# Insight 35

## Literature Review of Educational Provision for Pupils with Additional Support Needs

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# Literature Review of Educational Provision for Pupils with Additional Support Needs

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## Aims of the review

The study set out to review:

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

A full report and executive summary are available on the Scottish Executive website (www.scotland.gov.uk) and on the website of the Centre for Research on Education Inclusion and Diversity at the University of Edinburgh (www.creid.ed.ac.uk). This Insight describes the methods used and the findings from the various elements of the research.

## Methods

The following methods were used:

*Review of Scottish, UK and international policy and statistics*

This part of the work drew extensively on policy documents and statistical data published by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), the European Agency for the Development of Special Needs Education (EADSNE) and national Departments of Education.

*Review of the Scottish, UK and international academic literature*

A review of the Scottish, UK and international academic literature was undertaken to identify:

(a) Factors influencing patterns of identification and placement of pupils with additional/special educational needs.

(b) Curricular and pedagogical approaches employed in different national contexts.

(c) Evidence of the effectiveness of particular curricular/pedagogical approaches, including opportunities for progression.

*Interviews with international and Scottish experts*

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

## Background

*Comparing definitions and placement patterns*

Following the commencement of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, the definition of additional support needs used in Scotland now

encompasses all children who, for whatever reason, require additional support in school to enable them to benefit from education. This broader definition clearly has implications for understanding longitudinal data on the identification and placement of children with additional support needs.

Changing practice in Scotland also has implications for the way in which international comparisons are made. Research teams in Europe (e.g. European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE, 2003b; 200c) and internationally (OECD, 2000; OECD, 2005) have sought to compare definitions across countries, to discuss policy differences and to gather comparable statistics. They have found comparisons difficult, as the definitions vary even within countries (the UK being an example of this) as well as varying considerably across countries.

Such comparative difficulties are summarised by Evans (2003). He notes that 'special educational needs' is limited in some countries to students with disabilities, while in others the category extends to social disadvantage, those with minority ethnic backgrounds and/or gifted children. Comparisons are further complicated by different definitions of particular categories within 'special educational needs', and the number of categories used to gather statistical data. As a response, the OECD reports required agreement across countries to re-allocate their national categories into three types:

A    includes those students whose disability clearly arises from organic impairment

B    refers to those students who have learning difficulties that may well be acquired for example through unsatisfactory experiences in and out of school and

C    refers to those who have difficulties because of social disadvantage.

Existing work comparing definitions, statistics and their policy and practice ramifications forms the starting point for this review. However, different countries are dealt with in different ways within specific reviews, and there is no single source which contains comparable material across the board.

It is also important to understand the way in which funding models impact on definitions and placements. For example, European research on the impact of special education funding models on patterns of inclusion suggests that in countries where funds are tied to individual children, there is more evidence of strategic behaviour by parents and teachers to secure resources (Meijer, 1999). Thus countries like England, France and Luxembourg, where children with greater 'needs' have greater funding, have more strategic behaviour by parents and teachers to secure resources and tend to spend more funds on litigation procedures.

*Curriculum and pedagogy for children with special/additional support needs*

In Scotland, work to establish a suitable curriculum for pupils with additional support needs has been marked by, on the one hand, a desire to ensure the entitlement of those pupils within a common curriculum framework whilst, on the other hand, ensuring appropriate and targeted support for individual pupils. Issues of commonality in the curriculum framework, and of breadth and balance in the curricular experience of pupils with special educational needs, were addressed by the introduction in the early 1990s of the 5-14 Curriculum with its accompanying 5-14 Support for Learning pack. This material offered teachers advice both generic and specific to particular kinds of special educational needs, including pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and sensory impairments. Five strategies for customizing the curriculum were endorsed: differentiation, adaptation, enhancement, enrichment and elaboration. These strategies would enable teachers to plan a suitable

curriculum for individual pupils whilst ensuring that pupils' learning was framed by the national curriculum guidelines. The curriculum planning mechanism was an individualised education programme (IEP).

