National College for School Leadership

THE LEADING EDGE SERIES

# Leadership and Inclusion:
# A Special School Perspective

## Interactive Workshop Materials

# Leading Edge Principles

Over the last year, NCSL has developed, as a central part of its research activity, the Leading Edge Seminar Series. These events are designed:

- to bring together outstanding thinking and innovative practice from schools
- to challenge school leaders to articulate what they do
- to produce interactive materials and resources to promote debate in schools across the country

For a full account of the Leading Edge principles, please see page 35.

# Contents

# Introduction

In July 2002, over 50 leaders of special schools, together with some mainstream primary partner schools, came together in Northampton at a Leading Edge event to explore issues currently facing the special school sector. The challenge was to explore the role of special schools in an inclusive future and to identify their unique contribution to national provision.

During the day delegates took part in workshops to explore:

- ☐ the big picture
- ☐ current practice
- ☐ policy context
- ☐ what specialist provision might look like in 10 years time.

It was proposed at the beginning of the day that a school is 'four walls surrounding the future' (Roland Barth). By the end of the day it had become clear that specialist provision of the future could be very different - outreach services for mainstream classes, clusters of centres across wide geographical areas or centres of excellence providing specialist in-house or out-of-house consultancy and advice.

What follows is a summary of the debates, workshops and conversations that took place. In Part One, workshops pose questions for initial discussion whilst summaries of the ideas and questions that emerged from the seminar are provided for further debate. Part Two comprises of practitioner perspectives on how the inclusion agenda is being taken forward, on specialist provision within mainstream schools and on the contribution that special school teachers and heads can make. Part Three provides further reading, including a thinkpiece by Richard Byers of Cambridge University.

The materials have been developed either as a basis for personal reflection or for use in workshops to stimulate wider debate within your school, network or local authority. We hope that you find them useful, stimulating and a fair reflection of the rich and varied debate which took place during the day.

# Themes of the Day

A number of themes recurred throughout the discussions and form a useful introduction to the key ideas that informed the debate.

**Optimism and Uncertainty**
Special school leaders talk about children and show high levels of personal commitment, hope and optimism. Whilst the head who remarked that he had spent much of his professional life in schools under review or threat of closure may have been unusual, the uncertainty was shared by many others. This clear and sustaining sense of moral purpose in an uncertain world is quite striking.

**National Strategy, Local Implementation**
There is evidence of considerable variation in the ways local authorities are taking forward the inclusion agenda. It is clear that, in some instances, LEAs are willing to draw on the expertise and experience of special school leaders in developing and implementing policies. In others, however, special school leaders express concern over changes in personnel affecting leadership and management of change at local level.

**A Continuum of Provision**
Leaders of special schools regard themselves as part of inclusion, not separate from it. One articulated with great clarity that 'if inclusion isn't about school improvement, then it's a waste of time'. In this context, the role of the special school is about extending the curriculum, creating flexibility and a climate for learning. Special school leaders recognise the benefits of partnership working for both mainstream and special school children and some talked of high levels of expertise in partner mainstream schools to complement their own. The head who remarked, 'They need us now!' reflected satisfaction that, at last, skills were being recognised and used to develop and support staff in other schools. Others highlighted the need for a common language to demystify specialist provision and work together.

Responsibility for developing a vision and an ethos for special learning provision must spread across to the mainstream and the wider community. It is not real inclusion if the social inclusion agenda creates a dependence on the specialist sector to provide.

**Initiating Change**
Many of the special schools represented were Beacon schools. It is clear that they often initiate change, partnerships and the development of networks. More and more special school leaders are becoming leaders of services rather than leaders of schools. The most innovative use national initiatives such as the specialist school programme to build expertise and links or, in one case, lead federated schools. In some cases, threat has been a factor. As one head remarked, in 1998 he realised that 'if I only work in my own school, my own school will cease to exist'.

