
# OFSTED

## SPECIAL EDUCATION 1994-98

### A Review of Special Schools, Secure Units and Pupil Referral Units in England

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# INTRODUCTION

This review is based upon the findings of the published reports on OFSTED inspections of maintained special schools and of approved independent and other non-maintained special schools in England, some 1,300 schools in all, which were inspected in the four-year period beginning in September 1994. Data was obtained from the whole inspection database, and a sample of 100 reports from each year was examined in detail to provide illustrative material and to give some indication of the factors underlying apparent trends. The review also takes account of inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on specific themes concerned with special needs, of OFSTED's inspections of local education authorities (LEAs) and of visits by HMI to independent schools which have not yet been approved and have consequently not been included in the inspection cycle. Overviews are provided of inspection findings in relation to pupil referral units (PRUs) and secure units.

In the great majority of special schools it is inappropriate to attempt to judge pupils' attainment against national norms. Indeed, almost all special school reports are prefaced with a note to this effect. Prior to the introduction of the new Framework for Inspection in 1996/97, standards were judged on the basis of pupils' achievements. This measure was a judgement of pupils' attainment in relation to their capability.

The new Framework for Inspection introduced the notion of pupils' progress as a key indicator of standards in all schools. The measure was particularly appropriate for pupils in special schools, and was readily adopted as the principal indicator of standards. The change made the analysis of trends over the whole four-year cycle problematic, although the uniformity of judgements over time on the relative performance of different types of school suggest that the measures were closely comparable in outcome.

Schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD) and emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) form the largest groups of schools. Where judgements can be made as to the performance of specific groups of schools, these are the principal groups identified. Where judgements refer to "all special schools", this term includes those for pupils with impairment of sight and hearing; pupils with physical disability (PD), language and communication problems, autism, specific learning difficulties; hospital schools, and schools that individually serve a variety of disabilities.

Inspection is primarily concerned with the quality of the educational provision and the impact it has on the progress and attainment of the pupils. Thus this review concentrates on these prime concerns rather than the effect of the various statutory changes and arrangements which were introduced during the four-year period in question.

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# 6
# ASSESSMENT, RECORDING AND REPORTING

## 6.1 Assessing and recording pupils' progress

The assessment and recording of pupils' progress is essential to the effective functioning of all schools, but the process is especially important in special schools. The small classes and high adult-to-pupil ratios in these schools assume a close match of activity and teaching method to the needs of the pupils. Systems for assessing and recording individuals' progress and their strengths and weaknesses provide the means of identifying these needs in detail. Ongoing assessment provides an insight into the match of teaching methods to pupils' learning styles as well as into rates of learning, enabling profiles of pupils' progress to be built up and monitored. In this way, developing weaknesses can be detected early and addressed before pupils' learning and social development loses its momentum. Records of pupils' progress are also at the centre of the process of accountability of schools to parents, to the governing body and to the wider community. Despite this centrality of assessment and recording within the work of special schools, practice was often weak.

Less than half of special schools had satisfactory practice in assessment and recording. This proportion of schools remained constant over the four years, indicating that schools were not well equipped to improve the quality of their practice. There were variations between types of special school; those for pupils with SLD demonstrated the best practice overall, whilst only a fifth of schools for pupils with EBD had satisfactory assessment and recording systems. A significant number of schools introduced whole-school schemes immediately prior to their inspection, and these often failed to become fully effective in time to be recognised as adequate by the inspection.

In contrast, in early years provision of all kinds, there was a marked improvement over the four-year period. Guidance issued by LEAs on baseline assessment, that issued by the Pre-school Learning Alliance, and the assessment model encouraged by the Portage Association, all contributed to more effective assessment of young children's needs. Teachers' recording moved from mainly subjective comments linked to social and behavioural development, towards objective records of performance that could be used as part of the planning tool for future work.

The national requirements for assessment at the ends of key stages apply to pupils in special schools just as in mainstream schools, unless pupils' statements of special educational needs exempt them from some or all aspects of testing. While only a small minority of special schools exempted all their pupils from all national tests, rather more schools exempted some pupils, or exempted all pupils from some aspect of the assessment, such as the formal paper tests, whilst retaining teacher assessment of pupils' National Curriculum levels. Many schools took a pride in giving all their pupils opportunities to take part in the national tests.

Information from the tests and from teacher assessment of the National Curriculum levels in each subject provided useful broad guidelines for curriculum planning and pupil grouping, but the increments in performance measured by the tests and National Curriculum levels were usually too great to inform planning more generally. Pupils with limited academic capability often made very little progress as measured by the National Curriculum levels. Some schools for pupils with SLD and with PD found difficulty in coming to terms with the implications of the National Curriculum levels for their least able pupils who could spend their whole school career "working towards" the first level. Schools found this situation easier to manage and to discuss with parents when they developed schemes to identify and celebrate small increments of progress within the first levels of the National Curriculum. At Key Stage 4 and post-16, pupils achieved formal accreditation largely according to the degree of emphasis given to the process by their school. This is considered in detail later.