The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) referred to 'educational programmes for individual children' (11.15: 209) and emphasised the importance of planning long- and short-term learning objectives for all children with special educational needs (SEN) in a range of curricular domains. More recently in Scotland, IEPs have become a mechanism for raising and monitoring standards, as well as a tool for ensuring the curriculum entitlement and progression of pupils with SEN. Following the framework set out in the paper *Setting Standards – Raising Standards in Schools* (SOED, 1998), it was decided to set targets for schools in relation to the 5 – 14 programme and SQA awards and in 1998 support packs were produced and circulated to all schools. The target-setting initiative was intended to include children with SEN and the paper *Raising Standards: Setting Targets for Pupils with Special Educational Needs* (SOEID, 1999) described how this was to be done. In November 1999, a support pack in relation to special educational needs was produced and circulated to all schools (*Raising Standards – Setting Targets Support Pack: Special Educational Needs*, SEED, 1999).

The support pack provided to schools clarified the purpose of target-setting as a means of improving planning, assisting with self-evaluation and focusing schools on key aspects of their provision (learning and teaching, programmes of study, organization and management, use of certification). Advice was given about which pupils should have IEPs with targets. It was expected that IEPs should be opened for all children in special schools and units and all children with Records of Needs in mainstream schools. In addition, children in mainstream schools who did not have a Record of Needs but who required 'significant, planned intervention', as set out in the *Manual of Good Practice* (SOEID, 1998) should have IEPs with targets. It was recommended that targets should be set in one or more of the following curricular areas: communication and language, numeracy, personal and social development and that all targets should be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed.

Under the new additional support for learning legislation, IEPs will continue to be used for children with additional support needs, with some children and young people with complex needs requiring a range of additional support from different services having a coordinated support plan. All children with additional support needs will have a curriculum framed by the values, purposes and principles set out in *A Curriculum for Excellence* (http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/cerv-00.asp), a framework which seeks to provide for the first time for all children and young people from 3 to 18. The details of the new curriculum have yet to be worked out, and this review will contribute by summarising information on best practice in relation to pedagogy and curriculum for children with additional support needs.

## Findings

*The identification and placement of children with special educational needs*

Data were drawn from two different sources: the OECD and the EADSNE. Whereas EADSNE preserves national differences in understanding of SEN, OECD fits national data into a framework for the purposes of cross-national comparison. The OECD framework has been accused of being one-dimensional, since it does not recognise that many children with special educational needs have more than one difficulty. Broadly, the OECD uses four categories: disabilities, difficulties, disadvantages and non-categorical systems. Whilst there is an ongoing move away from the use of medical categories, almost all

countries employ at least nine sub-categories. However, there are significant differences between countries with regard to the types of category used and the proportion of children identified in each category. This is true even in relation to normative categories such as blindness, where Poland identifies more than 0.2% of all children in compulsory education, whilst Greece identifies less than 0.01%. In relation to non-normative categories such as emotional and behavioural difficulties, Canada (New Brunswick) identifies 2.6% of children in compulsory education, compared with Turkey which does not identify any students in this category. These differences may be attributed to social, cultural and administrative variation between countries, rather than variations in the incidence of particular disabilities or difficulties.

Countries differ markedly with regard to whether they allocate additional resources to students with particular impairments or disadvantages, and whether pupils are educated in special or mainstream settings. For example, in Italy, nearly 95% of blind or partially sighted pupils are educated in mainstream classes, whereas in Korea, 80% of such pupils are educated in special schools. In Canada (New Brunswick), all pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are educated in regular classes, whereas special schools and classes are more common in Belgium (Flemish Community), Germany, Japan and the United States. In Belgium, (French Community), all pupils with specific learning difficulties are educated in special schools, whereas the reverse is reported for Spain.

The European Agency for the Development of Special Needs Education (EADSNE) identifies three distinctive approaches adopted by different countries to school placement:

(i)   one-track – almost all pupils in mainstream

(ii)  multi-track – multiplicity of approaches to inclusion, the most common approach

(iii) two-track approaches – mainstream and special schools run in parallel.

Internationally, a higher proportion of boys than girls receive additional support for special educational needs. The OECD suggests that this is due to a range of factors, ranging from boys' greater vulnerability to illness, genetic problems and behavioural difficulties, as well as the growing 'feminisation' of the teaching profession.

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

*Focus on country case studies*

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

In Scotland, are particular settings preferred for pupils with particular 'types' of difficulty? To what extent might assumptions about the suitability of special or mainstream settings for particular groups be challenged?