Some of the good practice emerging during the day exemplifies a process of transformation anticipated for all schools - development of interdependent networks staffed by multi-disciplinary teams, adept and skilled at crossing boundaries, reaching out to a range of community providers to forge powerful partnerships. In this way, effective special schools are already fully engaged in a process of transformation and may have important messages about this process for leadership across all schools.

**Making the Future**
Across the seminar, there was an emerging consensus as to the future of specialist provision. Schools were increasingly seen as specialist learning centres, working flexibly with a group of schools in supporting students and staff. One federated model envisaged a group of specialist centres, each staffed by a head of centre.

**Contributing to Debate**
Finally, there was a strong sense that the voice of special school leaders needs to be heard more clearly in national debate and development. From the evidence of the seminar, special schools and their established partner schools have enormous intellectual capital, quality thinking and experience of change rooted in practice to contribute to wider debate.

# Part One
# The Workshops

## WORKSHOP ONE | **Leadership for inclusion:** The specialist contribution

The purpose of this opening workshop was to take an overview of recent developments.

**PRE-READING**

**Starting Points**

- ☐ National and international commitment to inclusion is clear, yet thinking about how and if special schools can contribute to an agenda for inclusion is much less developed at national level. Given this lack of policy clarity, the challenges facing leaders of special schools to provide direction and momentum are both greater and more complex.
- ☐ For leaders of special schools, this is a time of opportunity, rather than a time of threat.
- ☐ Leaders of special schools and the people with whom they work have unique skills in understanding and providing for a wide range of need. They are skilled in building and sustaining networks across communities, are experienced in working with a wide group of staff and are accustomed to managing complex change in an uncertain world.
- ☐ NCSL can have a key role both in promoting debate and discussion and in connecting practitioners with debate at policy level.

**See also**

- ☐ Background and Current Issues (Reading 1), and
- ☐ Richard Byers' thinkpiece, Leadership for Inclusion - the Specialist Contribution (Reading 2)

## WORKSHOP ONE | **Leadership for inclusion:** The specialist contribution

**Workshop One: Questions**

- ☐ Do the descriptions in the background reading resonate with your own experience?
- ☐ What's missing?
- ☐ What's different in your context?
- ☐ What are the key questions we should be asking at national, district (LEA) and school level?

**Post workshop**

On the next page you can find a summary of the ideas and questions that emerged from the seminar.

## WORKSHOP ONE | **Leadership for inclusion:** The specialist contribution

**Workshop One Seminar Responses: What are the key questions we should be asking at national, district (LEA) and school level?**

*National level:*

1. Where are the funds and detailed frameworks to sit alongside the government's vision of inclusion?
2. To what extent has clear vision of inclusion been communicated from the top layers of government to local level through to individual officers working in the LEAs?
3. Who is looking at the details of the policy change? Does anybody know whether or not inclusion will mean better outcomes for pupils?
4. What can government do to develop a national infrastructure to facilitate networking between special schools and between these schools and mainstream partners?
5. What is happening to promote, give time and accreditation to the excellent professional development occurring in our schools?
6. Is there enough emphasis in initial teacher education courses to develop awareness of inclusion, special needs and the role of specialist education as an integral part of training?

*Local level:*

1. Have all LEAs developed and shared statements about what inclusion looks like and how it will be achieved?
2. Is there a coherent plan for delivery?
3. Does the current policy context give conflicting messages? National government is emphasising the right to parental choice in education, whilst interpretation of this at local level varies widely. OFSTED, in turn, has its own view of inclusion. How can we be sure that local approaches are evidence-based, rather than dogma driven and over-simplified in approach?
4. Relationships between special schools and the LEA are often fragile. When there is high officer turnover, contact can vary from very positive to very negative. How can we be sure that judgements to close schools are on educational rather than political grounds?

## WORKSHOP ONE | **Leadership for inclusion:** The specialist contribution

5. There is pressure on special schools to become more generic and deal with a wider range of problems. Is this desirable?

