National College for School Leadership

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Research Associate Report

Joy Beaney, Assistant Headteacher, Torfield School, East Sussex

Reaching out, reaching in

Implications for leaders of mainstream schools and their support service providers in supporting children with an autistic spectrum disorder

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Rationale for the research

The National Autistic Society (Batten et al 2006: 13) estimates that there are now one in 110 children with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) in our schools. With this increase it is likely that many mainstream schools will be looking to provide positive and appropriate inclusion for these pupils, frequently in conjunction with specialist support services.

The starting point for this study was to personally gain a greater insight into the elements necessary to enable children with ASD to reach their full potential in mainstream schools. I set out to explore the implications of this on leadership, from the point of view of the leader of a support service working with children in mainstream schools. As the study developed I began to consider the links made between the leader in mainstream schools and the support service leader and how this impacted on the success of the intervention.

The report looks at the nature of inclusion and a background to the national perspective. It considers interventions and strategies used to support children with ASD, how this support is provided in different areas and the models of working. Through investigating these areas I have put together some points for leaders to consider when supporting these children.

I hope that this study, in both summary and full versions, will be of interest to school leaders in both special and mainstream schools as a starting point for reflecting on existing practice, to promote discussion on their future leadership roles and to gain practical ideas for supporting children with ASD. The points raised may also prove of value to any collaborative working.

Context of the study

The focus of my research was to identify:

- the key features of a successful inclusion support service for children with ASD in mainstream schools. I looked at a wide range of models of services nationally and their impact on the successful inclusion of children in mainstream schools;
- the leadership practices applied within these contexts to ensure effectiveness.

Specifically the research set out to establish answers to the following:

- What were the personal qualities and skills needed for the successful leadership of a service to support children with ASD?
- Which interventions were most successful and why?
- What models of support were available?
- What were the barriers to inclusion?
- In what ways did leaders feel their work made a difference to the successful inclusion of children with ASD in the mainstream school?

Methodology

My research encompassed providers of inclusion support services from maintained special schools, independent special schools, resource bases within mainstream schools and support services provided centrally by local authorities.

The report was written as a result of undertaking a range of activities:

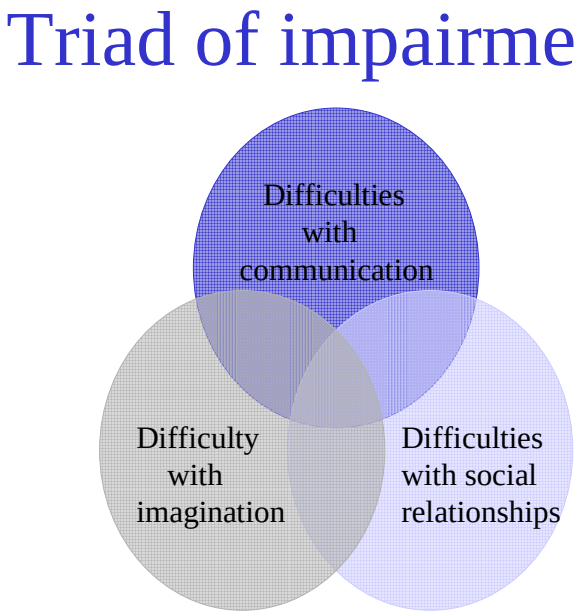
- a literature review
- interviews with headteachers and leaders of inclusion support services
- email conversations with professionals
- discussions with parents
- discussions with headteachers, special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) and staff of mainstream schools
- data provided by Ofsted reports and external accreditation
- attendance at conferences
- discussion with the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) research associates and attendance at NCSL seminars.

Autistic spectrum disorder and its impact on learning

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines autism as being “characterised by complete self-absorption and a reduced ability to respond to or communicate with the outside world”.

Leo Kanner described the condition in 1943. He believed that autism resulted from problems occurring in the developing brain.

To have a diagnosis of autism the child must have difficulties in all three of the following areas:



Everyone is different and the way autism affects the individual is variable so the term ‘autistic spectrum disorder’ is often used to describe the condition. This is commonly abbreviated to ASD.

ASD has been defined by The National Autistic Society on their website as:

> … a complex lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates and relates to people around them. The autistic spectrum includes syndromes described by [both] Kanner and Wing but is wider than these two subgroups. Many people have a mixture of features from these two syndromes but do not fit neatly into either. The whole spectrum is defined by the presence of impairments affecting social interaction, communication and imagination, known as the triad of impairments. This is always accompanied by a narrow repetitive range of activities.

Children with ASD often exhibit unusual aspects of thought and behaviour that may cause major problems for them in the mainstream classroom. However, some of these characteristics can be strengths and understanding these would help staff to offer a suitable approach to teaching the child with ASD.

Some children in mainstream schools may have a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome. Hans Asperger first described this condition in 1944 but his work was not published in England until 1991. Asperger's Syndrome is often associated with the more able students on the spectrum. These students are likely to be more verbal and want to socialise. Children who fall into this category are likely to be able to achieve well academically, especially in more formal, less creative subjects, for example, Science. Further exploration of how ASD manifests itself in terms of behaviours can be found in Appendix A.

National perspective

Defining inclusion

The term *integration* was first used in the Warnock Report (DES 1978) and this referred to a concept of children with special educational needs (SEN) being fitted into the education system that existed in the school. Over the years this concept began to alter to the idea of education changing so that it encompassed all children and the term *inclusion* began to be used more frequently.

> Inclusive education is a process involving restructuring of the curriculum and classroom organisation. This distinguishes it from integration which focuses on the placement of an individual or group having to adapt to what the school is able to offer. (Barnard et al 2000: 6)

There has been no agreed national definition for the term 'inclusion' and this has caused confusion over the years. The word 'inclusion' can evoke strong reactions as people have associated it with policies where schools feel they have been forced to take children that they are not adequately prepared to cope with, where situations have broken down and children have been excluded from schools and where staff have not felt they have adequate resources or provision. There are sometimes two opposing opinions on the desirability of inclusion expressed. Some educationalists feel it is the child's human right to be educated in mainstream schools and others feel children with a high level of SEN should be in specialist provision. Between these two opposing views is a spectrum of opinion.

Rustemier (2002: 6) expresses the view that inclusion is not simply about educational placement:

> A child can be physically included in a group by sharing location, but socially, emotionally and intellectually excluded by being unable to participate in an activity and in the learning that is occurring.

In 2004 the government set out its vision for special education needs in *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES 2004: 25), describing inclusion as:

> … about much more than the type of school that children attend: it is about the quality of their experience, how they are helped to learn, achieve and participate fully in the life of the school.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) report on *Special Educational Needs* (2006) says in a written memorandum from the DfES that future strategy will focus on three goals, "personalisation, inclusion and partnership" (2006: 25), and that future strategy will be based on "a flexible continuum of provision".

With the inclusion agenda schools have been coping with pupils with more complex and diverse SEN than in the past. As children with a diagnosis of ASD includes children that are very able through to those that are non-verbal and with severe learning difficulties, The National Autistic Society (Batten et al, 2006: 3) recommends:

> … that every child with autism has local access to a diverse range of mainstream and specialist educational provision, including autism specific resource bases attached to mainstream schools, special schools and specialist outreach support.

Background to the development of inclusion support services

The UNESCO *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action* (1994) was an agreement reached by 92 governments to adopt the principle of inclusive education for all. It stated that "every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs". This agreement led to government policy, legislation and guidance promoting inclusion. For special schools the trend towards inclusion led to uncertainty about their future. Some local education authorities (LEAs) closed their special schools and in others changes in the type and the complexity of need displayed by children entering the schools caused uncertainty and changes to curriculum and the approaches used.

This changing role for special schools has continued with the 1997 Green Paper *Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs* (DfES 1997), which showed the government's commitment to the principle of inclusion.

More children with SEN entered mainstream schooling following the SEN and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001, which gave parents a greater right to a mainstream place for their child, emphasising that everything possible should be done to provide a place in a mainstream school if that was the parent's wish.

Many staff in mainstream schools found it difficult to cope with the diverse needs of the children in their classes. The Audit Commission's report, *Special Educational Needs: A Mainstream Issue* (2002), highlighted that

> … children who should be taught in mainstream settings are sometimes turned away and many staff feel ill equipped to meet the wide range of pupil needs in today's classroom.

The National Autistic Society (Barnard et al, 2000) conducted a survey of its members asking the question 'Inclusion and autism: is it working?'. In this survey they recognised that inclusion is often interpreted within a narrow educational context, describing the integration of children with SEN into mainstream schools. They looked at the wider picture of inclusion in society and how it affected their members. They concluded that modifying the environment and training of professionals were essential for success. They stressed that everyone involved with the child needs to support inclusion: "inclusion can not rely on the interest, commitment and enthusiasm of one or two individuals" (2000: 12). They concluded that:

> … it is vital that all people who come into contact with these children and adults should acknowledge their autism and recognise what impact it has on their lives and their ability to learn and live within our society if they are to be fully included. (2000: 13)

Removing Barriers to Achievement (DfES 2004) explains the government's strategy for SEN. It builds on the proposals for the reform of children's services in *Every Child Matters* (2003c) emphasising that all children "wherever they are educated, need to be able to learn, play and develop alongside each other within their local community of schools" (2003c: foreword). The strategy states that all teachers should expect to teach children with SEN. It reaffirms the government's commitment to working in partnership, stating:

> … it is by working together that we can unlock the potential of the many children who may have difficulty learning, but whose chances depend on a good education. (2003c: foreword)

The government's vision described in this strategy outlines a programme of action in four key areas:

- *Early intervention:* ensuring that children who have difficulty learning receive the help they need as soon as possible.
- *Removing barriers to learning:* embedding inclusive practice in schools and early years settings.
- *Raising expectations and achievement:* developing teachers' skills and strategies to meet the needs of children with SEN.
- *Improvements in partnership:* improvements so that parents have confidence that their children's needs will be met.

Support services have been developed to increase staff confidence and promote the successful inclusion of children in mainstream schools.

Every Child Matters (2003c) recognised that schools have varying experience in working with children with SEN and across the country access to specialist expertise and resources varied enormously. It emphasised the need for specialist services to work together in multidisciplinary teams to focus on the needs of the child.

