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National Foundation for Educational Research

The Integration of Pupils with Special Educational Needs into Mainstream Schools

Interim Report

by
Barbara Lee

Acknowledgements

Contents

1   Introduction

1.1   Background

Research into the integration of children with special educational needs into ordinary schools has been carried out over a significant number of years and in many countries. In Britain, work took place both before the implementation of the Education Act 1981 (see, for example, Hegarty and Pocklington, 1981 and 1982) and has continued since then, looking at the changes resulting from the Act, which imposed a statutory requirement that children with special educational needs should be educated in ordinary schools wherever possible. There is thus considerable knowledge of the optimal conditions for effective integration and widespread practical experience of a variety of integration initiatives. Data from studies in the UK are supported by those from international studies (for example, Meijer *et al.*, 1994 and Malecka, 1994).

However, effective practice has now to be implemented in a changed educational context brought about by the requirements of the 1988 Education Reform Act, in terms of allocations of resources (through Local Management of Schools (LMS)) and the implementation of the National Curriculum and its assessment and the associated uses of results.

The issues arising as a result of LMS and changing patterns of resourcing are of great importance for pupils with special educational needs. Control over the allocation of resources and decisions about their use is gradually shifting from the LEA to schools themselves, with inevitable consequences for the type of practice that is encouraged. For example, some of the facilitating conditions underpinning the effective integration of pupils with special needs into ordinary schools identified in a previous NFER project (Fletcher-Campbell and Hegarty, 1992) clustered round the local authority's supportive strategies and provision, particularly in relation to staffing and other resources. With budgets now being delegated to schools, decisions as to whether to buy in support service provision or INSET which would equip teachers to meet the needs of pupils with special needs are made at the institutional level. Area policies are increasingly threatened and an individual child's chances of integration may be dependent on institutional, rather than local authority, policies.

A further factor which must be considered in this scenario is the increased choice regarding school placement that has been extended to parents of pupils with special educational needs under the terms of the Education Act 1993. This choice may mean, on the one hand, that a greater proportion of children with statements are integrated into ordinary schools and, on the other, that special school provision may have to be provided despite the availability of integrated placements, according to the wishes of parents. In some cases, schools may have to provide for a greater number of pupils with special educational needs and, also, a greater range of special needs than before, thereby requiring significant additional resources. On the other hand, some parents may reject a placement at an ordinary school which has been planned and resourced to meet the needs of children such as their own. The 1995 AMA report, *Reviewing Special Educational Needs* suggests that this may lead to 'conflicting pressures, requiring authorities to respond to different kinds of preference with which they will find it difficult to comply' (para 21).

In addition, evidence suggests that the implementation of the National Curriculum and its assessment may be having an effect on schools' willingness to admit pupils whose results might not be perceived as making a positive contribution to league tables (see, for example, AMA report 1995, para 25, and comments from the London Association for the Teaching of English (LATE) reported in the TES, 16 Feb)

Other research, (see, for example, Ainscow, 1995) which is exploring ideas about 'inclusion', centres around the principle of the effective school, that is, a school which caters for the needs of all pupils, and is designed to support and accelerate the progress of all pupils.

Finally, any long term effects of the *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs*, (DFE, 1994a) on integration policy and practice are as yet unknown, but at the time of the NFER research described in this report, its impact in schools was significant. An NFER project on the implementation of the Code is taking place concurrently with that based on integration (see below), so any links will be noted and explored in one or both of the projects.

In the light of this changed policy context, therefore, previous studies of integration have to be viewed from a fresh perspective in order to establish ways in which the principles of good practice can be maintained and developed.

1.2 The NFER research

Two research projects, funded by the Council of Local Education Authorities, through the NFER's Membership Programme, are currently underway at the NFER. The project reported on in this booklet, is the *Integration of Pupils with Special Educational Needs*. The other project, on the *Implementation of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs* is reported on in the accompanying booklet.

The integration project was set up to investigate the position for pupils with special needs in the climate of the 1990's, taking account of all the policy changes referred to above. The research has two main aims:

- to map the present position regarding the integration of pupils with special educational needs in all LEAs in England and Wales;
- to examine the impact of recent educational and resourcing strategies on the integration of these pupils.