6. How can LEAs and schools encourage greater recognition and celebration that special schools are integrated and inclusive in themselves?

7. After five years of developing different models of specialist provision for local contexts, is there sufficient plurality to be able to choose a number of successful models for implementation? How will this knowledge be gathered and shared?

*Special school level:*

1. How do you manage a school in an unfriendly context? When you know you have two years left of operation, how do you retain and attract good staff, attract new students, and give parents the confidence to keep their children in the school?

2. Sixty per cent of today's special school leaders are over 50. Where will the next generation of special school leaders come from when there is a lack of career structure and lack of staff?

## WORKSHOP TWO | What do special schools look like in an age of inclusion?

The purpose of this second workshop is to explore current developments in specialist provision.

**Workshop Two: Questions**

For leaders of special schools....

- ☐ What are the key leadership challenges which emerge?
- ☐ What are the opportunities?
- ☐ What unique skills and qualities do we have in our schools?

**Post workshop**

On the next page you can find a summary of the ideas and questions that emerged from the seminar.

## WORKSHOP TWO | What do special schools look like in an age of inclusion?

**Seminar Responses**

- ☐ Links with mainstream primary and secondary schools are increasing all the time.
- ☐ Special schools are increasingly working in clusters with other special and mainstream schools. Funding arrangements are often complex and short term, with combinations of ESF, SRB, Technology Status, Education Action Zones and other funding sources.
- ☐ Movement between schools is helping to break down preconceptions and stigmas.
- ☐ Children in special schools achieve a great deal when integrated into weekly mainstream school lessons, in some cases more than other students.
- ☐ Special schools do not have the resources to send teachers with individual pupils when taking weekly lessons in mainstream schools, so teaching assistants accompany them instead.
- ☐ Pupils from mainstream schools are also increasingly attending classes in special schools. Mainstream teachers find this has a positive impact on their behaviour and application, as these pupils start to feel good about themselves. Being able to help others gives them a sense of worth, achievement and improves self esteem.
- ☐ Special schools are increasingly generic, dealing with physical disabilities, severe learning difficulties, mental disabilities and emotional and behavioural difficulties in the same location.
- ☐ Special schools are seeking to provide as normal an environment as possible.
- ☐ Heads are involved with on-the-ground learning and individual cases rather than administration and finance issues. More heads are employing non-teachers to manage school operations, releasing valuable skills to support staff.
- ☐ Special schools are starting to provide specialist consultancy for mainstream heads and teachers.
- ☐ LEAs will listen to special schools if they have established themselves as a credible source of expertise.
- ☐ Autocratic, presidential and strict hierarchies are unhelpful forms of leadership in special schools so most special school leaders practice devolution of decision-making, power sharing with teachers and parents and families, and negotiation.
- ☐ Special school staff have highly developed skills in helping students make their way from school to adult life.

## WORKSHOP THREE | **Thoughts for the future**

This final workshop began to explore the shape of specialist provision in ten years time.

**A Case Study: West Oaks Special School, Leeds**

To support individual learning needs, Leeds LEA has adopted a policy of dividing the city into five 'wedges' or districts, encompassing 110,000 pupils and 300 schools in all. Each wedge has its own specialist learning centre and centre for learning technology. West Oaks School, which has both technology and beacon status, is one of these. It has 150 pupils, across all learning, behavioural and physical disabilities and its role as a technology college has extended its capacity to work towards inclusion.

This role has enabled the school to extend its curriculum and create better learning opportunities. It has a small group of staff who act as consultants, providing support in mainstream schools on specialist issues such as ICT, autism or single pupil support. The school is aiming to become a one-stop-shop for special school admissions, a provider of training, with a multi-disciplinary team of teachers and support staff.

## WORKSHOP THREE | **Thoughts for the future**

**Workshop Three: Questions**

- ☐ What will specialist provision look like in ten years?
- ☐ What roles will specialist staff have?
- ☐ What will specialist provision look like in relation to pupils with:
  - Severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties?
  - Challenging behaviour and autism spectrum disorders?
  - Social and emotional behavioural difficulties?