There are differing views on the role special schools should play in the inclusion agenda. Richard Byers, in his paper *Leadership and Inclusion* (2002: 31), proposed that:

> … the future development of inclusive practice needs to take full account of, and make meaningful use of, the expertise of the specialist sector.

Further, the DfES *Special Schools Working Group* report (2003a) states:

> Special schools have a vast wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience which if harnessed, unlocked and effectively utilised by mainstream schools, can help ensure that inclusion is a success.

This report proposed:

- special schools should increasingly cater for the growing population of children with severe and complex needs;
- they should be outward looking centres of expertise and work more collaboratively with mainstream schools.

Removing Barriers to Learning (DfES 2004: 26) agreed with this proposal and wanted to see:

> … special schools providing education for children with the most severe and complex needs and sharing their specialist skills and knowledge to support inclusion in mainstream schools.

However, the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) believes that the government's (2004) SEN strategy's concept of retaining special schools will work against the interests of disabled people. They feel that although the strategy has some positive proposals to promote inclusion, by retaining special schools many heads and teachers will rely on them to admit the children they do not want in mainstream schools.

Baroness Warnock, in *Special Educational Needs: A New Look* (2005), said that inclusion in practice often means that children are physically included but emotionally excluded. She believes that "Inclusion should mean being involved in a common enterprise of learning, rather than necessarily under the same roof". She also suggested that among children for whom mainstream school may be inappropriate are children with

autism, and that it was essential for us to ask the question 'What does their "inclusion" in mainstream amount to?' She called for the government to set up a commission to review SEN.

Lorna Wing, in her opening speech at the 2005 National Autistic Society Conference, expressed her view that children who can benefit from mainstream education should be given every opportunity to attend a mainstream school, but stated that one of her wishes was that education authorities should recognise the need for specialist education for many children with autism. Lorna Wing posed the question 'Why don't we listen to or observe the children themselves and do what they so plainly show is what they want and need?'.

In some LEAs each cluster of schools includes a special school and it is hoped to develop these to become inclusion support centres. Initiatives like this are opening many new possibilities for special schools to contribute to successful inclusion strategies.

Burnett (2005: 5) suggests that:

> Those working within SEN environments would claim to be strong advocates to the right of the child to high quality provision, so who better to drive forward the inclusion agenda, ensuring individual needs are met?

Range of support services

My research drew on data from providers of inclusion support services from maintained special schools, independent special schools, resource bases within mainstream schools and support services provided centrally by LEAs.

The support from these services took a variety of forms and I have described this further in the case studies that follow. They supported children with SEN by all or some of the following: pupil, school and parent advice and support, visits by the outreach team to observe, assess and plan strategies, modelling of interventions, access to the special school for observation and discussion, provision of resources and training.

More special school headteachers are becoming leaders of services as well as leaders of schools. Several of the leaders interviewed described their schools as specialist learning centres, working with mainstream schools. Some headteachers had delegated the running of the school's support service to their deputy, assistant head or had appointed a manager to lead this.

In some special schools the support service was developed by one individual and the outreach work was mainly done by one teacher. Other schools have decided that it is better to involve many staff including teaching assistants and other professionals such as speech and language therapists. The leaders that had gone along this route felt it enabled more staff to be up to date with current practice in mainstream schools and to provide a wide range of expertise. It also enabled them to utilise individual strengths and expertise.

Blamires and Moore (2004: 1) looked at the advantages of support services:

> If schools and early years settings are to be successful in enabling the social participation and academic achievement of all children and young people within their communities, they will need to look beyond the boundaries of their own expertise, and demonstrate a willingness to work with others who have the appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding.

Models of support

For the purposes of this study I have described ‘outreach’ as support given to a mainstream school by the support service through advice, visits to observe, offering of advice on strategies and approaches, demonstration of intervention, and training at the school. ‘Inreach’ offers the mainstream staff the opportunity to visit the special school or support service base for observation, training and loan of resources. It also enabled in a few instances children from mainstream schools to attend the special school or base to use specialist resources. The leaders interviewed offered some or all of the above.

Findings

In the course of my study I found many examples of support services that were working in imaginative ways with mainstream schools. The following four case studies explore the ways that the support services were operating and their models of working. I have chosen these services as case studies because as well as having external recognition for their quality of service they all described an interesting initiative that they considered to be a strength of their service.

Case study 1

The Ifield Smile Centre, Ifield School, Gravesend, Kent

Context

This is a consultation and training centre that supports a cooperative of 39 schools. There is a team of two teachers, a full-time administrator and a team of part-time teaching assistants. The centre emphasises their commitment to a two-way flow of knowledge and expertise between special and mainstream schools. The centre offers conferencing facilities for use by schools, organisations and community groups. They have developed a comprehensive website that enables school staff to liaise with professionals to gain skills and understanding. It also enables the sharing of ideas and good practice. The centre promotes collaborative working partnerships with other agencies.

Support offered

The involvement of the service takes place through a variety of different methods. These include: observation and assessment, bespoke training and INSET, transition planning and support, and family support groups. They have a graduated approach ranging from providing suitable resources to an intensive programme of work undertaken in the mainstream school by a team member. They provide resources to support their work.

Referrals

Referrals for support can be made through the local authority, school-based reviews, SENCOs, educational psychologists, specialist teaching service and shortly cluster-based reviews, pending consultation and training.

Interesting initiative

The centre has developed an innovative resource to support their work. Ofsted praised the way they had developed resources for mainstream schools. They have designed and produced resource boxes that contain a six-week programme of differentiated work and all the resources necessary to carry out the programme. One of the team discusses the child's needs with mainstream staff and then they select a resource box that will support the child. These resources have been very popular with local schools as they have helped children that are functioning at a much lower level than their peers. The resource has enabled the child to follow a suitable programme for their needs but also to be working on the same topic as their peers. The boxes also support social, emotional and friendship skills across the key stages.

Case study 2

Outreach Service, Phoenix School, London

Context

This case study was of an outreach service based at a special school in inner London. The school is an all-age school with children that have significant learning, language and communication difficulties, including autism. The redesignation as a school for pupils with ASD has meant staff have developed their skills in teaching and supporting these children. The school provides an outreach service to children in their borough.

Support offered

The outreach team works alongside mainstream staff, providing them with learning materials and modelling approaches to engage children with ASD in learning activities. The service had clear objectives and planned levels of input. The team has developed an extensive range of support materials that are stored centrally to enable team members to select the appropriate resource to model at the mainstream school.

Ofsted praised the excellent strategies they were providing for individual pupils to help them manage their challenging, autistic-related behaviours and therefore avoid responding to situations in ways that could lead to exclusion from school.

The service offered a wide range of professional development opportunities for staff of local schools. These ranged from sessions covering general topics related to autism to tailor-made training adapted to the needs of a school. Evaluations enabled the service to continuously develop its effectiveness.

There were opportunities for mainstream staff to develop their practical skills by working alongside colleagues in the special school classroom.

Referrals

Referrals to the service are made by schools, the panel and other professionals.

Interesting initiative

One member of the team with an interest and experience of sensory dysfunction and its impact on a child with ASD had developed a programme of activities to integrate sensory approaches into the mainstream class. In this way staff were meeting the child's needs in a proactive rather than reactive way. She was getting teachers to think through problems from a sensory perspective. Some children attended a block of weekly sensory support sessions at the special school and were able to work 1:1 in a therapeutic environment and make use of the specialist facilities at the school. Teaching assistants accompanied the children and attended the sessions at the special school. She felt this was invaluable as seeing and taking part in the session empowered them to implement it back in a mainstream setting.

Case study 3

Inclusion Support Service, Torfield School, Hastings, East Sussex

Context

The school, based in the south of England, caters for children aged from 4 to 11. It provides a specialised learning environment for children with communication, autism and learning difficulties.

The inclusion support team has a manager and a team of three part-time teachers from the school who have all had experience in both mainstream and special school teaching. The service started by offering support to mainstream schools for children with a variety of difficulties but as the demand from mainstream schools for support for children with ASD grew it began to specialise in this area. The team has now grown to include speech and language therapists, and a specialist teaching assistant.

The service has gained recognition for leading practice and been praised for its commitment to action research and professional development.

Support offered

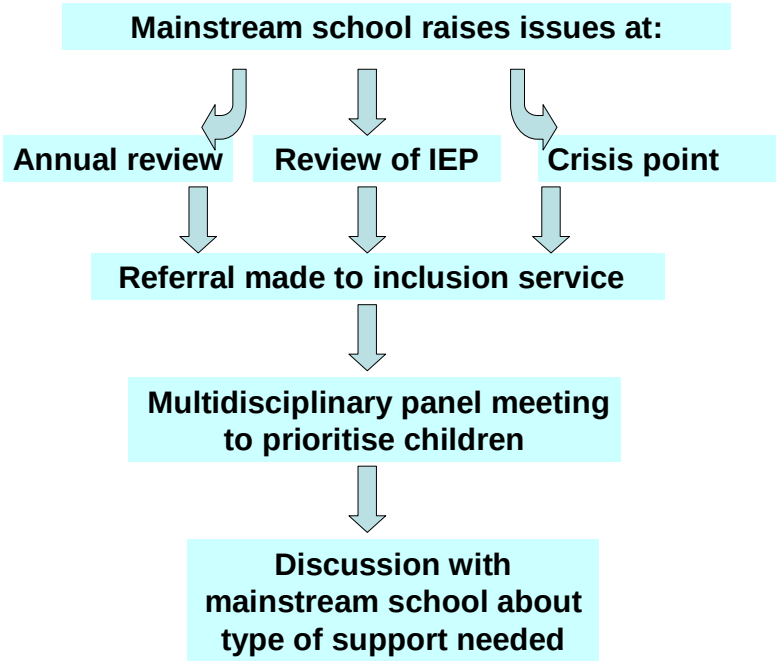
The service provides an outreach programme to mainstream schools that enables the successful inclusion of children with an ASD.

Support varies from advice to SENCOs, training for individuals or whole-school training and visits by the inclusion team to observe and assess a child's needs. The team offer flexible and practical advice and support to increase teachers' confidence and skills. The team has produced resource materials and information leaflets. Mainstream staff are able to visit the special school to observe lessons and see effective strategies and specialist interventions demonstrated. The Inclusion Service offers a termly open afternoon to mainstream staff which is a forum for discussing concerns and exploring solutions.