The issues to be investigated in detail include:

- resourcing - both the amounts available and the mechanisms by which schools can access and use resources;
- parental choice of school - the reasons for parents wanting to send their child with special needs to a mainstream/special school;
- attitudes of schools and parents to inclusive policies and practices;
- the effect of the National Curriculum on schools' ability or willingness to provide appropriate support for the needs of all pupils.

The research comprises two main phases. In Phase 1 (July - December 1995) a questionnaire survey of all LEAs was carried out to elicit information on their policies and practices with regard to integration. Questions focused on:

- LEA policy on integration
- implementing LEA policy
- placement of pupils
- parental choice of school
- monitoring and evaluation.

The questionnaire was completed and returned by 55 LEAs and, after analysis of the responses, 21 LEAs were selected for follow-up interviews. The LEAs represented a range of types (metropolitan and non-metropolitan), geographical locations and levels of integration (as measured by the data in the questionnaires and that provided by the Audit Commission for 1993). The LEA officer, adviser or educational psychologist who had responded to the questionnaire was asked to participate in an interview in which further details about the situation in the LEA were elicited and other relevant issues were discussed.

1.3   The contents of this report

This booklet reports on the findings from first phase, that is, the questionnaire survey and the LEA interviews. The two sets of data are reported separately within each section.

The LEA questionnaire was sent to all LEAs in England and Wales. The questionnaire itself comprised two parts: the first part asked questions about the *Implementation of the Code of Practice* and the second part related to *Integration*. This report provides details of the responses made to the questionnaire, based on the 55 LEAs who returned completed questionnaires. Numbers rather than percentages are reported since the numbers are relatively small.

The interview data are drawn from the visits made to 21 of the 55 LEAs which had returned the questionnaire. During the visits interviewees were asked about both areas of interest (that is, the Code of Practice and Integration) but in 11 LEAs the emphasis was on integration and in the other 10 on the Code of Practice. For this reason the data obtained vary in their level of detail according to the focus of interest of the team carrying out the interview.

For the purposes of the analysis, the LEAs in which interviews took place have been put into three groups, according to the level of integration in the LEA (calculated using information supplied in the questionnaire or during the interview). Of course, LEA statementing rates may vary for a number of different reasons and the extent and quality of the 'mainstream' provision may vary, but the groupings devised provide a rough and ready indicator. This approach was adopted to see if there were any differences between LEAs according to their views and arrangements, which could be associated with the extent of their integration. All the LEAs involved in interviews, for which data were available, had at least 30 per cent of pupils with statements in mainstream provision (including special classes or units), so the labels of 'high', 'medium' and 'low' are used with that as a basis.

The three groups are as follows:

High integration
LEAs with 75 per cent or more of pupils with statements in mainstream provision (including special classes or units) (4).

Medium integration
LEAs with 50 per cent or more of pupils with statements in mainstream provision (including special classes or units) (8).

Low integration
LEAs with less than 50 per cent of pupils with statements in mainstream provision (including special classes or units) (9).

2   LEA policy on integration

Since the implementation of LMS the power of LEAs over the practice of schools has been much reduced but, nevertheless, the policies and principles put forward by LEAs and the support they provide, have a significant influence on what actually happens in schools.   Although schools can set their own admissions policies, subject to conforming with legislation, LEAs have the duty to oversee the placing of pupils with statements of special educational needs, according to guidance given in the Code of Practice. Where LEAs have a clear commitment to increasing integration they may be able to implement such policies in terms of the way they allocate funds and the types of support that they provide. Where the commitment is less overt LEAs may feel that they can give guidance and advice to schools but are in no position to influence school activities in this regard.

2.1   Policy statements

In the questionnaire, LEAs were asked whether their policy statements had a specific reference to increasing the integration of pupils with special needs into mainstream schools. Of the 55 LEAs responding to the questionnaire, the majority (41) indicated that this was the case. However, only 18 LEAs indicated that their policies listed approaches for implementing the policy. A few LEAs did not respond formally to the question but noted that their policies were currently under review, with the implication that the revised policies would include references to approaches to be adopted. Some LEAs (14 in total) enclosed copies of relevant documents, including policy statements, when they returned their questionnaires.