On the next page you can find a summary of the ideas and questions that emerged from the seminar.

## WORKSHOP THREE | **Thoughts for the future**

**Workshop Three Seminar Responses:**

- ☐ Special schools will be brought together more and more into wider generic delivery bodies.
- ☐ Special schools will become a venue for staff development, focussing on training teachers rather than dealing directly with students.
- ☐ Special schools will provide expert learning support workers in mainstream schools.
- ☐ One special school will provide for everyone's needs.
- ☐ A national funding formula will resolve complex funding anomalies.

# Part Two
# Perspectives

## What School Leaders Said

**How the inclusion agenda is being taken forward:**

"I get the profound sense that the inclusion policy has been spurred by a social agenda rather than by education."

"You do not improve a system by adding another layer of bureaucracy. LEAs have to look at the obstacles they are creating from perpetual reviews and new initiatives."

"Local authorities don't always understand what inclusion means and this is not only scary, but means that special school students are often being sacrificed for the sake of other students."

"Policy makers have tried to run with the focus on inclusion, without fully understanding what it means for delivery."

"Teachers must be encouraged to move between mainstream and special schools. They cannot feel as though they are closing the door to one if they move between one and the other. This will ease recruitment, and enable teachers in the mainstream to develop more specialist skills."

**Specialist provision within mainstream schools:**

"If achieving inclusion is not about school improvement, then the inclusion policy is a waste of time."

"Policy makers have not thought this through enough. If we want integration to happen, there must be more preparation within the mainstream. Currently most mainstream schools are not prepared for the problems that children face. Some children are bed-wetting, a sign that some children are traumatised by being in the mainstream, and that they do not have the defence mechanisms to deal with the way they are received."

"We are so busy trying to achieve integration, we often forget to educate a class to be ready for children and children to be ready for the class, in both the mainstream and in special schools."

"Numbers of children with autism are growing, yet the picture for educating these kids is dismal."

"We mustn't override the contribution that the mainstream can have. It does have the skills and there are some very committed people looking to work in partnership."

"There's a danger that if all special school units are slotted into the mainstream, the mainstream will leave these pupils colouring in. These children are owed much more than this."

"The smart schools have clocked onto what we can provide, and they have us coming in all the time."

"Much more attention must be given to the needs of the children. You can not mix the most vulnerable of pupils with the most difficult to manage, for example."

"While the mainstream can integrate most children, certain children have to have specialist centres."

**The contribution that special school teachers and heads can make:**

"Give us a chance to have a say and be involved and we, as people with vast experience in dealing with these children, will have a really positive impact on the shape of future special school provision."

"A value of an institution is a thousand times greater than its infrastructure, if not more. The value of this intellectual capital must be recognised, with flexible partnerships and networks allowing this to be shared."

"If we get decent money for staffing, we can provide. Under the current system, we are struggling to keep our heads above water with the complex funding arrangements."

"Inclusion is a two-way process. Where students from special schools gain enormously from mainstream classes, so too do mainstream students coming into special school classes. They like the small, safe, friendly, environments, they are no longer ridiculed and feel good about themselves when they find they can help other students, and this changes their behaviour."

"No-one trusts us to get on with things."

"Special schools need to be able to talk the same language as the mainstream. This will help to demystify special schools."

"Behavioural workshops go down really well with the mainstream. They are always looking for ways to address unmanageable behaviour. We are now inviting teachers into all kinds of workshops."

"We are powerful technical resources which can start to open many doors. The mainstream now needs our expertise."

"Special school leaders can not be 'empire heads'. To achieve integration, they must have the networking skills to go out and be builders of partnerships, more so than in the mainstream."

## Issues and Questions

**Participants raised a number of issues as well as defining questions for further discussion:**

"What is more important to the children - subjects, curriculum, security or the sense of importance and well being by greater integration in the mainstream school?"

