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## Research Associate Summary Report

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# Opening doors, opening minds

exploring co-location as a route to inclusion

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## Introduction

How are schools seeking to include pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties into mainstream schools? One approach is through models of co-location in which mainstream and special school provision is located in the same building so that links can be established for the benefit of pupils.

Currently, there are three main models of co-location operating in England. These are:

- mixed – the two schools mix their classes together, so that a special class will be next to a mainstream class
- two schools under one roof – the two schools operate in separate areas of the same building
- a combination of these two approaches

The two schools will have some areas for shared use, such as the staff room, dining hall, assembly or sports hall, library and school grounds. There may be a shared reception area but, in all other respects, the two schools operate separately and have separate governing bodies, although there are usually link governors who attend each other's meetings.

Where two schools have separate buildings on the same site, the arrangement offers locational inclusion opportunities rather than co-location as defined above.

This study explored the co-location models described above in order to determine how schools for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and/or profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD)<sup>1</sup>, their mainstream partner schools and their local authorities were endeavouring to achieve effective inclusion; what the impact of this was for the schools; and what lessons leaders could learn from this.

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<sup>1</sup> Where an 'SLD school' is referred to, this means that the school is for pupils with SLD and for pupils with PMLD. Similarly, the term 'SLD pupil' always includes those with PMLD. Where the word 'pupil' is used, this includes those aged between 16 and 19 within SLD schools.

## Research method

The data was collected from sources within nine local authorities. These sources included:

- interviews with a range of schools including co-located schools, other SLD schools and other special educational needs (SEN) schools. Interviews and discussions carried out included those with headteachers, other staff, pupils and governors
- interviews with local authority representatives

In addition, interviews and discussions were held with senior representatives with SEN responsibilities from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), HMI and Ofsted.

## Findings

### What the models looked like in practice

In the 'two schools under one roof' co-location models visited, the two schools were physically adjoining, but operated as separate schools. The SLD school area has its own classes and many (if not all) the specialist facilities it requires, but in a number of cases also has timetabled access to some areas of shared use in the mainstream school. These shared areas were usually, but not exclusively, based in the mainstream school. In this model, the SLD school pupils were able to move about their school, and go into the mainstream school to join in with activities or use their shared facilities – in most cases, these included the dining and assembly halls, library, and PE facilities. The staff room was in some cases for shared use by both sets of staff.

In the mixed co-location model, classes from both the schools were next door to each other, across a corridor from each other, or grouped in areas adjacent to one another. They all had full and shared use of the corridors and the resource areas of the school. As soon as a pupil with SLD left the classroom and stepped into the corridor, he or she was in a shared use area and likely to be in contact with pupils from the mainstream school.

The main perceived advantage of the two schools under one roof model over the mixed model is that the pupils with SLD have the security of a 'home' in the SLD school. The main advantage of the mixed model over the two schools under one roof model is that there is almost constant social integration taking place.

### What has co-location meant for schools?

From the perspective of those working with pupils with SLD and the pupils themselves, co-location offers:

- access to all of the staffing expertise and specialist resources provided by an SLD school
- the opportunities that having access to a mainstream school provides
- the benefits of being socially included

*"I'm going into (the other) school to do textiles."  
"I've made friends in the other school."*

Schools reported a number of benefits to be accrued from the co-location arrangements. These included:

- increased awareness of disability on the part of pupils from the mainstream school
- increased self-esteem of pupils from the mainstream school through their engagement in supporting special school peers
- improvements in the pupil behaviour of pupils from mainstream schools due to their response to being seen as role models
- staff development opportunities arising from collaboration, eg learning from colleagues' professional expertise both in mainstream and special school settings
- a reduction in the pragmatic and logistical demands on the special school, eg arranging transport from a special school setting to a mainstream one, with this producing an increase in the time both pupils and staff are able to devote to learning rather than travelling

- greater opportunity for special school pupils to gain inclusion opportunities due to proximity, and for periods of time that are more appropriate and matched to needs
- attendance at the same school as a sibling who is in the mainstream school
- access to specialist teaching and facilities for SLD pupils, eg design technology

### Making co-location work – issues for leaders to consider

- Special schools will need to be prepared to take a lead in developing disability awareness in the mainstream school. In one example, all Year 7 pupils are provided with an induction to the special school.
- The investment in staffing to make the collaboration work is important. For example, the appointment of an inclusion co-ordinator can help establish a proactive link between mainstream and special settings. In one example, this staff member taught disability awareness sessions in the mainstream school.
- Having a co-located building does not necessarily mean co-location will work well. Schools need to identify ways in which they can develop effective links at a range of levels, eg the provision of joint curriculum opportunities or joint school trips.
- New appointees to the mainstream school may have reservations about their potential involvement and there is an induction and training implication for staff as well as pupils.

### Which co-location model works best?

At primary school level, the two main models can be seen to work well. At secondary school level, evidence from practice suggested that the two schools under one roof model was easier to operate within the secondary school environment as it was seen as difficult to make full inclusion for the pupils with SLD work well at this level. Similarly, at further education (FE) department level (ie students aged 16–19), the two schools under one roof model was perceived to be more successful. On a large FE college campus, where there are many separate faculty buildings, it is possible to argue that co-location is taking place even where the students with SLD have their own building, as this fits in with the overall pattern of provision, in that students with SLD must access facilities and courses across the campus.

There will of course be exceptions to the above statements and it needs to be borne in mind that these draw on the data collected.

## Conclusions

As a model for inclusion of pupils with SLD and/or PMLD, co-location, on this evidence, holds significant benefits for both pupils in the SLD school and the mainstream school. It offers specialist provision and inclusion to pupils with SLD and/or PMLD.

With the future in mind, one could propose that where the opportunity arises, it could be advantageous to co-locate an SLD school within a new-build mainstream school, so that both schools can be purpose-designed for co-location.

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