When visits were made to the 21 selected LEAs, further documentation was collected. In discussing the policy statements in the interviews, all the LEA staff expressed a commitment to the idea of integration wherever possible, and this was supported by the documentation. The standard approach to placements adopted by LEAs appeared to be, as required by both the 1981 and 1983 Acts, to look first at making a mainstream placement, and only to look at special school provision if no appropriate mainstream place could be found. Clearly, the extent to which LEAs were able or willing to implement that policy varied, as the rest of this report will show.

2.2   Features of policy

Analysis was carried out on the content of the policy statements and accompanying documents of the 21 LEAs and this was followed up by questions to the interviewee in each of the LEAs. The main features of policies (from either the documents or the comments) were as follows:

- although a few policy statements do not make a specific reference to 'integration', all indicate a commitment to mainstream placements for pupils with statements, wherever possible;

- most make reference to the fact that a number of pupils may have to have their needs met in special schools;

- some emphasise that there is a 'continuum of provision' which includes mainstream and special schools;

- some elaborate on their reasons for maintaining a continuum of provision, with continued support for special schools; pressure from parents to provide that option appears to be the main consideration;

- some stress the importance of integration, and suggest ways of promoting it and increasing the numbers of pupils in mainstream school. The strategies put forward are discussed in section 2, but it is worth noting the commitment shown by the policy of one LEA which, *'aims over a period of time to re-distribute resources away from specialist provision and late intervention toward early identification and support in ordinary schools, whilst ensuring that an appropriate and balanced range of provision, including day and residential special schools, is maintained to meet the needs of all pupils'*.

A number of LEAs had recently revised their policies, were in the process of reviewing them or had recognised the need to develop and revise their policy and practice. Most of the principles embodied in the policies reflect those reported in Fletcher-Campbell and Hall (1993) but with perhaps a greater emphasis on integration.

3   Implementing policy

As discussed earlier, LEAs have only limited control over implementing integration policies, but the way in which they allocate resources and provide support can influence practice in schools. LEAs also see themselves as having responsibility to ensure that provision is available across the LEA and that pupils with special needs are treated equably, wherever they live.

In the questionnaire, a list of strategies which might affect integration policy was provided and respondents were asked to indicate which were planned and which had already been implemented. The strategies were grouped under four headings:
- support and training
- procedures
- resources
- school places.

In the interviews, LEAs were asked to give further information on their strategies. They described the history and pattern of changes in the LEA over recent years and commented on how their strategies had been affected by both national legislation and local circumstances. Details of these comments are provided in the sub-sections below.

3.1   Support and training for increasing integration
The list of training activities provided in the questionnaire and the LEA responses are provided in Table 1, below. It is clear from the table that at least half of the LEAs have implemented most of the INSET and training activities listed, with further LEAs having planned them. The least commonly used strategies were: *support for the development or maintenance of links between special and mainstream schools*, and *the extension of LEA support services*. Neither of these is surprising, as, with regard to the first, the interviews revealed that, although in some LEAs, special schools were being encouraged to use any 'spare' resources (that is, those released because of unfilled places) to carry out outreach work and develop (further) links with mainstream schools, this was not being organised or otherwise supported by LEA staff. As far as the second of these strategies is concerned, most LEA interviewees (and questionnaire respondents) referred to their declining role in providing support to schools, as a result of the increased delegation of funds to schools, with little being retained centrally. Further comments on the support provided by LEAs are given at the end of this section.

Table 1   *Support and training for increasing integration*

Strategies	Implemented	Planned
Support/training for SENCOs	47	16
INSET opportunities for support assistants in mainstream schools	39	15
INSET opportunities for mainstream teachers	38	14
INSET opportunities for special school teachers	31	10
INSET opportunities for support assistants in special schools	31	14
Support for development/maintenance of links between special and mainstream schools	23	23
Extension of LEA support services	18	12

Based on 55 LEAs.

In interviews, LEA staff were asked to give more information on the kinds of INSET and training which had taken place to support integration policy and practice. It appeared to be unusual for LEAs to provide training which was explicitly focused on integration, as a topic, but most interviewees felt that the concept of integration underpinned the training that took place for teachers working in mainstream schools. This underlying aspect of training emerged particularly strongly from LEAs with high levels of integration (according to the definitions laid out on p4).