"We need to have a more flexible and open attitude to releasing resources and to timetabling."

"We need to encourage parents to open their hearts and minds to integrating more with mainstream schools. Some are overprotective and can become confused, so may need more encouragement."

"How do we encourage mainstream schools to be more positive towards students, praising them for what they have achieved?"

"How can special schools take on a wider role in providing training and development, for example in helping mainstream teachers to develop aptitudes in tackling behavioural problems?"

"What do we need to do to develop strategic and leading edge relationships in order to influence and challenge local education authorities?"

"How can we develop advanced skills in teachers in all schools to support children with learning difficulties?"

"The 'save our special schools' campaign is not helpful. How do we present the argument for special schools coherently, and ensure that there is informed debate around decisions that are taken?"

"How ready are colleagues in mainstream schools to listen to the valuable contribution the special schools sector has to make? How can special schools persuade them that special schools expertise has something to offer?"

"Managing small schools is an act of balancing outreach services, with existing resources. How do we get local authorities to recognise that outreach is very expensive and cannot be developed alongside what is already being delivered and provide additional funding accordingly?"

## Next Steps

One of the suggestions emerging from the day was an NCSL national leadership forum for leadership and inclusion, to bring leaders of special schools into wider debate on the development of future specialist provision.

In this way, the seminar represents no more than a start.

To take our thinking forward, we need your thoughts and responses at research@ncsl.org.uk

# Part Three
# Readings

## READING ONE

**Background**

In 1994, the UNESCO Salamanca World Statement on Special Educational Needs signalled an international commitment to inclusive education, 'enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise'[1].

By 1997 this thinking was reflected in DfEE principles of inclusion to initiate a challenging agenda for change at national level. The principles were founded on:

- the 'paramount importance' of individual needs and a commitment to respect parents' views
- a recognition that roles and relationships between special and mainstream schools had to change to provide partnerships and flexible programmes of learning, a 'new role for special schools', and a progressively extending role for mainstream schools
- an awareness that LEAs were at the heart of the whole business of turning national policy into operational reality.

[1] DfEE, 'Excellence for All Children', 1997

**Current Issues (from Richard Byers' introduction to the workshop)**

In November 2001 the DfES produced further guidance on inclusive schooling, outlining its commitment to inclusion. This highlighted 'an enhanced role' for specialist provision. Although this is a heartening message, we have to make sure that the picture drawn now is the right one for specialist provision in 10 years' time. A policy of shutting special schools down completely as, for example, occurred in Italy, meant that a generation of young people fell casualty to this aggressive approach to inclusion.

Instead we need to see the presence of young people with greater needs as a spur for the most dramatic improvements in mainstream schools. Inclusion needs to happen with considerable specialist input. This means specialist teachers in classes, and specialist teachers helping mainstream teachers to learn how to deal with behavioural, physical and mental issues in young people. The people who can make this happen are experts from special schools, so assistants, teachers and school leaders have a crucial role in driving change forward in a meaningful way.

After all, leaders in special schools spend more direct time with learners rather than in the office. They also spend time developing and facilitating professional development opportunities, running training and creatively adapting resources and curriculum through expertise rooted firmly in practice. Such knowledge and experience is embedded in special schools.

Government guidance and policy has not yet recognised this, and so has not taken into account what is required to adapt the mainstream to become inclusive.

At a local school level, colleagues in mainstream schools have not always been interested in listening to what special schools have to offer, thinking they can cope with the challenges achieving inclusion will present. There has been some exchange of ideas and practice between special schools and the mainstream, such as pupils attending classes in mainstream schools, but this has not always been even-handed.

There is greater potential for exploring working relationships, but special schools must have greater confidence and awareness of their strengths. This must start from the basis of a well-articulated view of what special schools have to offer. Then the two delivery agents will be able to start to work together towards a more inclusive future.