Mainstream schools are asked to complete an evaluation of the support they received and the impact it had on the school's ability to work with the child. The evaluation of these feed into the development plan for the service.

Referrals

When the service was first set up referrals for direct input came from the education authority and the support was given to children that had been suspended or were under threat of exclusion. The referral route was changed to allow earlier intervention and schools were allowed to refer children that they had concerns about.

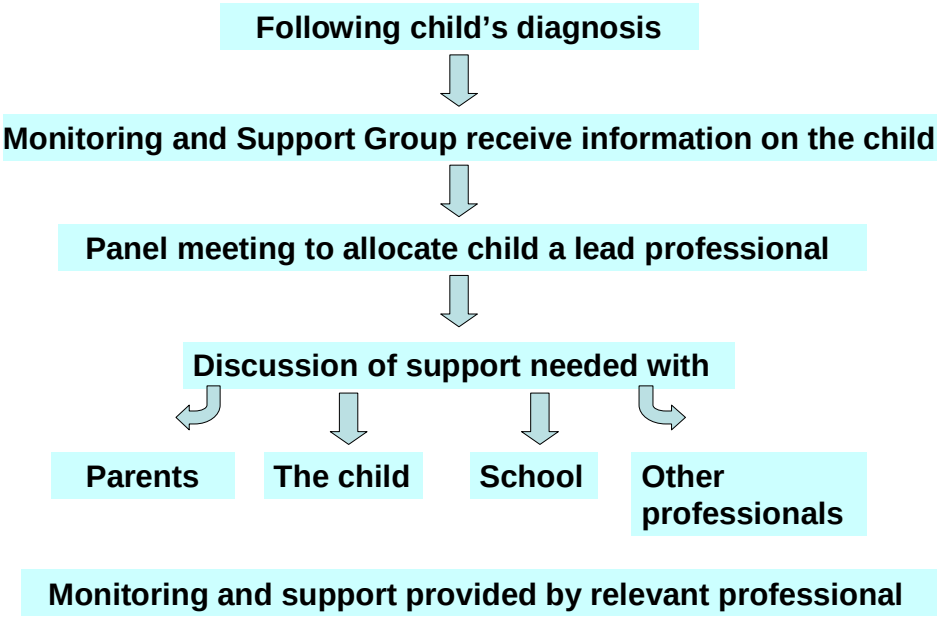


note IEP stands for individual education plan

Interesting initiative

A recent initiative across the county is to track children from diagnosis. Children without a diagnosis are referred as before.

A monitoring and support group has been set up containing professionals from different disciplines including representatives from Speech and Language Therapy, Educational Psychology, Occupational Therapy, Paediatrics, the Early Years Service and the Inclusion Support Service. This panel meets to prioritise cases and to decide on the support that can be offered. The development of this group aims to track children from diagnosis and therefore offer early intervention if necessary. Each child with a diagnosis of ASD will have a lead professional who will be responsible for monitoring progress by contacting parents and the school and triggering support from other professionals if needed.



Case study 4

Outreach Service, Linden Bridge School, Surrey

Context

The service provides support for mainstream schools in the eastern part of the county. The team consists of one full-time and one part-time teacher. The team is based at a special school and staff have experience of both mainstream and special school teaching. Although their roles are predominately outreach they still spend some time teaching within school 'to keep teaching skills up to date'.

Support offered

The outreach teacher usually observes the child with ASD in the mainstream class. They are then able to offer support to include the child more fully in the class, by exploring ways in which the curriculum can be adapted, by offering advice on understanding behaviour issues, structured teaching, transition and developing other pupils' understanding of autism. A direct intervention with pupils involves running after-school social skills groups.

The outreach team offers training on a range of issues, from a general overview of autism to an insight into specific intervention, such as TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children).

Referrals

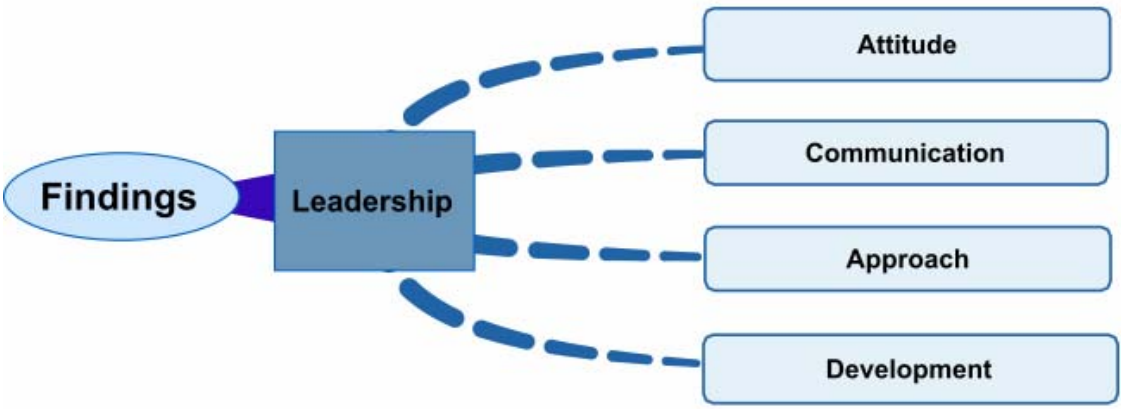
Referrals to the service are made by class teachers, SENCOs, educational psychologists and health professionals.

Interesting initiative

The service believes in the importance of partnership with parents and will do occasional home visits to support parents if needed. Difficulties experienced by parents are discussed and strategies suggested. The team are involved in running The National Autistic Society's 'Earlybird' programme. The course is a three-month programme that aims to help parents understand ASD, develop their child's communication skills and apply strategies to manage their child's behaviour. In addition, the outreach teachers are also involved in The National Autistic Society's new 'Earlybird Plus' training programme for parents, together with school staff of children aged 5–8.

Leadership

The findings related to leadership can be grouped under the following headings.



Attitude

Vision: those interviewed felt their most successful work was done when there was a shared vision between the support service and all stakeholders. They believed it was essential that they had a clear vision and were able to inspire others. Several heads described their approach of having informal conversations in which they introduced ideas and then let staff mull on them and wait for them to come back with suggestions to take an idea further and build on it.

One head of a special school felt that the most important feature of a strong leader was the ability to take people with them:

> "… a leader can take people from a to b without any problem at all but I think a strong leader has to take people who often do not want to go to where they should be."

She described how important it was to be able to give people the confidence to attempt strategies and approaches that they had previously not used.

Commitment: all of the leaders interviewed emphasised their commitment to inclusion and felt it was not enough for them to be committed to inclusion in isolation. They stressed that they felt they were a key factor in influencing the attitudes of others. Some emphasised that it needed a senior management team, governors, teaching staff, support staff, in fact everyone involved with the child to have the same commitment. This is confirmed in the government's strategy *Removing Barriers to Learning* (DfES 2004) that describes effective inclusion as relying on more than specialist skills and resources but also needing a positive attitude and greater responsiveness to individual needs and most importantly a willingness for all staff to play their part.

All the leaders interviewed felt it was important to acknowledge diversity, whereas some stressed that you had to go one step further and celebrate diversity. One head in emphasising this felt it was important to celebrate that every child was unique and if we wanted to bring about an understanding of difference and tolerance of others in our society it was important that this was first established in school.

Communication

Building the confidence of staff in mainstream schools was considered an important element of the role of the leader of a support service:

> "Give confidence – teachers flourish when they know they are doing well."

This quote was echoed by all the leaders interviewed.

Burnett (2005: 3) concurs with this view in his statement:

> … many staff will feel threatened and challenged by crisis, and therefore the really skilful leader ensures that the majority of staff feel supported and do not see issues arising as crisis but are able to manage problems successfully.

Leaders also need to be able to empower their own staff and give them the confidence to go into a mainstream school to support others. Training was considered vital for achieving this – both a comprehensive knowledge base about autism but also training to develop interpersonal skills.

Several leaders felt training in consultancy skills had resulted in a positive effect on their staff's confidence to work in mainstream schools. Mentoring of staff was also mentioned as an important element of the role of the leader to build up the team member's expertise level.

One head of a special school described how mainstream staff in his area had appeared wary of his children and it was only through working with them and encouraging links with other schools that he had broken down the barriers. He described the reaction mainstream staff used to have when they visited his special school:

> "Critical thing is getting people in – people ponder at the door – they didn't have any knowledge of what it was like in a special school. We had to break down barriers – they needed to realise that they are just kids with special needs. When trust was gained people worked together."

He described how over the years his involvement with other schools had developed so that now they worked in partnership with other schools in his area, sharing training days, working on shared projects such as drama days and art festivals. Staff were given the opportunity to swap classes and gain experience in each other's schools.

> "It is very satisfying to see staff with the confidence to innovate and to have the skills and support they need to meet the needs of all the children in the class."
>
> "… we are able to help them plan confidently to include children with increasingly complex needs." (leaders of support services)

The leaders interviewed also emphasised the importance of communication. Being able to negotiate and mediate in situations where participants are often feeling under pressure and in need of support was considered a vital skill. Leaders felt it important to establish a 'culture of trust'.

When asked how they developed this culture of trust they cited:

- growing a reputation in their field for developing the support that was required to suit the situation;
- having empathy for the situation;
- having a body of expertise so that they could offer solutions;
- the ability to communicate knowledge and strategies.

Many leaders were involved in meetings that required such skills, as their quotes below illustrate:

> "You need exceptionally good communication skills – you have to be able to help the client identify what the issue truly is. Sometimes the client is the local authority and they come to us with a problem. It's about sitting down and seeing what the issues really are and assessing the problem. You have to have an ability to negotiate with the staff and the client what the actual practicalities and what the support is going to look like."
>
> "Ability to communicate to mainstream staff the needs of the person with autism."
>
> "… you need to be able to cope with conflict situations and resolve issues in a diplomatic way."

The skill of being able to listen to problems was also considered an important element of the support services' success:

> "Really listen – so that you are not providing something that they have already had or haven't got the resources to implement."
>
> "… be willing to be a 'sounding board'."