There were many viable approaches to pupil assessment and to recording of progress in the absence of any nationally agreed framework for the process. At a day-to-day level, most teachers maintained some form of cumulative written record of pupils' responses and progress in each subject and in their social and behavioural development. Teachers and LSAs often contributed

notes during the day to narrative records, which were written up at regular intervals to contribute to more formal documents. On occasion, activities were set primarily as assessment tasks, and pupils' performance was recorded in detail.

In the best practice, lesson plans referred to opportunities for individual assessments to be made during the lesson, while longer term plans and schemes of work referred to key elements of units of work or essential concepts which were to be assessed. Schools often had checklists of particular sets of skills against which pupils' progress was recorded and from which further targets were set, as in **Horton Lodge School** in Staffordshire for pupils with PD:

> *Baseline assessments and checklists are well used in setting excellent, focused targets, which are then used to very good effect in planning and teaching.*

Samples of pupils' work were often kept; in the best practice these were dated and annotated to form portfolios of material that illustrated progress over time. Increasingly, photographs and even video evidence were coming into use to illustrate pupils' performance. The success of this kind of record depended upon the aptness of the illustrations and the insight offered by the accompanying annotation or commentary into the nature of the advance in progress that was demonstrated. **Larkrise School** in Wiltshire for pupils with SLD had developed a successful system:

> *Documentation is of a very high quality and [a collection of] a large range of pupils' work is maintained. The annotation of this work is excellent and gives a clear view of pupils' achievements.*

This kind of illustrative information increasingly contributed to a formal or informal record of achievement, particularly for older pupils.

Whatever the school's approach to the assessment and recording process, consistency between classes was essential if a picture of progress over time was to be built up. In order to achieve consistency, an agreed and documented policy was necessary. In the best practice, the adherence of all staff to the policy was either monitored by the school's co-ordinator with responsibility for assessment and recording or demonstrated by teachers as part of the staff appraisal process.

At the end of the four-year inspection cycle, although not all reports made reference to the presence or absence of a policy, it was evident from sampling that at least a fifth of schools for pupils with EBD and MLD still had no written policy to guide consistent practice in this crucial area of their work. This indicated a very low priority for assessment and recording in these schools. While the majority of schools had a written policy, adherence to this policy throughout all classes in the school did not necessarily follow. For example, the inspection report on a school for pupils with EBD notes:

> *While there is a common format for the assessment and recording of pupils' progress and attainment in place, it is not used consistently and a variety of formats are used. A considerable amount of information about pupils performance is gathered by staff, but it is not adequately monitored on a whole-school basis, nor is it used effectively to contribute to curriculum planning or the systematic monitoring of standards.*

This observation draws attention to the limited value of accumulating records which, because of their lack of consistency, are not usable as part of a whole-school information and monitoring system. A great deal of teachers' time was going to waste in this respect in many schools.

A report on a school for pupils with MLD pointed sharply to the need for monitoring of practice in assessment and recording:

> *Senior managers have responded to the recently identified need for sound assessment, recording and reporting procedures by developing policy documents designed to support classroom practice. The school has made a senior staff member co-ordinator for assessment. Despite these recent initiatives, the school is unable to articulate a coherent statement of purpose for assessment. There is therefore a serious disparity between the development of policy and the reality of classroom practice. There are examples of references to assessment in termly lesson plans remaining blank and very little evidence of assessment informing either planning or teaching. Teachers ...receive inadequate support and guidance since there is no effective co-ordinated monitoring taking place.*

Reports on a small number of schools drew attention to another unnecessary demand on teachers' time in that new systems for assessment and recording in some schools had been introduced without a review of existing practice, so that the new systems were being used by teachers while the old recording systems were still being maintained. In order to avoid this situation the assessment co-ordinator or senior management team should conduct a complete review of the system whenever new elements are introduced, so that unnecessary duplication is avoided.

Baseline assessments for pupils on entry to school provided a valuable starting point both for programme planning and for the

process of measuring progress. Their value was often unrecognised in schools for pupils with EBD, where pupils were often admitted part way through their school career. For these pupils, records from the mainstream school were often not accessible to the receiving special school or arrived a long time after the admission, following much negotiation. Despite the clear advantages in baseline assessment, few schools for pupils with EBD had a satisfactory scheme in place, and the process was not universally established in other types of special school.

It might be expected that statements of special educational need would provide any required baseline data, but while they have improved over time in their usefulness, statements did not often fulfil this role well. Where schools received pupils from several LEAs, contrasts between LEAs in the usefulness of statements were readily apparent.