## READING TWO | **Leadership for inclusion** – the specialist contribution

Richard Byers, June 2002

### Introduction

This paper sets out to explore two key topics, leadership and inclusion, and the contribution that the specialist sector might make to the development of policy and practice in both areas and in the interface between them. The paper opens with a brief review of some of the key concepts that will be significant in developing debate in this area. I then move on to explore the responses of a group of special school headteachers who were asked to analyse their roles as leaders in specialist settings. Finally, leadership and inclusion are considered in relation to one another and a series of questions about the contribution of the specialist sector to the development of leadership in inclusive schools is posed. A limited set of references is provided in order to locate some of the issues raised in this paper in the literature.

### The Issues

I wish to propose at the start of this paper that debate needs to move on from the concern with questions about the principle of inclusion (for example, 'how do we define inclusion?'; 'why should we work towards inclusion?') that has exercised many commentators for some time, in order to grapple with questions that focus on the development of inclusive policies and practices (for example, 'what are the characteristics of inclusive classrooms?'; 'which of the practices that are described as inclusive lead to enhanced achievements for all learners?') (see Daniels, 2000). To some extent, this process has been given impetus by initiatives like the Index for Inclusion (CSIE, 2000) but I also want to explore the extent to which the debate might benefit from a consideration of the contribution that the experiences and expertise of leaders from the specialist sector might make to the development of more effective inclusive policies and practices.

**Using special educational needs and specialist expertise as a spur for improvement**

It is my contention that the contribution of the specialist sector might prove to be highly significant, particularly in relation to those pupils who present the most unusual and extreme challenges to schools and educators who aspire to become more inclusive. If we accept that pupils with special educational needs can act as a spur to improvements in teaching and learning for all (see, for example, Skrtic, 1991), then arguably those pupils with the most severe difficulties in learning and who present the most extreme challenges can drive forward the most radical and productive improvements. At present, the practitioners and leaders who have the most experience of working with these learners work in the specialist sector. This suggests that there is a real and present need to take account of their expertise in developing more inclusive policies and practices.

*A focus on 'whole person'outcomes*

In developing confidence in the effectiveness of increasingly inclusive policies and practices, we will need to find new ways to motivate the drive for improvement and to measure the results. There will need to be less focus on pupil attainment in relation to a narrow set of academic assessments or accreditation opportunities and more concern for a broad range of whole person outcomes (Sebba et al, 1993; Inman and Buck, 1995). Such outcomes might focus, for example, on measures of quality of life that take account of issues like emotional and physical well-being as well as academic excellence (Brown, 1997). Colleagues in specialist settings have some experience of generating measures like these for themselves because there is, as yet, no generally accepted approach to evaluating 'best practice' in their area of work (QCA/DfEE, 2001; Dee et al, 2002).

*Measuring effectiveness in inclusive settings*

Specialist education is a field in flux. Leaders in specialist settings operate without the benefit of an established formula for promoting effectiveness or a widely trialled and agreed set of approaches to securing improvement. In specialist contexts, the equation that proposes that 'input' leads inevitably to 'outcomes' appears to be less than reliable (Norwich, 2002). In mainstream settings, leaders can have some confidence that the time, energy and resources devoted to an issue in a school improvement plan will yield some useful and measurable outcomes (for example, better SATs results or improved literacy skills). In a special school, the investment in a process focused on improvement can be made and the process itself can be pursued with vigour, resolve and commitment but the 'outcomes' may be much harder to secure or, at least, to measure, often because small cohorts of pupils, in spite of consistent or improving efforts on the part of staff, produce highly variable and idiosyncratic achievement profiles from year to year.

*Leadership in inclusive settings*

The exploration of the notion of effectiveness in more inclusive settings will also require a more determined focus on the individual learner, and the priorities for learning that are specific to him or her, than has been usual up to now in mainstream schools. Leaders in these more inclusive contexts will need to learn how to be more creative in relation to the curriculum; more responsive to individual priorities; more willing to reconceptualise, restructure and reinvent schooling and the school itself in order to meet pupil needs and address pupil priorities and aspirations. Again, I would suggest, these are areas in which colleagues in specialist contexts have some experience and, potentially, a great deal to offer (see, for example, Carpenter et al, 1996; Babbage et al, 1999).