Leaders mentioned that "just being there" and facilitating discussions that allowed for bouncing ideas around, mind mapping and sharing ideas was a valuable part of the partnership

It was felt that the external viewpoint enabled the leader to be empathetic but also allowed clarity because they are outside the situation and not emotionally involved. One leader explained that sometimes concerned parents responded more positively to the school's provision if the external service had been able to reassure them that all was going well and that strategies were in place to support their child.

Approach

Innovation: Burnett (2003: 1) states:

> I believe those of us working in special education have a responsibility not just to sit back and wait for the inclusion agenda, or other changes, to impact on us but to be at the forefront of the changes.

Leaders interviewed described innovative approaches that they were suggesting in their partnerships with mainstream schools.

They were adept at developing creative approaches to problems through 'seeing things differently'. Specialised approaches that were perhaps unknown to mainstream staff were modelled and implemented. Several leaders mentioned, for example, the increased use of visuals in mainstream schools. What was once an approach confined to the specialised environment of a special school was now being seen more frequently in mainstream classrooms. As mainstream staff gained in experience, schools were using visual symbols to support the routines of the day as a whole-school approach. Leaders were encouraging approaches that they knew worked in one setting and suggesting it was tried in another.

Service leaders were also not averse to taking a risk. Many of the situations they were dealing with involved children that had reached crisis point and were at risk of exclusion. In those situations many of the leaders described looking at a situation and trying to consider it from all points of view and coming up with an approach that was not the 'norm'. One head of a special school described his idea of offering his facilities to mainstream children. He had just had a multisensory room fitted and was planning for groups of mainstream children who would benefit from this facility to visit the school with their teaching assistant and to work alongside his staff. This would also have the added benefit of providing training to the mainstream staff.

Partnership: leaders of support services based at special schools emphasised the benefits of partnership working for both mainstream children and the children in their own schools. Leaders recognised their role in developing partnerships that were mutually beneficial and incorporated the sharing of good practice. It was stressed that the skill was in developing the confidence of all involved with the child.

> "… it's about having people on board – our best work is when we work with the team rather than just with the teacher."

Some schools were combining for training and INSET days, others were offering the opportunity for joint working between schools. In some examples, staff from mainstream schools were invited into the special school to observe good practice and the modelling of strategies. Leaders of special schools felt the gains were not one-sided and that the opportunity for their staff to join mainstream colleagues in their schools led to an increased knowledge of curriculum and government initiatives. One head of a mainstream school concurred with this view and said her staff had benefited from joint training as it had helped them personalise children's learning more through an increased focus on individuals in their planning.

Working with parents and outside agencies was cited as another important area.

Leaders described how they were considering ways of working together.

One service gave as an example a speech therapist and a service provider doing a joint visit and assessment and how this led to a joint plan of support for the child. They considered that joint working between the separate organisations had led to a more comprehensive and consistent package of support for the child.

Other support services had also found joint working to be beneficial and were developing their own multidisciplinary teams to include teachers, support workers and speech therapists. Some services were also forging links with occupational therapists and other therapeutic services.

Some authorities have developed clusters of schools that include their local special school. One leader of a mainstream school described involvement between the schools and how working with the leader of the support service that came from the special school had enabled the setting up of opportunities for moderation and the increased confidence of staff with using p level assessments.

> "… be approachable, be professional."
>
> "… we build up trust and that gives a good working relationships."
>
> "… the skills to work with other people that's the important bit." (leaders of support services)

Organisation: leaders felt it important to have good organisational skills to both manage workload and staffing. Some of the leaders interviewed felt under pressure juggling their workload to encompass their different responsibilities. Some said the additional complexity of organising staffing for outreach work in mainstream schools was not recognised. There were several elements to this. It involved the timetabling for staff that had a teaching commitment in the special school and also played a role in the outreach team. This was also complicated by the need to employ the most suitable worker in a particular situation.

> "I think you need to have the organisational and the practical skills to be able to make sure that the expertise in the team of people within the service and resources are deployed effectively." (leader, support service)

It was emphasised by most of those interviewed that there needed to be a team-based approach, with the leader having distributed roles and responsibilities to each team member so that everyone felt "we know our role and we know what to do". Those leaders felt this was the only way to be sustainable.

Flexibility: all leaders interviewed stressed the importance of flexibility and the ability to change and adapt their provision to suit the individual child's needs, matching provision to context.

> "'You need to be flexible, need to be able to communicate and find out what are the core needs to put in a package tailored to the individual." (leader, support service)

This was illustrated very clearly by the range of interventions used by leaders and the ways they used their expertise and facilities to support children.

Collaboration and distribution: leading in isolation was mentioned as not being desirable and detrimental to the sustainability of the service leader's work. They needed to acknowledge the limit of their personal capacity and to seek collaborative solutions. Distributing leadership, including developing people's skills in the team to become

'experts' in particular fields, was described as a long-term strategy for many of the services.

Development

Strategy: all the leaders of services interviewed had considered strategic development. With more children with autism being diagnosed and an increase in the demand for their services they all felt it was vital to be looking for more ways to work with mainstream schools. They were considering how they were going to achieve this if children with autism were going to be successfully educated in the environment best suited to their needs. The leaders that described good support from their local children's services and considered their funding was secure seemed to have well developed strategic plans.

Leaders were enthusiastic about their future plans. None of them seemed complacent about their current position with all of them describing initiatives they were planning to implement. In developing future strategy, leaders cited the use of both formal meetings with their team to discuss ideas and developments as well as informal conversations or strategic discussions. One leader described how, through reflecting on existing practice, new ideas 'took on a life of their own', and how he encouraged staff to take forward initiatives. He felt this had led to a more motivated staff and was building strategic capability. Some leaders explicitly mentioned the importance of giving people opportunities to develop their part in the leadership of a service.

Self-evaluation: the leaders interviewed said they were constantly evaluating to ensure the provision they were offering matched the child's needs. They needed to balance need while considering whether this was within the capacity of their service provision. They had to evaluate this both from the point of view of staffing – who was the most suitable and best qualified person to provide support – and finance – how much time could be offered to the school within the constraints of the budget.

Problem solving: the leaders interviewed agreed that it was an essential skill to be able to problem solve some very complex issues. They felt they needed to be able to assess people and situations and work together to find a solution, as their comments below reflect:

> "My inclusion team needs to be good at problem solving. They have to identify the problem, understand the issues and come up with a range of solutions."
>
> "You have got to make a judgement of which skills will suit which situation so x teacher may not be the best teacher to go into y situation. It has to be balanced – you need to have the wider picture and use your staff's expertise effectively."
>
> "Be able to see through complex issues."
>
> "Be able to advise on approaches and when necessary justify the use of specialist interventions."

Leithwood et al (1999) agree with this, suggesting that all schools will have to develop a greater capacity for collective problem solving and be able to respond to a wider range of pupils.

Professional development: all the leaders interviewed placed a high value on continual professional development (CPD) for themselves and their staff. Those that were service providers felt it was an important part of their role to ensure their staff developed skills in order to help others respond effectively to children with SEN.

Professional development involved very specialised training and many staff had to travel outside their own area to gain places on the courses they needed to advance their skills.

One leader described herself as the "lead learner" and felt it was critical to keep abreast of current research findings. Leaders stressed the importance of attending national and international conferences on autism in order to hear the most eminent speakers in their field. The National Autistic Society's website was also mentioned as an invaluable source of information and an easy way to access the latest research and information.

One leader of a support service stated that

> "We are able to give advice and support based on our specialist knowledge."

Many of these leaders felt it was their role to be at the forefront of research. Some leaders encouraged their staff to participate in research activities and fed this into their development plan. Several stated that this raised the profile of their school or support service.

> "We have staff highly qualified and skilled to deliver the expertise."

> "Mainstream schools want experts in the field. They have the expertise in the curriculum and maybe 2% of children in their schools have really significant needs. It is these children that we can support."

Most of the leaders of mainstream schools emphasised the importance of whole-school training by the support service. Training that involved all the staff was considered to be most beneficial enabling a consistent approach to support the child. Although some mainstream leaders felt it was important for them to keep up to date with issues related to autism, they found it difficult to dedicate the time to training all their staff when government initiatives also required whole-school training.

Range of interventions

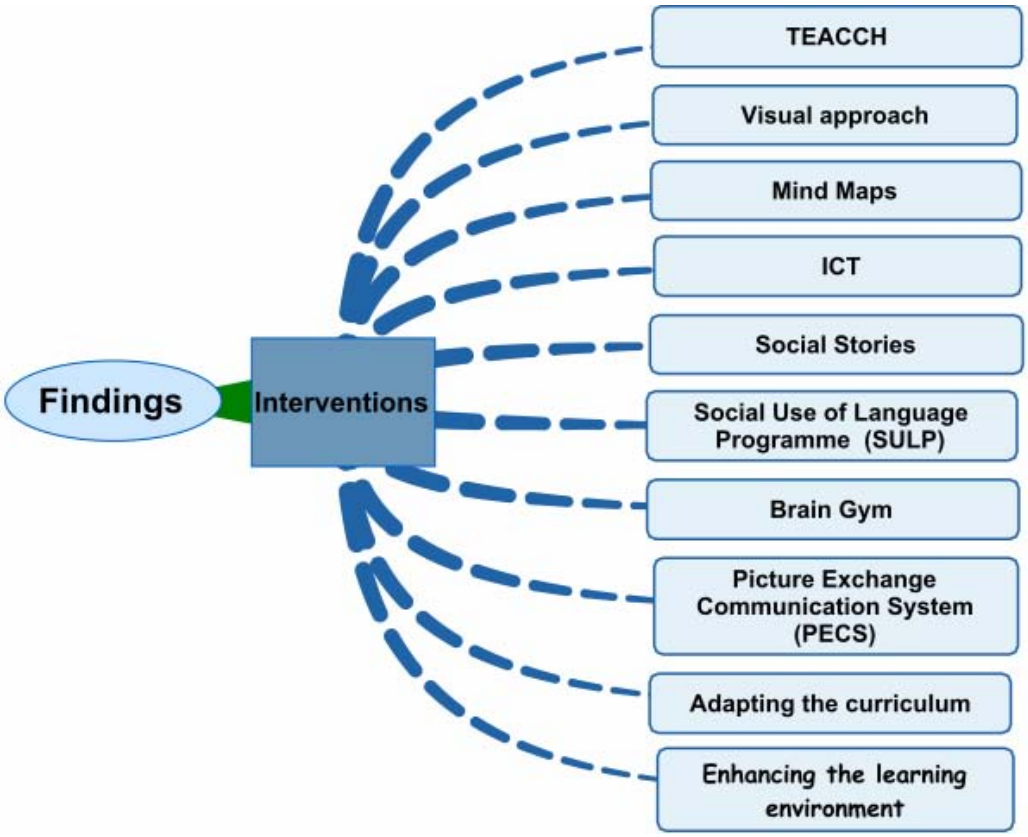
All those interviewed promoted the use of an eclectic approach, choosing the best from a range of diverse strategies dependent on the situation rather than rely on a particular intervention.