Scotland is regarded as adopting a multi-track approach to pupil placement. What do you see as the pros and cons of such an approach?

Why do you think boys are more likely than girls to be identified as requiring additional support in school?

What type of support needs to be in place in secondary schools to better meet the needs of pupils with additional support needs?

due to difficulties in ensuring the availability of the necessary resources in mainstream settings.

There is no clear view emerging from the literature in any of the case study countries as to which setting, mainstream or special, provides more positive outcomes for pupils. This is due to difficulty in gathering reliable and comparable data on the progress and attainment of pupils with particular difficulties in different settings.

In all countries, systems are in place to identify those children who have special educational needs and who require additional resources to make progress. This takes different forms, for example, in the US it is mandatory to conduct formal assessments of children who may qualify as disabled under disability legislation. All children identified as disabled in the US (about 12% of the total school population) must have Individual Education Programmes, which are legally binding documents specifying resources, curriculum and pedagogy. If dissatisfied with their substance or implementation, parents may bring a case to the federal appeal court. The Statement of Needs fulfils a similar function in England, but in the other case study countries systems of identification and assessment are less rigorous.

*Curriculum and pedagogy for children with additional support needs*

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

Different practices are used to monitor the progress of children with SEN in different countries, but, as noted earlier, there are difficulties in implementing approaches which combine a formative assessment function with the summative and comparative outcomes needed for school improvement and accountability purposes. The use of individual target-setting within Individualised Educational Programmes has been used for formative and summative purposes. In relation to formative assessment, there is evidence that this strategy has helped in clarifying successive 'next steps' in learning for pupils, parents and teachers. However, the summative purpose of target-setting has been more problematic. Target-setting was perceived as conflicting with formative and learner-orientated approaches to progress and also failed to provide attainment data which enabled comparisons of pupil progress in similar and different educational settings.

> **Why is differentiation perceived as difficult for teachers to implement and what can be done in schools to support effective differentiation?**

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

> **What practices are currently used within Scottish schools for formative and summative assessment?**

In Scotland, there are ongoing difficulties in devising a national system of assessment which is able to recognise the progress of all pupils. Standard Grade is regarded as too

difficult for some pupils with special educational needs, particularly those with significant difficulties with literacy and numeracy. Some pupils with special educational needs follow Access courses which form part of the Higher Still programme. However, some mainstream teachers find it difficult to teach pupils studying Standard Grade and Access courses in the same class because of differences in course content. It is hoped that the new Curriculum for Excellence will rectify some of these difficulties.

> **Do you agree with the idea that, rather than focusing on specialist pedagogies, attention should be paid to the adaptations required by particular children to general teaching approaches?**

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

With regard to particular adaptations, children with autistic spectrum disorder appear to benefit from an ordered classroom environment where extraneous stimuli are limited and controlled and there is an emphasis on the development of social skills.

For children with visual impairment, there is an emphasis on extending physical, intellectual and social capacities. For some children, specialised software may be necessary and others may benefit from learning Braille. A specialist qualification is required for teachers of children with visual and hearing impairment.

There are fierce debates about the best means of educating deaf children, with some people maintaining that British Sign Language should be used much more extensively, whilst others support 'oralist' approaches. As more children have earlier cochlear implants, the latter may become more popular. It is argued that many deaf children do not make adequate progress in school due to lack of knowledge of appropriate teaching methods, particularly in mainstream settings.

Very particular approaches are needed in the education of deafblind children, focusing on the development of attachment and security and the fostering of access to the external world through touch.

For children with severe and complex learning difficulties, behaviourist approaches have tended to be replaced by Intensive Interaction teaching methods, which emphasise the importance of social and communication skills. Specialist computer software is also used extensively, although some argue that there is a need for greater clarity about the learning objectives to be achieved.

Teachers in mainstream schools find the education of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties extremely challenging. A range of innovative approaches to promote positive behaviour have been developed including those which modify the classroom environment to provide intensive support, including the use of classroom assistants.

At secondary level, there is an increasing emphasis on the use of a single curriculum framework allowing for different routes for progression. This is an area which will be further developed through the Curriculum for Excellence.