We might now usefully move on to consider, in more detail, the skills, experience, knowledge and understandings that colleagues in specialist contexts feel that they have to offer this debate.

**The contribution of leaders in specialist contexts**

The University of Cambridge Faculty of Education hosts regular meetings of the Eastern Region Network for senior staff who work in schools for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. At a recent meeting, Network members were asked to list the features that characterise the work of leaders in special schools.

In establishing a context for this discussion, participants argued that leaders in specialist contexts engage in similar tasks and deploy broadly the same range of skills as their counterparts in the mainstream of education, but that, for headteachers in special schools, these tasks and skills will be in a different relationship with one another. Compared with their counterparts in mainstream schools, members of the Network suggested that leaders in specialist contexts will, for example, be likely to:

- ☐ have more direct contact with learners (including individuals and groups of pupils and students); members of staff (including teachers and members of learning support staff); parents, carers and families; and professionals from other agencies (including health and social services and the voluntary sector).
- ☐ focus more on inputs (including issues in assessment, target setting, planning, making decisions about pedagogy, solving challenges and problems in implementation) than on measuring outcomes in order to make judgements about, and to drive forward the development of, the quality of provision.
- ☐ address more of their own professional development needs by locating their own sources of information and inspiration and securing their own strategies for staying ahead of or in touch with the field - often because relevant professional development opportunities are not provided for them locally.
- ☐ be more actively involved in providing (planning, facilitating, leading and evaluating) 'in house' training for staff - particularly focusing on the induction of new staff (newly qualified teachers and colleagues with mainstream experience moving into specialist contexts); opportunities to develop teamwork and collaboration in the school community; continuing professional development opportunities for teachers, support staff, parents, carers and family members; and shared development opportunities for staff from other agencies and other schools.

These responses suggest that leaders in specialist contexts are experienced at multi-tasking, perhaps particularly because, in common with leaders in small schools in the mainstream of education, they will, in their small-scale settings, have fewer colleagues with whom traditional senior and middle management structures can be built. Members of the Network suggested that many of the characteristics of leadership in specialist contexts are shared by colleagues who work in other isolated, marginalised schools working in challenging circumstances.

The responses of Network members indicate that leadership in special schools and units is, in addition, highly concentrated. Leaders are frequently managing more initiatives (because a special school may cater for pupils with a wide spectrum of needs from two to nineteen years of age, for example) with fewer staff and a narrower spread of expertise than would be available in a mainstream setting (because special schools and units often cater for small numbers of learners with small and often poorly prepared staff groups).

Respondents suggested that leaders in specialist contexts often also have a leadership role beyond the scope of their own institution thrust upon them. They may become, for example, the de facto LEA 'expert' on a certain set of issues (such as behaviour management, autism spectrum disorders, or multi-sensory impairment) and be expected to contribute to policy making and professional development on a wider front than in their own school or service.

Members of the group further argued that leaders in special schools tend to favour collaborative approaches to their work. They will be likely, for example, to:

- ☐ work co-operatively with other schools - leaders in special schools and units have learned to rely on one another because these settings are so often isolated both geographically and in terms of national, regional or even local policy (see Lunt et al, 1994).

- ☐ work with staff from other agencies (including the health and social services and the voluntary sector) because the needs of pupils in specialist contexts often require a holistic, inter-agency response (compare Lacey, 2001).

- work in close partnerships with parents, carers and families, developing closer bonds; considering the views and needs of parents, carers and families more carefully; and bringing these considerations more consistently into their daily work than colleagues in mainstream settings (see, for example, Gascoigne, 1995).