Most of the LEAs had been providing INSET for mainstream and special school staff for many years on issues related to the support for pupils with special needs. Although not always directly based on integration issues the LEA input had been of two main types:

- information on and training to work with pupils with particular difficulties or disabilities, usually aimed at learning support coordinators;
- general awareness raising, usually aimed at a broad range of mainstream staff, especially when a new unit or 'enhanced' provision was being established.

Interviewees felt that the emphasis in more recent training had been on teaching and learning strategies (related to the National Curriculum) for teachers working with pupils with special needs in mainstream schools. Courses focusing on 'differentiation' or 'science for pupils with learning difficulties' were commonly cited as examples of the types of general INSET provided. Of course, in the most recent training programmes, many of the courses offered had been directed at helping teachers to implement the Code of Practice. Issues related to inclusion were inevitably covered in some of the discussions. The finding in Table 1, above, that most of the LEAs had provided support or training for SENCOs is almost certainly based on the fact that the latter were the target of much of the Code of Practice training.

Another significant change in recent years to patterns of training and support has been brought about by modifications to funding mechanisms whereby schools currently control most of the funds for training. This has led, in some areas, to reduced take up of centrally provided courses since schools can choose whether or not to buy into the programme of events offered by the LEA. On the other hand, in all the LEAs for which information was available, there had been an increase in training and support being provided to individual schools or clusters of schools. Such support would be aimed at meeting the needs that those particular schools had themselves identified as priority areas.

Some LEAs also referred to the support they provided for teachers to participate in courses run by Higher Education institutions or specialist groups but indicated that these opportunities were not always taken up by teachers. Distance learning courses seemed to be replacing those requiring attendance in person at classes.

LEA support, other than training, tended to be directed towards providing expertise to help teachers to organise their teaching and assessment strategies in order to enhance the educational experience of all their pupils. Centralised LEA teams tended to concentrate on providing this kind of support for primary schools, whilst secondary schools were more likely to include staff with particular expertise on their own staff, or in special units, and to receive less support from the centre. The reduction in LEA central teams over recent years was perceived as providing benefits in that many people with important expertise were now permanent members of school staff, rather than providing peripatetic support to a number of schools. On the other hand, some authorities felt that they had insufficient staff on central teams to provide all the support which they would have liked to provide and which schools had previously found helpful.

3.2 Procedures, resources, provision for increasing integration - questionnaire responses

As well as strategies for support and training, LEAs were asked to indicate in the questionnaire the strategies used or planned in terms of procedures, resources and provision of places. Tables 2 to 4 show how LEAs responded. The specific procedures suggested in the questionnaire as ways of facilitating greater integration were not used by large numbers of LEAs, as Table 2 shows. In particular, the development of explicit criteria for proposing integration did not seem to be common practice amongst the 55 LEAs.

Table 2   Procedures for increasing integration

Strategies	Implemented	Planned
Increased links with mainstream for pupils in special schools	29	18
Earlier identification of needs	27	11
Statements make more specific ref. to integration	21	14
Increased outreach/support service	18	16
Criteria for integration made explicit	4	16

Based on 55 LEAs.

As Table 3 shows, nearly half of the LEAs were introducing more 'additionally resourced' schools but the transfer of resources from special schools to mainstream schools was not indicated as a common strategy. As the interviews revealed, a more common strategy was that described above in section 3.1, whereby special schools were expected to use funding freed up by any unfilled places to undertake outreach work.

Table 3   Resources for increasing integration

Strategies	Implemented	Planned
Introduction of more 'additionally resourced' schools	22	22
Transfer of funds to mainstream school	11	10
Transfer of (additional) staff to mainstream schools	3	5

Based on 55 LEAs.

Making adaptations to mainstream school buildings appeared to be the most popular approach to increasing school places for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream, as Table 4 shows. These changes were generally made to improve access for pupils with physical disabilities and interviews suggested that these pupils were increasingly being included in (local) mainstream schools as the changes to buildings needed were relatively easy to implement. This finding reflects those reported by Riddell and Brown (1994) who found that it was easier for teachers to integrate such pupils as particular types of arrangements can be set up and agreed with all teachers, whereas planning for pupils with moderate learning difficulties may 'call for more radical changes to the curriculum and teaching approaches'. Several LEAs referred to the applications they had made for funding for the new financial year under the DFEE's Schools Access Initiative.