While many schools were still struggling to co-ordinate practice in assessment and recording between different classes, a small number of schools had moved ahead to the next stage of development of co-ordination, in that they had established moderation procedures to ensure the comparability of teachers' judgements between classes, key stages and subjects. This was achieved either by direct oversight by the co-ordinator or through the circulation of exemplars of assessed work. In these circumstances, schools were much better placed to make secure judgements about pupils' progress.

Schools also had great difficulty in aligning their assessment and recording systems with the National Curriculum, to relate pupils' progress to National Curriculum levels and to record progress in all subjects. Scrutiny of reports indicated that only a third of schools met these criteria. It was a particular problem in schools for pupils with EBD, where, even towards the end of the four-year period, few schools were taking adequate account of the National Curriculum in respect of assessment and recording. Over the period, schools for pupils with SLD made the most progress (albeit from a low baseline), until, in a recent sample, the assessment and recording systems in half of these schools took satisfactory account of the National Curriculum.

A very small number of schools involved pupils in a degree of self-assessment that contributed significantly to the overall assessment process. **Greenside School** in Hertfordshire for pupils with SLD had developed an unusual degree of self-assessment by pupils:

> *Where possible, pupil self-assessment is encouraged and some pupils are able to appraise their own progress. This information is appropriately included in annual reviews and transition reviews which are attended by pupils, parents and professionals.*

# 6.2 Accreditation

Opportunities for accreditation for pupils in special schools increased over the four-year period. This reflected developments in the range of qualifications agreed by School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and, latterly, by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. Schools have been cautious about offering additional or alternative means of accreditation as staff have been awaiting national decisions about acceptable Entry Level awards. A small number of special schools were involved in the GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualifications) pilot, which commenced in 1995. This has provided a useful vehicle for developing and accrediting key skills, as well as a good bridging device toward future vocational qualifications.

Schools for pupils with sensory disabilities offered the greatest range of accreditation opportunities, with GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education), YAS (Youth Award scheme), GNVQ and, more recently, Certificates of Achievement, in a variety of subjects. In all types of school, the Certificate of Achievement increased in popularity as it offered a pathway into GCSE courses for pupils who were not yet ready to attempt them. Although schools for pupils with MLD were reported to be exploring suitable pathways of accreditation for their pupils throughout the four-year period, only half of those inspected recently had a satisfactory or good range of accreditation and some offered no form of external accreditation to their pupils. Outstanding results were achieved in a small number of schools for pupils with MLD where teachers had high expectations. For example, 10 of the 20 pupils in Year 11 at one school for pupils with MLD achieved passes in one or more subjects at grades A to G in the year the school was inspected.

The proportion of schools for pupils with EBD offering GCSE courses increased slowly over the four-year period, until at the end of the period, six out of ten schools did so. A third of EBD schools, however, provided a poor range of accreditation. A broad and widening range was offered at **Thornchace School** in Surrey for girls with EBD:

> *A good range of GCSEs and other accredited courses such as AEB achievement tests in mathematics and English are available. Staff are investigating the possibilities of introducing the MEG "Science Plus" course at Key Stage 4, which can lead to a Certificate of Achievement in science. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme allows girls to gain additional accreditation in a number of activities.*

Most schools for pupils with SLD, and with PD, provided only limited opportunities for external accreditation. However, in one third of these schools, Records of Achievement were well produced and gave an effective picture of progress and achievement. The Youth Award Scheme improved the quality of their curriculum planning, particularly within post-16 provision.

# 6.3 Reporting to parents

There was very wide variation in practice in reporting to parents. The Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs identifies educational progress as part of the annual review of pupils' statements of special need, while the National Curriculum orders obliged schools to report annually to parents on pupils' progress in each subject of the National Curriculum.

Schools coped more successfully with the former recommendation. The requirement to report on pupils' progress within each National Curriculum subject was often confused with reporting on the range of pupils' experiences within subjects. The reporting task was made more difficult in many schools where assessment and recording systems did not record pupils' progress in a satisfactorily objective way. However, the quality of reporting to parents improved over the four-year period as schools became more skilled in addressing the need to report on pupils' progress in subjects and on their progress in relation to personal targets.

In early years provision, the requirements for all settings to provide information for parents proved successful. Parents commented positively upon this development as they were able to use the information to make more informed judgements about future provision.

# 6.4 Responses to the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs

Almost all pupils in special schools had statements of special educational need, as their statement was usually the key to their admission to the school. The exceptions were pupils who attended special schools for the purpose of assessment, and there was a small number of special schools whose prime function was assessment.

Statements are subject to an annual review. The annual review process is intended to question the continued validity of the provision made in the statement, to review targets set for the pupil at the beginning of the 12-month period, and to set fresh targets for the next 12 months based upon progress made. A cycle of target setting and review is thus envisaged. The annual review is an opportunity for all professionals involved with the pupil to contribute reports on progress and for the parents to add their views, all of which are shared at a meeting of the parents and professionals.