> "It's the old adage 'if they can't learn the way that you teach them you teach them the way that they learn'. Some teachers have good knowledge but not necessarily experience of working with diverse groups of children, and they don't consider their learning style." (headteacher, special school)

> "We are very eclectic in our approach. Each case is radically different, it's tailored towards each individual." (headteacher, special school)

> "We have got experienced staff, offering practical advice to schools. I think many schools can explore the theoretical things behind inclusion. There is a plethora of information written about inclusion but in terms of practicalities our staff have the experience to go in to schools – very quickly assess pupil need and empathise with the staff in the school as to the difficulties they may be experiencing. We are able to meet a range of needs, by a range of strategies, in a range of situations." (headteacher, special school)

Some of the strategies mentioned by leaders as being particularly beneficial for helping children to access learning were as follows.



TEACCH *(Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children)*

This was developed in the early 1970s by Eric Schopler in North Carolina and is now the most widely recognised programme for people with autism. It focuses on the individual and develops a programme around their skills, interests and needs, developing strengths and interests rather than concentrating on deficits. Structured teaching is a strategy developed to teach children with autism in a classroom setting. It is central to the TEACCH programme. The strategy focuses on the child's visual skills and reliance on routines. It is a system for organising the classroom, developing appropriate activities, and helping children with autism to understand what is expected of them and how to function effectively.

Most of the people interviewed mentioned this approach as being highly successful. One leader described how helping the staff working with the child to focus on the child's strengths had made them appreciate the child's potential and this in turn had led to more appropriate targets on the child's individual education plan and resulted in an improvement in behaviour.

Using a visual approach

Temple Grandin, who has autism, says:

> I think in pictures. Words are like a second language to me. I translate both spoken and written words into full colour movies, complete with sound, which runs like a VCR tape in

> my head. When somebody speaks to me, his words are instantly translated into pictures. (Grandin 1996: 19)

Although not all people with autism are such highly visual thinkers research suggests that many children with autism have good visual memories. Using a visual approach is vital for enabling the child to access the most from a lesson. Introducing visuals to support organisation can take the form of visual timetables that enable children to follow the structure of the day without relying on verbal instructions or social cues. It enables the child to have a point of continual reference to reduce anxiety and give them confidence and security.

The use of symbols appeared to be recommended by most of those interviewed. One headteacher described how her team had produced a visual timetable for one child with ASD in a class and following a dramatic improvement in the child's ability to cope with classroom routines had demonstrated their use at a whole-school staff meeting leading to more widespread use of these throughout the school.

Mind Maps®

These are a way to record and organise knowledge and ideas visually. Mind maps were invented by Tony Buzan. They use a combination of key words, colour and visual images to record everything that can be remembered about a particular topic on a single sheet of paper. They enable the child to have an overview of the topic and how everything fits together. They help the child organise their thoughts and develop understanding.

One service had recommended this approach and the school had taken it on board and were using it with all the children. Staff reported how much the children enjoyed recording their ideas in this way.

Use of ICT

Most children with autism find using the computer motivating and it enables them to learn while reducing the need for social interaction. Many services were promoting the use of ICT and supporting writing with the use of symbols.

Leaders highly recommended the use of ICT both as a motivator and to support the child's work.

Social Stories™

This is an approach invented by Carol Gray that describes social situations and the appropriate behaviour. Social Stories™ are helpful with teaching routines and helping children cope with change. They present social information clearly without the need for social interaction.

One headteacher explained how they had found Social Stories™ enabled the children to cope more effectively with new situations. They were helping staff in mainstream schools write these to prepare children for transition to secondary school.

Social Use of Language Programme (SULP)

This is a series of stories written by Wendy Rinaldi that deal with basic social skills and matters arising from communication difficulties, for example listening and taking messages. Many of those interviewed said their teams were involved with setting up small group sessions that included the child with ASD to support the social use of language. The service provider was modelling the approach and coaching mainstream staff to enable them to continue these group sessions when the support service withdrew.

Brain Gym®

This is an exercise programme that develops the whole brain. The programme was developed by Dr Paul Dennison, working with children in North America. Dr Dennison has done research into the interdependence between physical development, language acquisition and academic achievement.

The exercises retrace the developmental movements that a child makes from birth. Different exercises stimulate different parts of the brain and the activities are intended to make all types of learning easier.

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

This was developed in the United States by Andy Body and Lori Frost. It enables children to express their needs using picture symbols that they can exchange for what they want. This can provide children with an effective and functional method of communication. The children are taught to initiate communication and it is developed to enable children to construct sentences and become more effective communicators.

One teacher in a mainstream reception class described how, through using this approach, a child with ASD in her class was now able to request activities. This had enabled the staff to respond to the child's needs more effectively and reduced the child's frustration. Since the introduction of the approach the child had not displayed any aggressive behaviour.

Adapting the curriculum

Leaders said they were often asked by mainstream schools for advice on adapting the curriculum and the provision of resources to support the work. Their advice was also sought on assessment especially when the child was performing below level one of the national curriculum.

The National Curriculum Statement, "inclusion – providing effective learning opportunities for all pupils" (QCA 2000), provided guidance on planning and teaching the curriculum. It emphasises that teachers should adapt the curriculum to provide all pupils with relevant but suitably challenging work and remove potential barriers to learning. The government recognises that there is still some way to go to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of all children. *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES 2003b) encouraged teachers to have the freedom to be more flexible and to use their professional judgement to decide how they teach.

Cheminais (2003: 4) believes that:

> Good inclusive practice in any school setting is reliant on high quality multi-sensory teaching that facilitates pupils' learning in their preferred learning style.

Heads of special schools felt their staff were able to advise mainstream staff as they have traditionally had an holistic approach and have experience of adapting the curriculum to optimise children's learning. As one leader explained:

> "We lead by 'drip feeding' ideas on multisensory approaches."

The service leaders interviewed felt they were particularly well qualified to respond to an individual's needs and to offer support to others.

The strategy *Removing Barriers to Learning* (DfES 2004) aims to personalise learning for all children, therefore making education more innovative and responsive to the children's diverse needs. The leaders interviewed felt this was essential to the success of the inclusion opportunities for children with ASD. The government believes this would reduce the need for separate SEN structures and processes and raise achievement.

> Seeing diversity as the new reality means that the SEN provisions must recognise that not only must they meet the needs of a wider range of pupils but that they must include a knowledge of individual learning styles and the fact that one curriculum will not meet the needs of all pupils. It is also slowly being recognised that pupils learn in lots of different places and in lots of different ways. The SEN provision of the future will need to ensure they use different strategies and approaches that personalise learning according to the individuals' learning abilities, needs, purposes and preferences. (Burnett 2005: 80)

Enhancing the learning environment

All leaders interviewed thought the environment had an effect on the child's behaviour and ability to learn. Many described the positive effects of a quiet area for the child to work, as many children with ASD can be hypersensitive to sound and cannot cope if the noise levels become too high.

Several leaders recommended individual 'office' areas or workstations within the classroom if there was the space. One service described the setting up of one of these areas and the dramatic improvement in the child's ability to cope within the busy classroom environment.

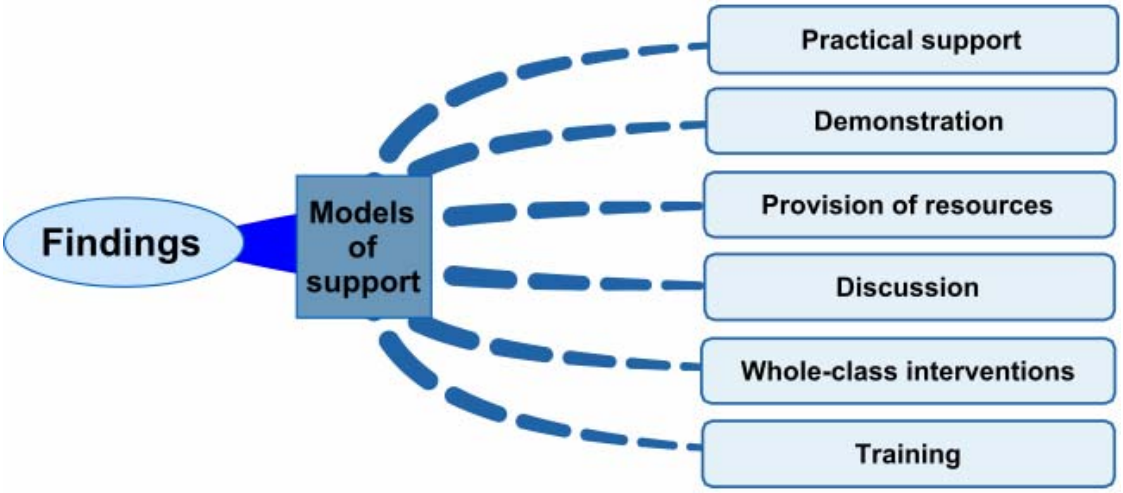
Models of support

In *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003c) it states the government's commitment for all children's services to work together on prevention rather than wait until there is a crisis. Most leaders agreed with this and stressed the importance of having early referrals to their service so that they could offer support before a crisis situation had arisen and the relationship between child and school had broken down.

Henderson (2004: 32) confirms my findings:

> Firstly, the interventions are often crisis led, which results in the guidance being necessarily reactive. In order to develop a proactive culture, with a focus on early intervention strategies, schools must be supported to develop an ethos and framework in which teachers can meet the needs of these pupils with both confidence and competence.

Service leaders categorised the main ways they worked with mainstream staff as follows.



Offering practical support

All leaders emphasised the need for practical strategies. Although many mainstream staff had read about autism their difficulty came when they had to interpret what they had read into strategies they could use to support the child in their class who had ASD.