- strive to involve pupils and students meaningfully in their own education and in choices and decisions at a variety of levels, both because this is a requirement of the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001a) but also because movements towards advocacy and empowerment for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities demand that pupils should take increasing control over their own learning (compare Jelly et al, 2000; Jones and Charlton, 1996).

As a result of their extensive experience of working collaboratively (with other professionals, with parents, with pupils), members of the Network suggested that they tend to develop skills and attitudes that underpin a 'community' rather than a 'competitive' approach to leadership. Their comments also suggest that leadership in specialist contexts tends to be highly distributed, devolved and transformative or emancipatory in character. Special school leaders have expertise not only in creating community networks but also in sharing power (for example, with teaching colleagues, members of learning support staff and other professionals) and in actively promoting the empowerment of other participants in the educational process, including parents and pupils.

At the same time, the group argued that leaders from the specialist sector are used to acting creatively and autonomously. Working outside the networks of guidance and advice designed to support the needs of leaders in mainstream contexts forces autonomy upon them and respondents suggested that they have developed confidence in acting upon their own initiatives. There is certainly an established history of invention and innovation in the specialist sector and colleagues have extensive experience of evaluating and adapting guidance that is usually aimed essentially at mainstream schools. Developing creative interpretations of requirements and taking risks as leaders in order to secure the relevance of new initiatives to pupils' individual needs has produced a generation of leaders who have become confident decision makers and who are used to resolving challenging issues both within their own sector and across agency boundaries.

**The challenges that remain**

This paper set out to explore the nature of the contribution that those with experience of specialist provision and, in particular, of leadership in specialist contexts, can make to the development of inclusive policies and practices. The evidence thus far (see Sebba and Sachdev, 1997, for example) indicates that leadership for inclusion needs, among other things, to:

- ☐ emphasise collaboration and teamwork
- ☐ move away from hierarchical approaches and develop leadership capacity at a range of levels including:
  - headteachers and deputies promoting the development of the whole school community
  - teachers leading and facilitating the work of teams of other professionals, including learning support staff
  - professionals from other agencies and parents, carers and family members entering into partnerships with school staff and taking the lead in many initiatives
  - pupils and students learning about leadership in direct ways by taking active roles in leading the work of schools

The views of members of the Eastern Region Network, as outlined above, provide only self-reported data drawn from a small group of headteachers in one region, but they do begin to suggest that leaders who work in specialist settings may have established understandings and developing expertise that match many of these demands. Leadership in specialist contexts could be said to be:

- ☐ collaborative and co-operative in ethos
- ☐ focused on developments that are collegiate while retaining the capacity to be highly autonomous
- ☐ confident, creative and innovative in response to externally generated pressures
- ☐ flexible, versatile and eager to engage with and solve problems
- ☐ focused on addressing individual priorities for learning while securing a wide diversity of educational and 'whole person' outcomes
- ☐ distributed widely among members of the school community
- ☐ focused on transformation, particularly through emancipation and empowerment for learners
- ☐ able to meet the challenge of taking on roles outside and beyond school, providing leadership in the community and across agency boundaries

In closing this paper, I would like to propose that the future development of inclusive practice needs to take full account of, and make meaningful use of, the expertise of the specialist sector. In particular, colleagues with experience of leadership in specialist settings have a great deal to offer if we accept, with the DfES (2001b), that inclusion should be operationalised in ways that incorporate specialism. While we may be confident about the importance of these propositions, many challenges and many questions remain, for example:

- ☐ What are the significant characteristics of the expertise of leaders in specialist settings?
- ☐ What demands will be made of leaders in more inclusive settings in the future?
- ☐ What issues, opportunities and challenges emerge from a consideration of the relationships between inclusion, school improvement and the role of the specialist sector?
- ☐ In the future what role(s) will specialist provision have in a more inclusive education system?

We need to discuss these issues further and, more importantly, we need to gather detailed accounts of policies and practices in order to exemplify the contributions that specialist staff, specialist provision and specialist leaders can make to a more inclusive education system in future.

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