## Conclusions

*International comparisons of special educational needs provision*

- There appears to be an international move away from medicalised categories and towards inclusion. However, the difficulties of managing inclusion effectively are acknowledged, with primary schools having greater success than secondary schools.

- Most countries appear to favour multi-track systems, with parallel developments in inclusive education, special classes or units in mainstream schools and special schools.

- World-wide, boys appear to have more difficulties in coping with mainstream education than girls, and across the world attract a greater proportion of additional resources.

- There are intriguing differences between countries, with very different local practices in relation to inclusion and decisions on additional resourcing. In relation to disabilities such as blindness, whether a child is educated in a mainstream or special setting depends on local custom and practice. Children experiencing social disadvantage, often associated with emotional and behavioural difficulties, are almost always educated in mainstream schools.

*Comparisons of case study countries*

- The five case study countries exemplify different approaches to special needs provision. Whilst the US, England and Sweden run multi-track systems, Greece is much closer to a one-track system, with very little investment in its special sector, whilst Flanders features many characteristics of a two-track system, with strong insulation between special and mainstream schools, including separate curricula.

- The US has the strongest rights-based provision, with strict qualification criteria for additional provision. Whilst children with Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) in the US benefit from relatively generous additional funding, until recently many, including a high proportion of African-American boys, were disadvantaged by being excluded from participation in state-prescribed curricula and assessment systems.

- In England, the Government is trying to encourage less reliance on the Statement of Needs, and many local authorities are making much less use of them. In the US, there is no parallel move away from the use of IEPs.

- Compared with the US, which has a very highly developed system of training for special educators, the system in England and in many other European countries is far more ad hoc, with only teachers of visual and hearing impairment routinely requiring special qualifications. The US system produces highly qualified professionals, but also promotes the idea that children with special educational needs require special pedagogies.

- In terms of future trends, it is evident that both England and Sweden are experiencing something of a backlash against inclusion. In both countries, the trend is to delegate funding to schools, thus making the connection between additional funding and the needs of individual pupils less clear-cut. If parents believe that children will only receive additional resourcing in special settings, then they may regard such placements as preferable to mainstream schools, where they may have to struggle for additional resources.

*Curriculum and pedagogy for children with additional support needs in Scotland*

- Individualised Educational Programmes are generally regarded as the vehicle for specifying individual targets for pupils with additional support needs and for monitoring progress.

- Research has highlighted a number of issues in their implementation, including a possible narrowing of the curriculum, a lack of ownership by subject teachers in secondary schools and low levels of involvement by parents, pupils and external agencies.

- Since the early 1980s, there has been an emphasis on the entitlement of children with special educational needs to access the mainstream curriculum, and yet teachers appear to have difficulty in making the curriculum accessible through effective differentiation.

- There is a growing demand at secondary level for more flexible curricula to stem the growth of disaffection, particularly for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Curriculum for Excellence appears to offer possibilities for the further development of flexible, rather than alternative, curricular programmes within the overall curricular framework.

- There are ongoing debates as to whether children with additional support needs require specialist teaching methods related to the nature of their impairment. One school of thought maintains that most children can be taught effectively through the development of generic approaches to effective teaching, which will benefit all learners, rather than requiring qualitatively different approaches. Others maintain that there is a need for distinctive approaches for children with particular types of impairment, and discrete rather than generic approaches are often sought by voluntary organisations campaigning for particular groups.

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

- Some groups of pupils in some countries are excluded from national systems of assessment and certification. In Scotland, all pupils are included in the national assessment systems but there are difficulties in combining formative, summative and accountability assessment functions. These difficulties have been tackled through changes to the 5 – 14 assessment and testing framework and by a national initiative in formative assessment, Assessment is for Learning, which has relevance for the assessment of pupils with additional support needs.

- Some teachers have had problems in breaking down the curriculum into sequential segments to be articulated for pupils, parents and teachers as long- and short-term targets, and P scales, originally developed in England, are being used in some special schools and units in Scotland.

- A particular challenge for the new Curriculum for Excellence is to find better ways of including children with additional support needs in national systems of assessment.

*Outcomes of schooling*

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

## A note on terminology

Scotland now uses the term 'additional support needs', however most other countries in the world refer to children with special educational needs. Additional support needs has therefore been used when referring to Scotland alone, but special educational needs has been used when describing practice in other countries.

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