Table 4   School places for increasing integration

Strategies	Implemented	Planned
Adaptations to mainstream school buildings	35	17
Building new units attached to mainstream schools	19	14
Extending existing units attached to mainstream	16	11
Closure of special schools	15	13

Based on responses from 55 LEAs

In the questionnaire, a few LEAs indicated other strategies for implementing their integration policy, such as moving pupils from out-authority placements back into the LEA, thereby releasing funds, or they described the particular types of provision they had made. Several LEAs reported that they were also exploring other ideas or reviewing existing provision with a view to increasing integration.

When asked about any barriers to implementing their aims, questionnaire respondents identified three main areas of concern:

- Insufficient resources or the problems of funding integration within LMS/ LMSS formulae were specifically mentioned by 23 LEAs.

- Resistance from mainstream schools was perceived by 12 LEAs as being caused by worries about inadequate resources or concerns about the image of the school and the effect on league tables of taking in too many pupils with special educational needs.

- Other difficulties were identified by seven LEAs, including references to parental preference for special provision.

3.3   Procedures, resources, provision for increasing integration - interview responses

In the interviews, the LEAs were asked to give more information both on the strategies which they found most successful and on the aspects which were found to be most problematic. The picture which emerged supported the broad findings reported above, but provided more insight into some of the tensions felt by schools, and the importance of the context. The positive strategies identified and the apparent barriers to (fuller) integration are laid out below.

3.3.1 Positive strategies
Approaches which appear to encourage greater integration can be attributed to: more positive attitudes, appropriately targeted resources, and moves towards provision which facilitates or encourages integration. Details of the strategies implemented or planned are listed below.

Attitudes
- greater expectations that pupils will attend mainstream schools, especially at primary level;
- perception (by parents, teachers and LEA staff) that pupils with physical disabilities or sensory impairments can be integrated relatively easily;
- the influence (mentioned in 2 LEAs) of Portage work, giving parents the confidence to choose mainstream provision.

Resources
- support targeted at mainstream provision in terms of LEA training and advice (see above), facilities and equipment, staff expertise;
- a changing role for special schools who were being encouraged by the LEA, sometimes by means of funding explicitly labelled for (re)integration activities;
- projects/funding to encourage and support links between special and mainstream schools;
- projects to promote (re)integration with support provided by special school staff to mainstream staff.

Provision
- special school places being reduced, except for some needs e.g. autism, emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD);
- residential special schools for pupils with educational and behavioural difficulties being replaced by day schools or units attached to mainstream schools;
- more unit/enhanced resource places in mainstream provided as alternatives to special schools;
- where units well established, a move to viewing them as resource bases only, thereby encouraging full integration;
- where units/centres had been established, within a particular area, a move to more widespread provision so that pupils could go to local schools rather than travelling to area schools.

Although the strategies have been listed above under discrete headings, interviewees pointed out that it is often the combination of actions and attitudes and the interaction between them which determines their success.

3.3.2   Barriers to increasing integration
Despite the positive features of LEA actions listed above, there were also many barriers identified by interviewees, as shown below.

Resources
- no spare resources whereby new provision can be established for pupils, a Catch 22 situation e.g. in order to bring back pupils in out of county schools, there is a need to build up appropriate provision within the county, but there is no money to do that as the money is tied up in funding the out of county placements; or, because funds are tied up in places in special schools it is difficult to provide increased places in mainstream schools;
- funding for reintegration not sufficient/not used appropriately;
- high delegation of funds to schools leaves little scope for LEAs to provide support to schools.

Attitudes
- parental pressure for special school places (see section 4, below);
- concerns by special school staff that their schools will close, leading, in some areas, to threats to apply for Grant Maintained status;
- lack of confidence or job satisfaction experienced by special school staff in carrying out a different role, such as working in mainstream schools to support individuals or groups of pupils;
- mainstream schools reluctant to increase the numbers of pupils with statements in their school, because of the effect on their image within the community (particularly for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties) or their effect on league tables (particularly for pupils with learning difficulties);
- mainstream schools reluctant or unwilling to allow the LEA to establish a unit or resource base within their sites (particularly for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties);
- schools reluctant to lose unit provision if it entailed a loss of expert staff or additional funding.