Schools carried out the Annual Review conscientiously, although the quality of target setting and the success with which parents were involved both varied considerably between schools. The degree to which LEAs involved themselves in the review process also varied from virtually nil to the attendance of an LEA representative at most annual review meetings. Close involvement of the LEA was strongly associated with good practice in keeping resource levels and placements for individual pupils under scrutiny. LEAs which had established mechanisms to identify reviews as high or low priorities for officers' attendance managed their responsibilities more effectively.

There is a general expectation that pupils in special schools will have individual education plans (IEPs), even though this is not specifically spelt out in the Code of Practice. The lack of specific reference suggested to some schools, and indeed to a small number of LEAs, that IEPs were not needed for pupils in special schools. This confusion accounted for the lack of IEPs in a small number of schools, but some other schools had simply not yet engaged in the process.

As in mainstream schools, practice in the writing of IEPs varied very widely in terms both of quality and of intended purpose. In part, this reflected a lack of national guidance on the expected nature and purpose of IEPs in special schools. Some schools attempted to summarise each pupil's complete educational programme, while others only stated behavioural targets or used the IEP to clarify provision needed by the child that was beyond the usual provision of the school.

The approach that was most widely favoured and that appeared to be best in line with the intentions of the Code, was to use the IEP to set a small number of key educational and behavioural targets for each pupil for the term, derived from the year's targets in the pupil's annual review. This provided a manageable set of short-term targets that could be agreed with therapists

and also with parents, who could share in the responsibility of helping their child to achieve some of them. It supported the establishment of a cycle of target setting and review, which was very helpful in demonstrating advances in pupils' capabilities.

The performance of all schools in writing IEPs improved towards the end of the four-year period, but by the end of the period, practice was still weak. In a sample from the cohort of schools inspected in 1996/97, only a third of schools produced IEPs with targets expressed clearly enough to enable them to be reviewed effectively. In the cohort of schools inspected most recently (in 1998) half of the 100 schools sampled produced IEPs with clear targets for all pupils. While schools refined their own practice, LEA advisory and educational psychology services offered consultations and courses aimed at raising the quality of IEPs.

**Arden School** in Sandwell for pupils with MLD made good use of IEPs in planning:

> *Individual education plans contain specific and relevant learning objectives for pupils in the areas of English, mathematics and personal development, the quality of which are very effectively monitored by the headteacher. There is ample evidence of the very good use made of pupils' individual education plans to effect improvements in pupils' progress through appropriate modifications to the curriculum and teaching strategies.*

Few schools progressed to the level of involving pupils in the setting and review of IEP targets, although this was slightly more common in annual reviews. Where pupils were involved, the sense of involvement and partnership was beneficial and pupils were especially well motivated to achieve the targets. This practice is worthy of wider adoption.

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# 12
# NATIONAL AND LEA ISSUES IN SPECIAL SCHOOLING

## 12.1 Patterns of provision

The present national pattern of provision for special schooling reflects decisions taken by individual LEAs over many years. These decisions have rarely had a consistent long-term aim, as most have been unique responses to changing local and national initiatives and pressures. The LEAs themselves have been subject to various geographical reorganisation, to which special educational provision has had to adapt. As a result, there is no uniformity across the country and the widely varying patterns of provision do not consistently reflect the nature of the LEAs, rural or metropolitan, large or small.

The local patterns of special schools, PRUs, designated special provision in mainstream schools, support services and the extent of the use made by LEAs of non-maintained and independent special schools are thus the result of a series of changes to provision over time. The changes have been influenced by, amongst other things, the creation of larger LEAs in 1974, responses to the Warnock report and the 1981 Education Act and, recently, the reduction in size and increase in number of LEAs. In a few instances there has been an LEA-wide review of disability groups, of trends in special needs and of existing provision which has resulted in a comprehensive reorganisation of special educational provision.

## 12.2 LEA review and reorganisation

The number of LEA-maintained special schools has fallen from 1,253 in 1993 to 1,164 in 1998,[6] while the number of pupils in the schools has risen slightly to 93,500, the highest figure for five years. The average size of maintained special schools has thus risen from 73 pupils in 1993 to 80 pupils in 1998.

In recent years there has been a marked increase in the number of LEAs wishing to modify their provision for special schooling, either to change the nature of individual special schools or to undertake a reorganisation of special schools across the whole LEA. Although a number of the proposals, when fully implemented, will result in the increased inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, the majority of proposals are designed to improve the quality of, or to rationalise, the existing special school sector. As a result of the local changes currently planned or under way, there will remain almost as many special schools, but the schools will have improved facilities and will meet local needs more appropriately.

Few reviews involve all special needs provision across the LEA. Some have affected all the special provision within one small geographical area of the LEA, and have had no intended influence beyond that area. In other cases there are plans to reorganise in either one discrete geographical or disability area before further changes are set in train elsewhere. Political as well as financial factors may influence these modes of operating, as LEAs may wish to proceed slowly on grounds of cost or in order to cope with resistance to change, which may be strong. Progress has usually been slower than most LEAs would wish, and proposed changes are often fiercely contested by parents and governing bodies. Proposals to close or reorganise schools for pupils with EBD and with MLD are usually much less controversial than proposed changes to schools for pupils with SLD or with PD.