> "Using practical strategies in real situations – busy teachers, lots of children, big classrooms – teachers need to see things they can put in place very quickly – particularly when you are dealing with mainstream teachers who have a huge amount of experience in educational terms but little experience of working in this particular area." (headteacher, special school)
>
> "Heads want practical help." (leader, support service)

Demonstration

Many thought it was helpful to demonstrate a technique in the mainstream school or to offer the opportunity to see it working in the specialised setting of the special school. Some services had support workers who could work alongside teaching assistants in mainstream schools for a limited time to put in place an intervention. One service described an option offered by the team of working with a small group in the mainstream school. The school encouraged the mainstream school to select a few other children who might benefit from specialist input as well as the target pupil. The programme of work was planned, resourced and delivered by a member of the team. A member of staff from the mainstream school was asked to accompany the group. In this way they increased their knowledge and skills and good practice and resources were shared. When they felt confident with the strategy modelled they were encouraged to run the

group. Several other leaders described similar input and stated how successful this approach was.

The Ofsted report *Inclusion: The Impact of LEA Support and Outreach Services* (2005: 2) stated that the best support "often included coaching for teachers through demonstrating effective strategies".

Leaders of support services run from special schools emphasised the credibility that their staff, who were also practising teachers, had in the eyes of mainstream staff:

> "We demonstrate, show them, make things to get it going." (teacher, support service)

Provision of resources

The provision of resources was recognised as being invaluable for mainstream staff and often ensured the success of an intervention and the probability that the approach would continue when the support service had withdrawn. The development of resource centres that enabled mainstream staff to view and borrow resources were being set up by many services.

Discussion

Factors identified as helpful were the time to talk, reflect and mind map solutions. Some services offered telephone and email support as well as visits to individual schools. A lot of the planned training included opportunities for discussion and workshops:

> "… teachers find it helpful to reflect on their teaching, discuss their concerns." (teacher, support service)
>
> "Our outreach isn't just about hands on it's also about advice and consultancy." (leader, support service)

Whole-class interventions

Interviewees felt that it was important to consider the needs of the whole class rather than just the individual. Approaches that were successful with the whole class were more likely to be implemented and have a lasting effect.

> "If something is good for everybody they are likely to adopt it." (specialist support service worker)

Training

A range of training opportunities for mainstream staff was described by those interviewed but it was felt that the most important factor was the way they tailored their training to the situation:

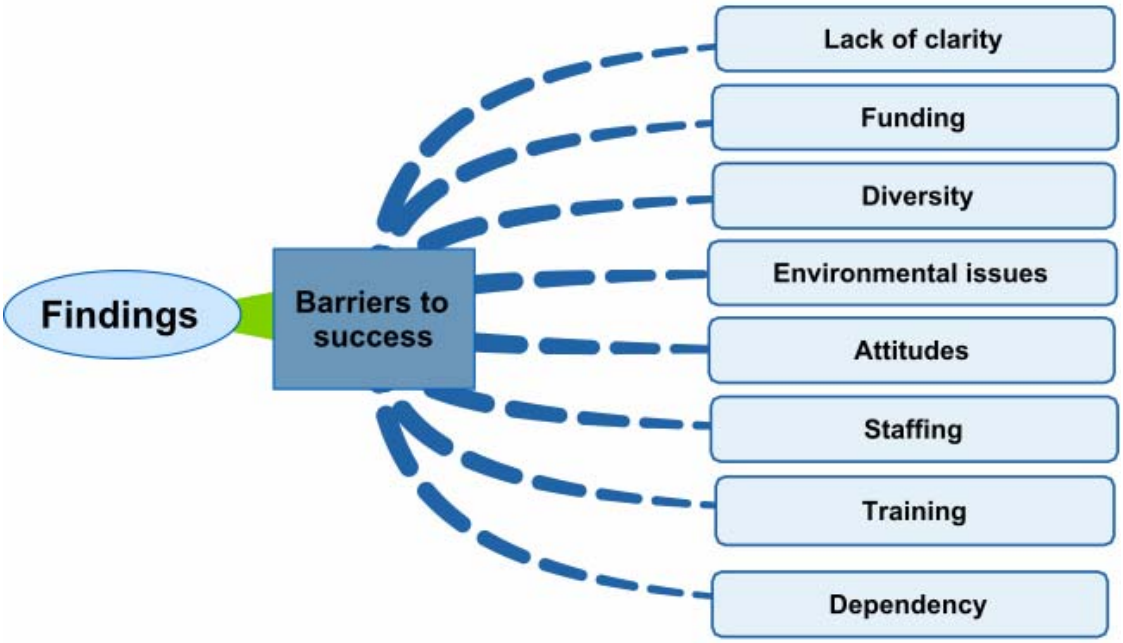
> "Bespoke service – we will tailor it to fit individual school's needs. If the school wants whole-school INSET we will do that or if it's one teacher, one class we can do that."
>
> "… the training we have done in school has been invaluable and that can be seen by the fact that we have had 50 people at a training session and they want more. That comes back to the fact that as practitioners you are practical, you are not theorists and that's the best way to be." (leaders of support services)

Most support services offered a rolling programme of training as well as offering specific training for individual schools. Many of the support services offered training to parents and recommended joint training as being particularly valuable.

Mentioned by several of those interviewed was the high quality training that staff working for the support service had received so that they not only had knowledge of specialist interventions to support children with ASD but had also received consultancy training in order for them to be able to succeed in such a diverse role.

One head of a special school described a very successful project linking with other schools in the London area. Staff worked with a facilitator and undertook projects as part of their CPD, often linking with a mainstream partner. These were written up so that the good practice could be shared. An INSET day was put aside to celebrate staff achievement and for the dissemination of the projects. The head thought a benefit of his staff undertaking school-based research was that the development challenges meant they were more interested in their work, had 'their eye on the ball' and were willing to introduce new things. He explained that many projects took on 'a life of their own' and led to a change of mindset.

Barriers to success



Those interviewed raised a number of issues.

Lack of clarity

In *Leadership and Inclusion* (NCSL 2002: 7) it explains that:

> 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 the lack of policy clarity the challenges facing leaders of special schools to provide direction and momentum are greater and more complex.

This lack of clarity in the role and future of special schools has led, in the view of some of the leaders interviewed, to the limited development of their inclusion work with mainstream schools.

Funding

Some special schools had a lump sum allocated for this work from the local authority, while some local authorities had delegated the money to mainstream schools and these schools had to buy in services. In areas where schools had the delegated funding some leaders identified this as causing difficulties with the coordination and the effective planning of their service.

The majority of support service leaders from special schools said they found it difficult to balance outreach services with existing resources. They felt local authorities did not recognise the full cost of outreach and found they needed additional funding. They also felt that to provide a flexible service and to be able to respond to a school's needs promptly there needed to be a more creative approach to funding.

Many leaders said their funding arrangements were only secure in the short term and this made long-term planning difficult for many services.

> "… the frustration of it is that more is needed so we are almost fooled by our own success. Our inclusion service is spreading but we haven't got the resources we need to expand it."

> "… sometimes you have to say no, we cannot support this child. There will be a great deal of pressure to always say yes because a lot of these children will have a huge range of needs and they will all have been referred for very good reasons. However, you have to make a judgement based on the wider picture and the capacity of the service. I think if you are going to offer a service it has to be a service that operates then and there, not in six months' time."

Several of those interviewed expressed this view and felt frustrated that they were unable to offer what they knew was needed. It was felt that more financial commitment should be available.

Diversity

The number of children with a wide diversity of SEN in mainstream schools has risen and over recent years the skills of mainstream staff have developed, but those children displaying behaviour problems are still often excluded.

Some might perceive the inclusion of these children to be in conflict with the government's agenda to raise standards, although in *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES 2004: 49) the government states that:

> … helping children with SEN to achieve is fundamental to sustaining improvements in schools' performance.

Raising standards has, in the past, often just concentrated on academic achievement but in the light of *Every Child Matters* (2003c) there is the potential for this to be seen

with respect to the five outcomes, enjoying and achieving keeping healthy, keeping safe, achieving economic well-being and making a positive contribution.

Environmental issues

The leaders interviewed agreed with Rustemier (2002: 7) in which she says:

> The task is to recognise that barriers to learning are constructed through interactions in the settings in which children find themselves, and then work to dismantle those barriers.

These comments by support service teachers describe how even small alterations to the environment can make a difference.

> "We work with children who find it difficult to fit into their environment."
>
> "It helps to make slight adaptations to practice – they have their own place that gives them security."
>
> "Simple interventions make a big difference. If a child can't sit on the carpet cross-legged why can't he have a chair? The interventions we suggest are not rocket science but they make a profound difference to success in placement."

Attitudes

Some leaders had encountered negative staff attitudes within mainstream schools. In dealing with these when encountered, all leaders interviewed recognised the importance of their own and their team members' interpersonal skills and how imperative it was for their support team to develop partnerships to break down misunderstandings and barriers.

> "I think there are still schools that come in with the agenda that we don't want this particular child in our school and we are going to find a way of making sure this child goes somewhere else. I think there are still elements of that in some settings and that is normally born out of frustration, disillusionment and fear that they are not doing the right thing." (headteacher, special school)

Staffing

Many of those interviewed expressed that finding staff with the appropriate skill levels was often a problem. From the mainstream school perspective:

> "… support staff change – you work with one and then someone else comes."

From the special school perspective:

> "… one of our difficulties has been to balance the effect of using our staff on outreach without it affecting the children in our special school. This is particularly a problem when we have staff absent through sickness. We don't have enough staff in our classrooms."

