently many, including a high proportion of African American boys, were disadvantaged by being excluded from participation in state prescribed curricula and assessment systems.
- In England, the Government is trying to encourage less reliance on the Statement of Needs, and many local authorities are making much less use of them. In the US, there is no parallel move away from the use of IEPs.
- Compared with the USA, which has a very highly developed system of training for special educators, the system in England and in many other European countries is far more ad hoc, with only teachers of visual and hearing impairment routinely requiring special qualifications. The USA system produces highly qualified professionals, but also promotes the idea that children with special educational needs require special pedagogies.
- In terms of future trends, it is evident that both England and Sweden are experiencing a backlash against inclusion. In both countries, the trend is to delegate funding to schools, thus making the connection between additional funding and the needs of individual pupils less clearcut. If parents believe that children will only receive additional resourcing in special settings, then they may regard such placements as preferable to mainstream schools, where they may have to struggle for additional resources.

Curriculum and pedagogy for children with additional support needs in Scotland

- Individualised Educational Programmes are generally regarded as the vehicle for specifying individual targets for pupils with additional support needs and for monitoring progress.
- Research has highlighted a number of issues in their implementation, including a possible narrowing of the curriculum, a lack of ownership by subject teachers in secondary schools and low levels of involvement of parents, pupils and external agencies.
- Since the early 1980s, there has been an emphasis on the entitlement of children with special educational needs to access the mainstream curriculum, and yet teachers appear to have difficulty in making the curriculum accessible through effective differentiation.
- There is a growing demand at secondary level for more flexible curricula to stem the growth of disaffection, particularly for children with social emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Curriculum for Excellence appears to offer possibilities for the further development of flexible, rather than alternative, curricular programmes within the overall curricular framework.
- There are ongoing debates as to whether children with additional support needs require specialist teaching methods related to the nature of their impairment. One school of thought maintains that most children can be taught effectively through the development of generic approaches to effective teaching, which will benefit all learners, rather than requiring qualitatively different approaches. Others maintain that there is a need for distinctive approaches for children with particular types of impairment, and discrete rather than generic approaches are often sought by voluntary organisations campaigning for particular groups.

Defining and monitoring the progress of pupils with special educational needs/additional support needs

- Some groups of pupils in some countries are excluded from national systems of assessment and certification. In Scotland, all pupils are included in the national assessment systems but there are difficulties in combining formative, summative and accountability assessment functions.
- Some teachers have had problems in breaking down the curriculum into sequential segments to be articulated for pupils, parents and teachers as long and short term targets. P-scales, originally developed in England, are being used in some special schools and units in Scotland.
- A particular challenge for the new Curriculum for Excellence is to find better ways of including children with additional support needs in national systems of assessment.

Outcomes of schooling

- There is an international trend towards the development of more inclusive approaches to the education of pupils with SEN. However, there is no clear view emerging from the literature as to whether mainstream or special education provides more positive outcomes for pupils. The lack of good evidence here is attributable to the difficulties in gathering comparable data about the outcomes of schooling for pupils with SEN.

Aims of the review

The main aim of the review was to examine:

- the definitions of special/additional support needs employed in different countries,
- the placement patterns of children with particular types of difficulties in different countries, and
- approaches to pedagogy and curriculum for children with special/additional support needs.

Methods

The methods used in the study included a review of:

1. Policy and statistical evidence. The main sources were policy and statistics published by the OECD, the European Agency for the Development of Special Needs Education (EADSNE) and national Departments of Education.
2. The Scottish, UK and international academic literature. This review focused on:
 - a. Factors influencing patterns of identification and placement of pupils with additional/ special educational needs.
 - b. Curricular pedagogical approaches employed in different national contexts
 - c. Evidence of the effectiveness of particular curricular/pedagogical approaches, including opportunities for progression.

It also included interviews with international and Scottish experts. This included experts in Scotland, other European countries and the USA to provide a commentary on policy drivers and trends within specific national contexts. The Scottish experts commented on particular 'types' of learning difficulty to explore the curricular and pedagogical adaptations which might be required for that particular group.