The impetus for local changes in special schooling results from many factors. The principal influences are summarised below:

**Pupil numbers and disabilities**

a. Most LEAs have seen an increase in the number of pupils with statements of special need; these pupils have been increasingly placed in mainstream schools rather than in special schools. LEAs have encouraged this development, although in some authorities it has resulted in particular special schools (especially those for pupils with MLD and PD) becoming so small as to be scarcely viable from both financial and curricular points of view.

b. In some LEAs there is spare capacity in a number of special schools and this has encouraged a review of provision, resulting in closure or amalgamations, but in other LEAs the numbers of pupils in special schools have been constant or, in a few cases, numbers have increased. There is no clear pattern of changes with regard to particular disability groups, although the total number of schools for pupils with MLD and with PD has declined. The number of schools for pupils with SLD has remained steady. In some LEAs there has been an increase in special school places for pupils with autism or EBD.
c. Many schools for pupils with MLD have an increasing proportion of pupils with behaviour problems or of pupils with SLD. The populations of schools for pupils with PD have also been changing, notably to include more pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and other disabilities, and fewer pupils where physical difficulties are their sole disabling condition. There are fewer special schools now for pupils with sensory impairment than four years ago. Some LEA reorganisation proposals are attempts to regularise and plan for these emerging patterns whilst other proposals aim to redesignate schools formally as the outcome of detailed audits of the incidence of particular disabilities.
d. Many LEAs are noting an increase in the numbers of young children with PMLD; the numbers and proportions of such pupils in schools for pupils with SLD have been increasing in recent years. There is now a small number of schools catering solely for such pupils.

The national pattern that appears to be emerging is that of slightly fewer special schools, while the remaining schools cater for a more complex and challenging population.

### Excluded pupils

There is a growing professional and public concern about the number of pupils excluded from both mainstream and special schools. There has, for example, been a 20 per cent rise in permanent exclusions from special schools in the latter part of the four-year period of this review. This was most markedly of pupils of secondary age, and from schools for pupils with EBD or with MLD. It has influenced LEAs' planning for both PRUs and behaviour support services. However, proposals often do not take sufficient account of the LEAs' existing special schools for pupils with EBD.

### Parental pressure

The views of parents individually and collectively have become increasingly influential. In some instances, parents have been keen to see their children with disabilities receive their special education in mainstream schools, but other parents (usually those of pupils already in special schools) have worked hard to ensure that their children have a place in a special school. Parental lobbying has often acted significantly as a brake on LEAs' closure or amalgamation proposals. Some LEAs have had great difficulty in persuading parents of the benefits of change, and a few have lacked the will to risk extended public challenge.

### Discrete primary and secondary provision

a. Several LEAs have made proposals designed to reduce the age range in their special schools by reorganising schools so that they are either primary or secondary. This has been easier to achieve in densely populated urban areas where distances between special schools are not very great. The move enables schools to focus more effectively on their selected phase of education. In county and rural areas, where the special school population has either declined or remained static, the opposite movement is taking place. Smaller schools are being amalgamated or remaining schools are taking a broader range of disabilities and sometimes also a wider age range. These latter developments are driven by the need to cope with changing demographic patterns and shifts of the population of pupils with disabilities into mainstream rather than by educational factors. Thus, special schools that are similarly designated may have very different pupil populations in different LEAs, or even, occasionally, within the same LEA.

b. LEAs have differing views as to whether age-phasing of schools or limiting the range of disabilities for which staff have to plan should be the prime consideration in reorganisation. Some have decided that the priority is to provide separate primary and secondary schools (often with a concomitant increase in the diversity of disability), while others have amalgamated small primary and secondary special schools to produce more viable (but all-age) schools with a narrower and thus more manageable range of disability.

*an LEA in the north of England is planning to rationalise some of its provision for pupils with MLD and SLD so as to yield separate primary and secondary special schools. In one locality, an all-age school for pupils with MLD is to become the secondary school as it has a range of specialist subject rooms suitable for older pupils. The nearby school for pupils with SLD lacks these facilities and so it will become the primary school. Capital costs will be*

*incurred, for example in providing toileting and hygiene facilities for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties in the former MLD school. Staff redeployment and training will be necessary in order to meet the needs of a wider range of disabilities in each school. The advantages will include the provision of a distinctly age-appropriate ethos in each school and the access of all the pupils to specialist subject facilities at Key Stages 3 and 4 and post-16.*

c. Special schools for pupils with MLD and SLD of secondary age are increasingly taking pupils from 11-19 rather than 11-16, and all-age schools are tending to retain more pupils post-16. This trend appears to be associated with changes in the management and funding of colleges of further education in the early 1990s, which have reduced the willingness of some colleges to provide for the pupils, especially those with the more severe disabilities.