Training

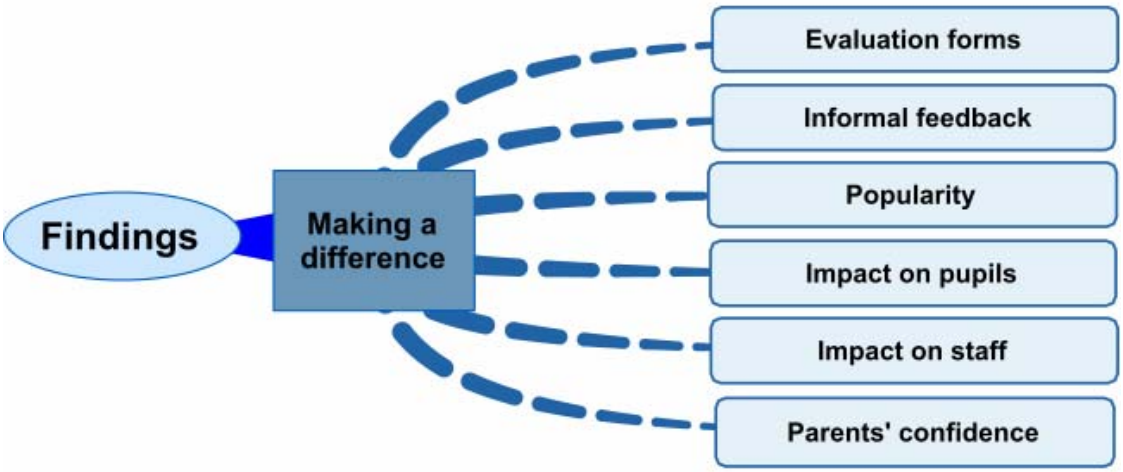
Teachers are not required to have any training in autism. Batten et al (2006: 13) found that even in schools where there were children with autism only 22% of teachers had received any autism training. This lack of training not only for teachers but also for support staff means that many support services need to spend considerable amounts of time on training. One model of training was to invite mainstream staff to link with special schools and share training opportunities. Another service offered 'bespoke' training to individuals and whole-school training on issues identified as being a priority to them.

Most services offered a rolling programme of basic training so that individuals could access support through the year, when it was needed. Many found they could not fulfil the need within existing capacity and courses were often oversubscribed.

Dependency

Several leaders stressed that they had to be aware of schools becoming too dependent on their service supporting the child rather than developing their own expertise. They felt that training and advice on ways of working was more helpful than working with individual children.

Making a difference



All support service leaders interviewed felt their Inclusion Support Service was making a positive difference. Byers (2002: 24) states his belief that:

> 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…. Such outcomes might focus on measures of quality of life that take account of issues like emotional and physical wellbeing as well as academic excellence.

The leaders interviewed agreed with this and judged the success of their support using a wide range of criteria. They cited a number of ways that they gathered evidence of this using a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, for example, excellent Ofsted reports, evaluation forms and responses to questionnaires.

Evaluation forms

Most of the leaders interviewed sent out evaluation forms either at the end of a period of support or at regular times in the year. All of those that sent them out found the comments informed their practice.

> "We have the feedback sheets and the feedback gives you an enormous feeling that we are doing the right thing."

> "We have a 12 week meeting with all stakeholders. We review the package every 12 weeks, assessing what's gone right, what's gone wrong, what could be adapted and basically asking the question – Has there been a change in this person? Considering why the child was referred – it might be the family wasn't managing. Do they now feel they can manage? Is this young person's behaviour easier to manage? Is that due to staff training? Is it due to the physical management plan being implemented?"

Informal feedback

Many leaders cited anecdotal comments to support their evidence:

> "… primary heads speak highly of the service we offer." (leader, support service)

> "It's the 'able' sort of comments – *invaluable*, *usable*, *workable* that have come back from mainstream schools." (headteacher, special school)

> "Predominately looking at all the feedback it is the practicality of the suggestions that have been given that means that these staff are confident to go out and try these ideas. For some of these staff, that's a real challenge in itself because for some of them it means stepping out of the traditional methods of approaching working with children."

Many felt comments like this were a better marker of their success than analysing performance data that was based on academic achievement alone.

Popularity

> "We know we are successful –more people want outreach than we can provide." (leader, support service)

> "We are inundated with requests to support children." (headteacher, special school)

Many in the study had developed their capacity over time and were employing more staff to take on an outreach role. One headteacher described starting as a service to support the local area and now supporting across a wide area of the county.

It emerged from the evidence provided by support services that the support had an impact on children, staff and parents.

Impact on pupils

Leaders of support services emphasised the importance of taking into account the child's progress in social skills as well as academic progress when judging the impact of their work.

> "I think it's largely about young people being in their own community whereas they would normally be in a residential school. It's about getting kids back into the community where they were previously excluded from. We are looking at a very holistic definition of education." (headteacher, special school)

Impact on staff

All heads agreed that, following support, staff had increased confidence:

> "Staff feel empowered to try things." (leader, support service)

One teacher commented in her evaluation form that she completed following support that:

> "… input has been like opening a door to …'s world."

One headteacher of a special school felt he could evaluate how successful their support had been by the fact that they were seeing children being educated in the right place and they had played a part in giving people confidence to say:

> "… we can do this. He is doing fine here." (teacher, mainstream school)

Parents' confidence

Many considered parental confidence in the support the child was receiving essential to the success of any intervention.

> "Our inclusion team plays an integral part in the support children get. It also has benefits as parents see much more of a one-stop shop. They don't see a battle in having to get knowledge or information from lots of different places. They see our inclusion service as coming in to school, supporting everybody who is working with the child to make sure that everything is in place for them to succeed." (headteacher, special school)

> "… it provided me with hope to carry on with my autistic son." (parent, following training session by a support service)

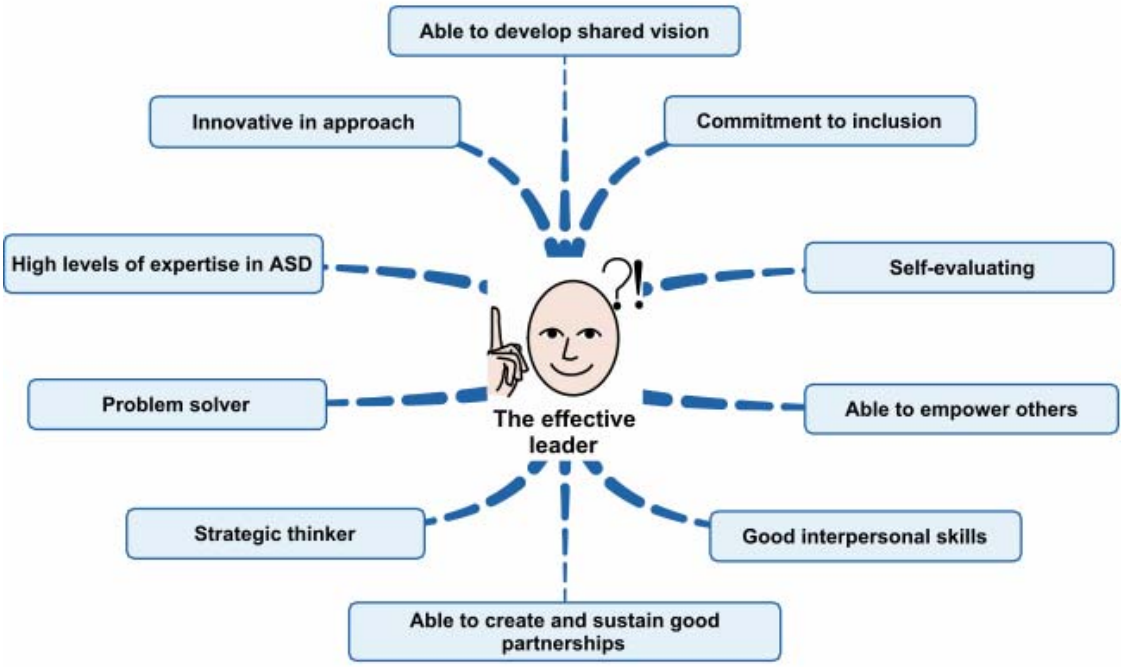
> "It's good for parents and practitioners to come together and to hear each other's views and frustrations." (parent, following joint meeting to discuss strategies to support the child)

Some implications for leadership emerge from these findings.

Conclusions

Implications for leaders of mainstream schools and their support service providers

From the interviews, the following leadership characteristics were identified as central to how effective service leaders conducted their role. However, it is how these are combined with those of others, including mainstream school leaders, that lies at the heart of developing the best partnership-based support for the child with ASD.



This study suggests that there is a leadership implication for both mainstream and the support service provider to generate a *shared vision* in order to support children with ASD. The challenge is for school leaders to find the time to develop this shared understanding of the issues. From this research it emerged that the process involves:

- reflection on current practice
- mind mapping solutions
- analysing and thinking about possible ways forward
- articulating and implementing the agreed strategy.

Communication of that strategy to all stakeholders emerged as one of the keys to successful intervention. My study leads to the conclusion that, as people worked together, they developed a shared understanding of the issues resulting in a shared vision being created. It was also evident that to be successful there needed to be a willingness on the part of the whole school for inclusion to be part of self-evaluation and for approaches to be put in place that would have a positive impact.

Following this study my overriding thought is that the people I interviewed had a passion to make a difference and succeed with the children they were working with and this enthusiasm inspired others. This *commitment to inclusion* was also one of the key findings of the Ofsted report *Inclusion: The Impact of LEA Support and Outreach Services* (2005: 3).

> … in the most effective support services, all staff were thoroughly committed to inclusion and it pervaded all aspects of their work.

My study leads me to believe that the effective leader puts the child at the centre and considers the who, what and where of the situation. From interviews it became apparent that leaders were continually *self-evaluating* and reflecting on practice, asking the questions:

Who can provide the best support for the child?
What does that support look like?
Where is the best environment to achieve this?

To many of the leaders of support services interviewed in my study successful inclusion did not always mean the placement of a child in a mainstream school. Some leaders described successful inclusion experiences undertaken by children attending special units and special schools. This study leads me to suggest that inclusion can be best achieved through having available in each area a variety of settings offering a continuum of provision.

My findings suggest that effective leaders are enablers of staff. There appears to be a dual aspect to this role of building the confidence of others. Leaders of support services need to be able to empower not only mainstream staff but also their own staff to be able to work confidently in the mainstream schools. Establishing a 'culture of trust' emerged as being an important element in the building of this confidence.

The study suggests that leaders of support services often began their role as 'troubleshooters', working with the mainstream school in response to a crisis situation, but that effective leaders developed their role to become enablers of others. By developing knowledge in the partner school this could be translated to another situation and therefore lessen dependency on the support service. Ensuring that this capacity building takes place is an important consideration for the mainstream leader, especially when planning training and its dissemination.