Findings

The identification and placement of children with special educational needs

Data were drawn from two different sources: the OECD and the EADSNE. Whereas EADSNE preserves national differences in understanding of SEN, OECD fits national data into a framework for the purposes of cross-national comparison. The OECD framework has been accused of being one dimensional, since it does not recognise that many children with special educational needs have more than one difficulty. Broadly, the OECD uses four categories: disabilities, difficulties, disadvantages and non-categorical systems. Whilst there is an ongoing move away from the use of medical categories, almost all countries employ at least nine sub-categories. However, there are significant differences between countries with regard to the types of category used and the proportion of children identified in each category. This is true even in relation to normative categories such as blindness, where Poland identifies more than 0.2% of all children in compulsory education, whilst Greece identifies less than 0.01%. In relation to non-normative categories such as emotional and behavioural difficulties, Canada (New Brunswick) identifies 2.6% of children in compulsory education, compared with Turkey which does not identify any students in this category. These differences may be attributed to social, cultural and administrative variation between countries, rather than variations in the incidence of particular disabilities or difficulties.

Countries differ markedly with regard to whether they allocate additional resources to students with particular impairments or disadvantages, and whether pupils are educated in special or mainstream settings. For example, in Italy nearly 95% of blind or partially sighted pupils are educated in mainstream classes, whereas in Korea four fifths of such pupils are educated in special schools. In Canada (New Brunswick), all pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are educated in regular classes, whereas special schools and classes are more common in Belgium (Flemish Community), Germany, Japan and the United States. In Belgium, (French Community), all pupils with specific learning difficulties are educated in special schools, whereas the reverse is reported for Spain.

EADSNE identifies three distinctive approaches adopted by different countries to school placement:

- 1 one-track – almost all pupils in mainstream
- 2 two-track approaches – mainstream and special schools run in parallel
- 3 multi-track – multiplicity of approaches to inclusion, the most common approach

Internationally, a higher proportion of boys than girls receive additional support for special educational needs. The OECD suggests that this is due to a range of factors, ranging from boys' greater

vulnerability to illness, genetic problems and behavioural difficulties, as well as the growing 'feminisation' of the teaching profession.

The EADSNE report notes that teachers perceive inclusion to work well at primary level, but believe that problems arise at secondary level due to school organisation, topic focus and growing distance between the child with special needs and his or her peers. Parents tend to support education in inclusive settings where this is the established model, unless their children have severe disabilities, in which case they prefer special settings. In countries with highly segregated systems, parents often lobby for more inclusive provision.

Country case studies

The five case study countries (England, Belgium (Flemish Community), Sweden, Greece, USA) demonstrate contrasting approaches to the dilemma of inclusive versus specialist placement and curriculum provision, although in all countries there is a trend towards the development of more inclusive approaches. The Flemish Community within Belgium is the closest to a two-track system, with special and mainstream schools divided and running along parallel lines. Greece is close to a one-track system, with almost all pupils in mainstream schools. Sweden, England and the USA operate multi-track systems, as does Scotland. In Sweden there has been a recent trend towards the greater use of special settings for children with special educational needs, due to difficulties in ensuring the availability of the necessary resources in mainstream settings.

There is no clear view emerging from the literature in any of the case study countries as to which setting, mainstream or special, provides more positive outcomes for pupils. This is due to difficulty in gathering reliable and comparable data on the progress and attainment of pupils with particular difficulties in different settings. In all countries, systems are in place to identify those children who have special educational needs and who require additional resources to make progress. This takes different forms, for example, in the USA it is mandatory to conduct formal assessments of children who may qualify as disabled under disability legislation. All children identified as disabled in the USA (about 12% of the total school population) must have Individual Education Programmes, which are legally binding documents specifying resources, curriculum and pedagogy. If dissatisfied with their substance or implementation, parents may bring a case to the federal appeal court. The Statement of Needs fulfils a similar function in England, but in the other case study countries systems of identification and assessment are less rigorous.

Special education is highly developed in US universities and many teachers have specialist qualifications. This leads to more highly qualified professionals, but also promotes the idea that children with special educational needs require special pedagogies. In Sweden, England and Scotland only teachers of children with visual and hearing impairments require specialist qualifications.