### Local government reorganisation (LGR)

The rapid expansion in the number of LEAs as a result of the recent creation of unitary authorities has resulted in not only the new LEAs, but also the residual LEAs, needing to re-examine their "inherited" special educational provision. Most affected LEAs have had, or are having, some form of review of special needs provision. Some reviews have been initiated and completed very quickly, whilst others have become very broad consultative exercises that will take some time to complete. The current task of rationalising inherited patterns of provision as a result of LGR is more complex than the limited rationalisation that took place following the 1974 LEA reorganisation. This reflects the very different educational climate in the late 1990s, and the fact that the changes in 1974 resulted in fewer and larger LEAs, whilst today's LGR has established more and smaller LEAs.

### Travel and cross-border arrangements

LEAs have always placed pupils in special schools and units in their neighbouring authorities when this arrangement has made the best use of resources, but this activity is increasing as a result of the establishment of more and smaller LEAs. Journey times have increased and become more questionable in terms of their effects on pupils' preparedness for school. Furthermore, the special school transport budget is increasing. LEA reviews often intend to rationalise these inherited patterns of placement, but the decision making can be complicated by the amalgamation of special schools leading towards fewer and larger schools, which in turn increases pupils' journey times and LEAs' transport costs. For some LEAs, this set of pressures increases the appeal of making more provision for pupils with special needs in their local mainstream schools.

### The OFSTED cycle of inspection

Many OFSTED inspections of special schools have highlighted problems with unsuitable sites, inadequate specialist subject accommodation, and difficulties in catering for broad ranges of special need and wide age spans. The inspection process has thus often added impetus to LEAs' plans for review and reorganisation, as long-standing deficiencies have been highlighted and have become published in reports as issues which only the LEA can address.

### PRUs and special schools for pupils with EBD

Inspections of schools for pupils with EBD that identify them as requiring special measures, or that draw attention to serious weaknesses, sometimes lead to LEAs proposing to close the schools, or may result in a reduction in pupil numbers that renders the schools unviable. Several LEAs, particularly in the London area, have acute problems in staffing their special schools for pupils with EBD, and this factor is also a pressure towards closure of the schools. Some schools for pupils with EBD are being replaced by PRUs where the education provided is usually part-time. There are also pressures in the other direction, as LEAs become dissatisfied with the limited curricular provision and part-time attendance of pupils in PRUs and seek to replace them with special schools. These factors contribute to the continuing state of change in this field.

### Cost of "out-of-county" pupil placements

LEAs have become increasingly aware of the size of special needs budgets and have wished to respond to the warnings of the Audit Commission concerning weak systems of accountability for their use of special needs funding. The high cost of placing pupils outside the LEA in independent or non-maintained schools, particularly residential schools, is a frequent target for budgetary review and reduction, especially where placements have been made without consistent criteria and without detailed knowledge of the quality and suitability of the provision.

Arrangements for SEN provision are locally determined and reorganisations are addressing local pressures and responding to immediate needs rather than developing into any uniform or unified national pattern. Thus, recent changes are resulting in increasingly diversified arrangements. This is likely to continue. Whilst there is encouragement from the DfEE for LEAs and the independent and voluntary sectors to co-operate in regional planning, this is slow to develop as LEAs are uncertain as to

who will take the lead in such planning and how joint arrangements can be funded.

# 12.3 Developments in the education of fostered children

The reduction in the number of children's homes run by local social services departments and national voluntary bodies, and the decline in the number of pupils in residential schools, have been reflected in the upsurge in the number of children who are placed with foster-care families away from their home area. Placement with these families is increasingly through independent (non-charitable) companies specialising in this work. Many of the children attend local mainstream or special schools, but a large number of children either will not, or cannot, attend their local schools, including special schools. These private organisations are seeking increasingly to establish their own educational provision for these non-attenders.

This provision is often closer to the curriculum and part-time arrangements that are features of PRUs, rather than to those of special schools. In recent years many of these organisations have sought to have their educational provision registered as day independent schools. Whilst it is encouraging that there is a greater awareness amongst care providers of the negative impact of the lack of schooling, the educational arrangements being established are not always satisfactory, so that many of these vulnerable young people receive minimal and often grossly unsatisfactory tuition. There are often complex problems over funding. For example, if a child is fostered at some distance from his or her home area, the LEA to which the child has moved provides education at a suitable mainstream or special school at no cost to the "home" authority. Should the child move to an independent special school, there is an immediate controversy as to whether the "local" LEA, the "home" LEA or the "home" social services department should pay the fees, which are often very costly. Further central guidance on such matters is required and is in preparation.