Provision
- a shortage of school places generally, enabling mainstream schools to justify not accepting 'challenging' pupils;
- pressure on class sizes (i.e. larger groups) affecting teachers' willingness to take in pupils with learning difficulties;
- some LEAs having to establish new EBD special schools if they were unable to persuade mainstream schools to accept units.

It was noticeable from the interviews that LEAs with medium or low integration perceived far more barriers to fuller integration than those with already high levels. For example, the question of the mainstream school's image within the community and the effect of league tables as deterrents to taking in (more) pupils with statements, was seen as a minor issue in LEAs where all schools had the expectation and acceptance that they would provide for all the pupils in the area. The only pupils towards whom this inclusive attitude was no longer held so generally, were those with emotional and behavioural difficulties. This change was relatively recent and therefore interviewees in the high integration LEAs were reluctant to see it as necessarily constituting a trend.

In the LEAs with lower levels of integration there was a clear tension between the aspirations of the LEA staff, often towards much more inclusive practice (although there was not always agreement on this between staff within an LEA), and the preferences of some parents for special school places (see section 4) and the views of mainstream and special schools themselves, as listed above.

Resourcing problems were shared by all LEAs, as the AMA report pointed out, '...without extra funding, progress will necessarily be slowed because of the problem of expanding special needs provision in mainstream while still paying for a segregated system. So, completing a planned transition from segregated to integrated provision needs investment which it is hard for constrained council budgets to support.' (1995, para 14)

4   Placements of pupils with statements

In the earlier section of this report, the strategies used by LEAs to increase integration or improve access for all pupils were discussed whilst in this section the extent to which pupils are integrated within LEAs is reported. The numbers of pupils with statements appears to be rising nationally (DFE 1994b and 1995), and it has been suggested that this can be attributed to the increase in pupils appearing to need more support than the school can provide from its own resources. Clearly, if overall numbers are rising, it is of interest to see whether the percentage of pupils with statements in different types of school remains constant, even though the numbers themselves are higher, or whether the patterns of distribution are different.

4.1   Types of placement

In the questionnaire survey LEAs were asked to indicate the numbers of pupils with statements in the LEA and to give a breakdown of the types of provision to which they were allocated. Data were not provided by all 55 LEAs: some LEAs were not able to give the information at that time; others gave partial information; a few provided detailed figures covering all aspects of their provision; others referred the researchers to their enclosed documentation. Where figures were given, there was some variety in how much detail was provided and, as was clear from subsequent interviews, in how respondents interpreted and used different headings (see discussion below). Therefore, in order to collate the data, it was necessary to take certain arbitrary decisions about groupings, so that, for example, Pupil Referral Units (where mentioned) were included under special school provision, given that they are usually run separately from mainstream schools.

Table 5 below gives a broad picture of the proportions of pupils in special or mainstream provision in the 37 LEAs for which those data could be compiled. As the table shows, 23 LEAs placed more than half of their pupils with statements in mainstream provision.

Table 5   Provision for pupils with statements

Percentage pupils in mainstream	No. of LEAs
90 - 100	1
71 - 80	4
61 - 70	10
51- 60	8
41 - 50	8
31 - 40	3
21 - 30	2
11 - 20	1

Based on 37 LEAs.

In looking more closely at the detailed information provided, distinctions can be drawn between pupils in mainstream provision placed in ordinary classes and those placed in special classes or units. Table 6 shows data from the 35 LEAs which provided relevant information. The figures give a useful indication of the distribution of pupils in different types of provision but should be treated with caution, as respondents may have interpreted the headings in different ways, as discussed below. The percentages provided in Table 6 are based on the numbers of pupils with statements placed in any type of mainstream provision, as indicated by the LEAs.

Table 6   Placements of pupils within mainstream schools

Percentage pupils in ordinary class	No. of LEAs
100	3
90 - 99	8
80 - 89	13
70 - 79	4
60 - 69	1
50 - 59	2
40 - 49	1
20 - 29	3

Based on 35 LEAs.

In the interviews carried out with LEA staff further clarification of the figures was elicited. **The actual placement of pupils did not necessarily indicate the level of integration which was in place for individual pupils.** In looking at the statistics provided above, it may be useful to consider the points listed below, which emerged from the interviews.