Curriculum and pedagogy for children with additional support needs

Some groups of pupils in some countries are excluded from national curricula and systems of assessment and certification (e.g. some pupils in special schools in the Flemish community of Belgium are taught an entirely different curriculum from that which is prescribed for children in mainstream schools). Elsewhere, as in Scotland, there has been adherence to the principle of including all pupils in the national systems. Differentiation is seen as the principal mechanism underpinning effective inclusion, with teachers developing different approaches to the curriculum and pedagogy in response to pupils' varying learning needs. For children who require curriculum adaptation in order to learn, personal learning goals are set out in Individualised Educational Programmes. However, research suggests that teachers vary greatly in their skills in this area.

Different practices are used to monitor the progress of children with SEN in different countries, but, as noted earlier, there are difficulties in implementing approaches which combine a formative assessment function with the summative and comparative outcomes needed for school improvement

and accountability purposes. The use of individual target-setting within Individualised Educational Programmes has been used for formative and summative purposes. In relation to formative assessment, there is evidence that this strategy has helped in clarifying successive 'next steps' in learning for pupils, parents and teachers. However, the summative purpose of target-setting has been more problematic. Target-setting was perceived as conflicting with formative and learner orientated approaches to progress and also failed to provide attainment data which enabled comparisons of pupil progress in similar and different educational settings.

In England, P scales have been developed to support the structured progression of pupils working towards Level 1 of the National Curriculum. P scales attempt to break knowledge down into 'bite-sized' chunks. In 2006, P scales will be used to assess summative and comparative outcomes for accountability and school improvement purposes whilst P scales are seen as a helpful tool in curriculum planning for teachers, but whether they will be useful in terms of tracking and comparing the progress of pupils with special educational needs has yet to be fully assessed.

In Scotland, there are ongoing difficulties in devising a national system of assessment which is able to recognise the progress of all pupils. Standard Grade is regarded as too difficult for some pupils with special educational needs, particularly those with significant difficulties with literacy and numeracy. Some pupils with special educational needs follow Access courses which form part of the Higher Still programme. However, some mainstream teachers find it difficult to teach pupils studying Standard Grade and Access courses in the same class because of differences in course content. It is hoped that the new Curriculum for Excellence will rectify some of these difficulties.

There are ongoing debates about the need for special pedagogies and recent UK reviews have suggested that most children with special educational needs do not require qualitatively different teaching approaches, but rather adaptations to pedagogies which are used with all children. However, there is an abundant academic and practitioner literature setting out the specific approaches and adaptations which are effective for children with particular impairments and voluntary organisations often lobby for specialised teaching methods.

With regard to particular adaptations, children with autistic spectrum disorder appear to benefit from an ordered classroom environment where extraneous stimuli are limited and controlled and there is an emphasis on the development of social skills. For children with visual impairment, there is an emphasis on extending physical, intellectual and social capacities. Some of these children require specialised software, whilst others may benefit from learning Braille. A specialist qualification is required for teachers of children with visual and hearing impairment. There are fierce debates about the best means of educating deaf children, with some people maintaining that British Sign Language should be used much more extensively, whilst others support 'oralist' approaches. As more children have earlier cochlear implants, the latter may become more popular. It is argued that many deaf children do not make adequate progress in school due to lack of knowledge of appropriate teaching methods, particularly in mainstream settings. Very particular approaches are needed in the education of deafblind children, focusing on the development of attachment and security and the fostering of access to the external world through touch. For children with severe and complex learning difficulties, behaviourist approaches have tended to be replaced by Intensive Interaction teaching methods, which emphasise the importance of social and communication skills. Specialist computer software is also used extensively, although some argue that there is a need for greater clarity about the learning objectives to be achieved.

Teachers in mainstream schools find the education of children with social emotional and behavioural difficulties extremely challenging. Approaches which modify the classroom environment to provide intensive support, including the use of classroom assistants, have been developed. At secondary level there is an increasing emphasis on the use of a single curriculum framework allowing for

different routes for progression. This is an area which will be further developed through the Curriculum for Excellence.

Summary

In all countries considered there was a trend towards the development of more inclusive approaches to the education of pupils with SEN. However, there was no clear view emerging from the literature as to whether mainstream or special education provided more positive outcomes for pupils. The lack of good evidence here is attributable to the difficulties in gathering comparable data about the outcomes of schooling for pupils with SEN.

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Further information

A full report and executive summary are available on the Scottish Executive website (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/10/19104601/0>) and on the website of the Centre for Research on Education Inclusion and Diversity at the University of Edinburgh (www.creid.ed.ac.uk).

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