# 12.4 Evidence from OFSTED visits to LEAs and inspections of LEAs

### Unitary authorities

OFSTED has made brief visits to 34 new unitary authorities established since 1996 and to 16 of the LEAs of which they previously formed part (the "releasing" LEAs). Half the releasing LEAs planned to review their services for pupils with special needs, including special schools; in half of these authorities, special needs provision was a high priority for review. Releasing authorities were often left with insufficient special school places to meet their perceived requirements, as all but schools for pupils with EBD tended to be located within the (generally urban) new unitary authority boundaries. Provision for EBD was more often located in rural areas, and was thus more likely to be found within the releasing LEA boundaries. Two LEAs had significantly overspent their special needs budgets.

More than half of the unitary authorities claimed to have a disproportionately high number of special school places for their own populations, usually accommodating pupils from their releasing county authorities. Three quarters of the new unitary authorities planned to review services for pupils with special educational needs within the year and half of them regarded this as a strategic priority. The new authorities generally proposed more active policies than their releasing LEAs to place pupils in mainstream rather than special schools.

### LEA inspections

Including eight LEAs inspected as part of the pilot project for the LEA inspection process, 19 LEAs had been inspected and reported upon at the time of writing. All but one LEA had a written policy for special educational needs. However, only one of the LEAs updated its policy on a regular basis. Having been produced at the time of the introduction of the SEN Code of Practice in 1993/94, many LEA policies require updating and regular review. All but one of the special needs policies inspected made general statements in support of the inclusion of pupils with disabilities in mainstream schools. Just one LEA had successfully implemented its inclusion policy by taking particularly serious and sustained measures to put it into practice. Other LEAs had, at most, moved towards developing additional specifically resourced provision in mainstream schools. In two LEAs, this policy was effective in that numbers in special schools for pupils with MLD had declined. This, however, left the LEAs with surplus places and overfunding, which had not been addressed. Resourced provision in mainstream for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties was uncommon and in two LEAs had been resisted by mainstream schools.

Most LEAs fulfilled their statutory duties in relation to pupils with special educational needs with the exception that in 6 of the 19 LEAs, the speed of conducting statutory assessments for statements of special need was unsatisfactory and in two cases completely unacceptable at the time of inspection. All LEAs saw this as a key indicator of performance and all were improving, some at a rapid rate. All but one of the LEAs inspected had criteria in place that pupils had to fulfil in order to be statutorily assessed. The thresholds which were key to the operation of these criteria were not always implemented on a consistent basis. While schools were familiar with the general operation of the criteria, they were frequently unaware of the detail of the thresholds.

Mainstream schools were often unclear as to the basis upon which funding for special educational needs was delegated. This uncertainty inhibited the partnership of mainstream schools in the process of inclusion of pupils with special needs who would formerly have been in special schools. This issue has recently been addressed by the DfEE.**7**

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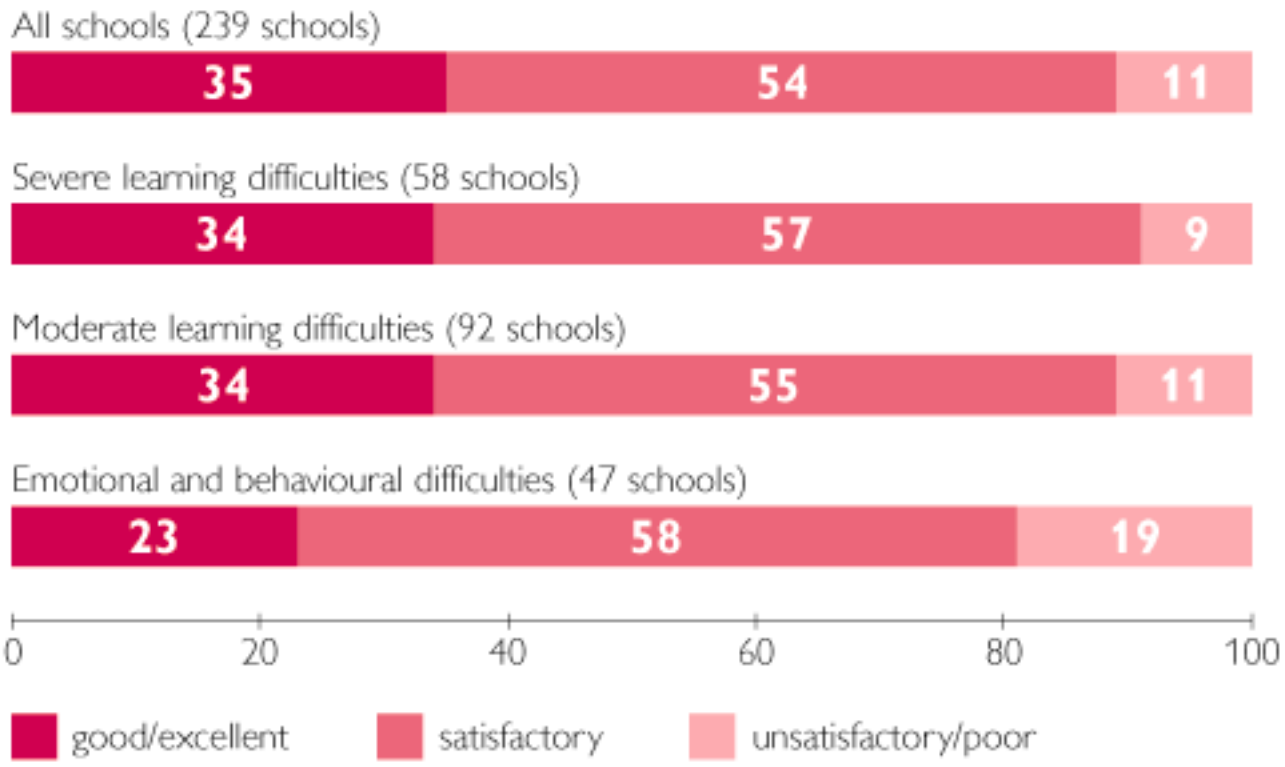
**6** DfEE (1998) *Special Educational Needs in England: January 1998*. Statistical Bulletin.