As the study developed and I talked with leaders I was conscious of the need for effective *interpersonal skills* on the part of those leading support services and those leading mainstream schools. I would suggest that those committed to inclusion would need to embrace collaborative working. For leaders of service providers this study has highlighted points for reflection on existing practice. It also provides mainstream leaders with illustrations of ways support could be provided and developed. Dialogue between leaders can play a vital role towards developing partnerships that are mutually beneficial and incorporate the sharing of good practice.

There is evidence to suggest that the logistics of providing a successful support service necessitated the leader developing good organisational skills. This involved developing a team-based approach. Being able to delegate so that each individual had their own roles and responsibilities was one element of this. The effective leader's role is to determine who can provide the best support and the form that support will take.

Distributing leadership by developing people's skills in the team to become 'experts' in particular fields was described as a long-term strategy for many of the services. Leading in isolation was mentioned as being detrimental to the sustainability of the support service provider's work. I suggest that it is important for leaders to acknowledge the limit of their personal capacity and to seek collaborative solutions. The study considered how schools might look towards *developing partnerships*. With more children receiving a diagnosis of ASD (DfES 2003a p26), and the resulting increase in the demand for support services, it is vital to seek collaborative solutions and find ways for partnership working.

Leaders recognised the importance of *strategic thinking*. It emerged that good support from children's services and secure funding for service providers was instrumental in the leaders' ability to develop their strategic plans. Some leaders whose funding was not secure were thinking strategically even though there was uncertainty about their capacity to deliver the service in the future. This was leading to frustration as they knew what they wanted to achieve but were reluctant to commit themselves to employing staff on permanent contracts in case their funding stopped.

From this research it emerged that leaders of support services were interpreters of situations, helping people identify particular triggers for behaviour, looking at situations from different points of view and finding solutions. They were continually seeking out answers and *problem solving*. Mainstream leaders needed to share this 'can-do' culture to remove barriers to learning for children with ASD.

CPD for support service leaders and their staff played a big role in developing their expertise and credibility and this had a knock-on effect on mainstream staff's ability to support children with ASD. Effective leaders of support services should also think about building capacity in the mainstream school to lessen dependency so that they do not need to call on support all the time. This can only be done by developing knowledge in the partner school so that a skill learnt could be translated into another situation. Findings suggest that this has an implication for leaders of mainstream schools as developing a whole-school approach through the training of staff requires a commitment of time.

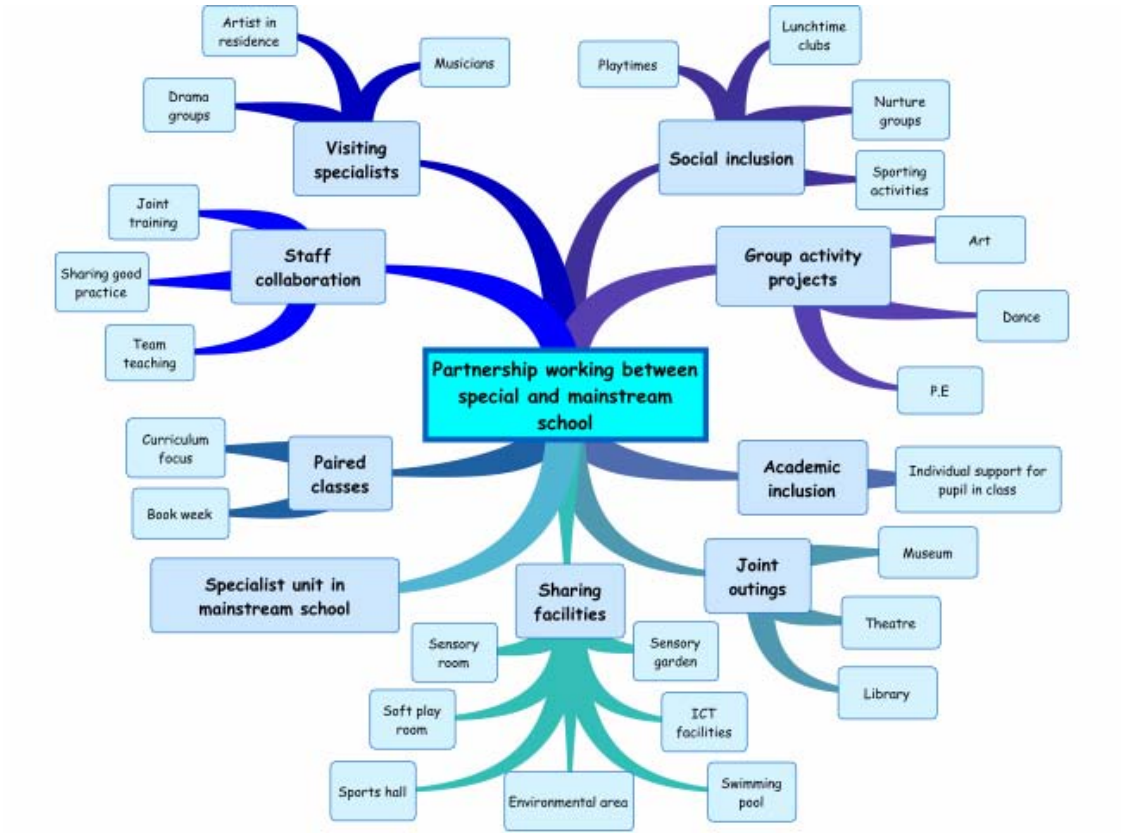
The quote from one service provider as being the "lead learner" was echoed in other interviews and to me summed up the leaders' continual quest for solutions and ways to remove barriers to learning. It appears vital for leaders to have high levels of expertise in ASDs. Training and undertaking research emerged as not only being the route to gaining these high levels of expertise and knowledge of ASDs but also leading to increased motivation and job satisfaction.

My study suggests that *innovative approaches* were often needed to solve problems and remove barriers to achievement and these have been described more fully in the body of the report.

Final words: making a difference

Leaders of both mainstream and support services play a vital role in promoting partnership working. The skills and attributes that were needed for these leaders developing collaborative working to support children with ASD could have implications for any multiagency working.

During the course of the research the leaders interviewed offered the following possible opportunities for successful partnership working between special and mainstream schools.



All those interviewed judged support services to be making a positive difference to the inclusion of children with ASD into mainstream schools, based on a wide range of data, both quantitative and qualitative.

> "Huge difference – the impact for a lot of the children has been a better experience of learning and a better experience of being part of their school community." (headteacher, mainstream primary school)

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Sources of information – interventions

The National Autistic Society
Headquarters
393 City Road
London EC1V 1NG
Tel 020 7833 2299
www.nas.org.uk
The National Autistic Society produces a comprehensive publications catalogue. They also produce some very useful leaflets on Autism and Asperger's Syndrome.

TEACCH
www.teacch.com

Writing with Symbols (computer program)
Widgit software Ltd
www.widgit.com

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
www.pecs.org.uk

Social Stories™
Carol Gray, 2002, *My Social Stories Book*, London, Jessica Kingsley
www.thegraycenter.org

Social Use of Language
Learn Communicate Publications

Wendy Rinaldi
01483 268825
www.wendyrinaldi.com

Brain Gym®
The Educational Kinesiology Foundation
02082 021732
www.braingym.org.uk

Mind Maps®
Tony Buzan, 2002, *How to Mind Map*, London, Thorsons

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Appendix A: ASD behaviours

Problems making and sustaining friendships can be a great source of unhappiness and may lead to depression or an increase in aggressive behaviour. Children with ASD often do not understand the peer group's rules or understand their behaviour. These are particular areas that may cause them to have difficulty 'fitting in' especially when they get older when peer acceptance is so important. This means they can easily become a target for bullying and the school will need to be aware of the students who are particularly at risk. Social skills and behavioural expectations will need to be taught to these children. They may need significant support in social situations, to maintain positive behaviour and with developing organisational skills.

Children with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) may have problems empathising, for example, they often do not realise other people have ideas or thoughts that differ from their own. This can lead to a misunderstanding, as they do not see the need to explain a situation as they think the person already knows what has happened. They are often not aware of people's personal space and may stand too close, which can make others feel uncomfortable or threatened. The student may not pick up meaning from others' body language. They might not realise that someone is getting angry or upset and may just say what they are thinking! Some students may find eye contact difficult and this could result in them being thought of as rude.

The child with ASD is often preoccupied with parts of an object rather than the whole. This is sometimes referred to as central coherence deficit, for example, the child will play with the wheels on a toy car rather than the car itself. This impacts on their learning as the child will have difficulty connecting concepts and will need help to see the whole picture or overview. When reading, many of these children are good at word recognition but picking out relevant parts of a text and getting meaning from it is often an area of difficulty.

Children with ASD have a liking or need for routine and order. This means they are often precise and accurate. The child will often produce very neat, careful work. They often enjoy educational activities that are repetitive and which many students without autism would find 'boring'. They often have an overwhelming need to organise according to their own criteria, for example, the child may enter the classroom and arrange all the items on your desk so that it is tidy! New experiences or changes to routine, however, can be threatening for the child with ASD as this creates uncertainty and leads to anxiety. Children with ASD create their own routines and if something is changed they can become very distressed. It is often only if you interrupt or change how they do something that you realise how dependent they were on that pattern of events for security. They may also have problems coping with the differing behavioural expectations of the many staff they encounter during the day.

The child with autism may be highly knowledgeable about something that interests them and will be happy to spend a long time finding out about the subject. However, interests can become obsessions and they may have difficulty focusing on anything else.

Many people with ASD are very good at rote learning but this expertise at reciting information can mask a lack of understanding about a topic. Some people with autism say they think in pictures and many have good visual memories.

Over-stimulation can be a major cause of behaviour problems. The child may be very sensitive to stimuli that we do not even notice, for example, the sound of a heater

clicking on. Children with ASD can be hypersensitive, for example, to textures and may refuse to wear certain items of clothing as it is painful to them. Over-stimulation could stem from overload. This can result in the child being very frightened of objects or situations that to us do not appear threatening, for example, they may refuse to enter the toilets in case the hand dryer makes a noise. If a child is upset we are apt to increase stimulation by approaching them, talking to them, giving them comfort by touching them. For the child with ASD this can increase their anxiety. For a variety of reasons, anxiety can build up and up during the day and then the student loses control and can become upset, withdrawn or aggressive.