**7** DfEE (1998) *Meeting Special Educational Needs: a programme of action*.

## Chart 1

## Pupils' progress in special schools in the academic year 1997–98

(percentage of schools)



## Chart 2

**Pupils' progress in schools for pupils with EBD 1996–98**

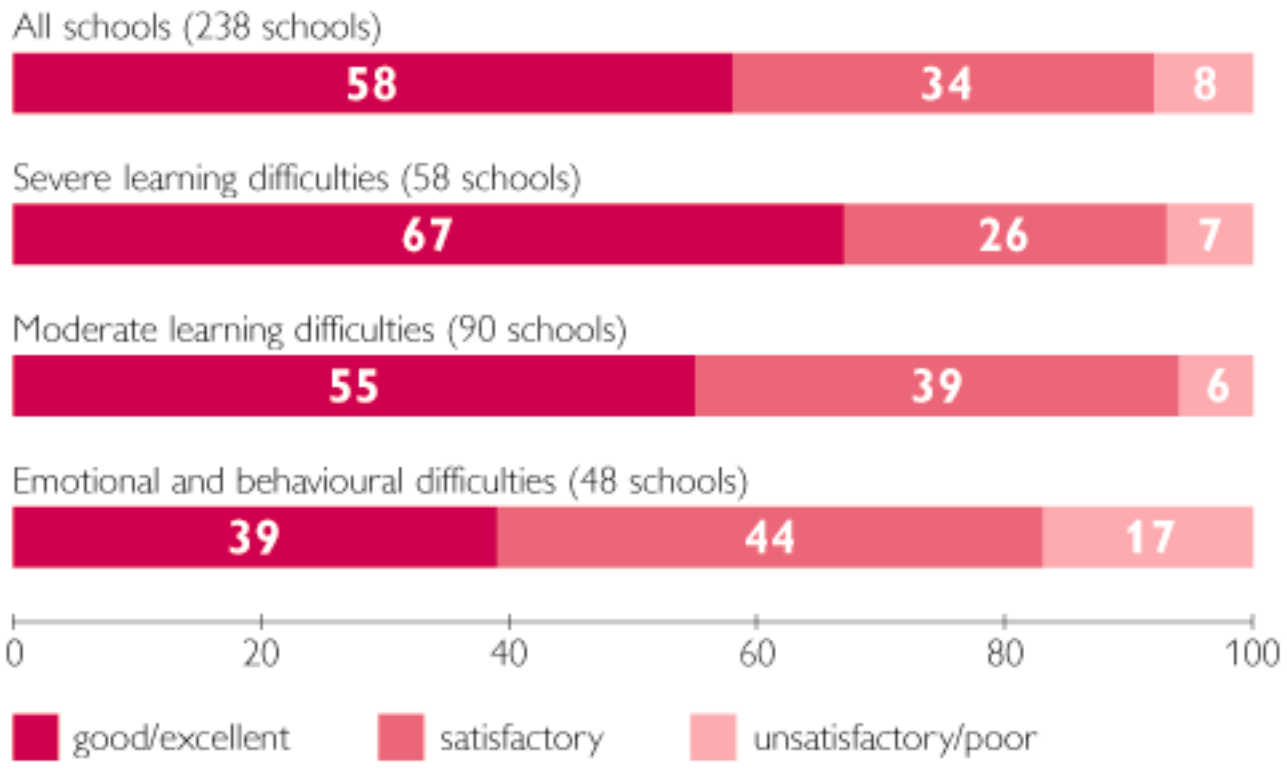
(percentage of schools)

on this site.

## Chart 4

## The quality of teaching in different types of special school 1997–98

(percentage of schools)



on this site.