- pupils counted as being in *ordinary classes* are generally fully integrated;
- pupils counted as being in *special classes or units* may spend differing amounts of time in mainstream classes: there is a continuum from totally separate provision through to pupils spending greater or lesser amounts of time in mainstream classes, through to pupils spending practically all their time in mainstream classes but with access to a resourced base when needed;
- pupils counted as being in *special school* provision may spend some time in mainstream schools as part of link projects or reintegration programmes;
- the method of counting pupils was done simply on the basis of the funding provided for a particular type of school, rather than according to the type of educational experience individual pupils may have (data which LEAs might be unable to supply); this was particularly so when related to enhanced funding for pupils in units or resource bases, or funding for statements tied to individual pupils;
- units or resource bases were often perceived as a way of giving pupils a mainstream experience with additional support rather than as separate specialist provision;

- whether pupils attended mainstream classes, special classes or special schools depended to some extent on where they lived, even within the LEA, as the types of provision available varied across the LEA; this was particularly the case in large shire counties. Even when resources were concentrated in designated schools within an area, pupils might still be placed in schools nearer their homes, whichever type of provision it might be, to meet the demand from parents for local provision.

4.2 Changes

LEAs were asked to indicate in the questionnaire whether there had been any changes to the numbers of pupils with statements in integrated/segregated provision, between April 1993 and July 1995. The responses showed increases in all types of provision, as Table 7 shows. Some LEAs indicated increases in both mainstream and special provision, and explained this in terms of increasing numbers of pupils overall, and/or increasing numbers of pupils with statements.

Table 7   Changes in provision for pupils with statements

Type of provision	No. of LEAs
More pupils in ordinary classes in mainstream schools	41
More pupils in special units/ classes in mainstream schools	25
More pupils in special schools	21
No response	7

Based on 55 LEAs.

There was a view expressed by a small number of respondents that increases in special school populations were due to mainstream schools being reluctant to take pupils with statements, as well as the overall increases in numbers; no hard evidence of this was provided.

Further information on the figures was elicited at interviews and interviewees in many areas, though not all, agreed that the increases in each type of provision were due to rising numbers of pupils with statements, overall. Perceived reasons for the overall rise were related to the effect of linking resources to statements, whereby schools felt that they needed the extra resources to provide appropriately for pupils with special needs. The need for the statements to ensure that extra support could be provided was perceived as arising as a result of LMS, whereby schools started to look more closely at costs. The effects of the National Curriculum were also cited as contributing to a situation whereby more pupils were identified as needing extra support.

Another contributory factor to the increase in statements appeared to be as a result of medical developments, whereby some children with serious disabilities, who would not previously have had a long life expectancy, were now participating in the school system.

The majority of interviewees felt that even where the numbers of pupils with statements in special schools had risen, the overall tendency was for the increases to be for pupils in mainstream provision, as was shown by the questionnaire data.

5 Parental choice of school

As discussed in Section 1, the 1993 Education Act provided an enhanced opportunity for parents to express a preference for the school to be attended by their child with special needs. LEAs have a duty to ensure that pupils are educated in a mainstream school so long as this is compatible with: parents' wishes, the suitability of the school for the child, 'the provision of efficient education for the children with whom he/she would be educated or the efficient use of resources'. Naturally, this may lead to disagreements between the LEA and parents which, if not settled between those parties, may require the case to be taken to a Special Educational Needs Tribunal.

5.1 Questionnaire results

The majority of LEAs (40) indicated in the questionnaire that they did not keep separate records on the preferred choice of school made by parents of pupils with statements. A few respondents explained that such information was only available in individual pupil records and would be too difficult to collate. This may apply for other LEAs too, although the evidence is not available. Three LEAs provided no information.

Of the 12 LEAs which did keep records only three indicated that parents were offered a choice of integrated or segregated placements, with the others suggesting that the question did not arise in this way as appropriate placements had been discussed with parents from an early stage. Other comments suggested that it was not always appropriate or possible to offer the choice, since appropriate provision might only be available in a particular type of school.

5.2 Factors affecting choice of school

In interviews, there appeared to be a difference between the LEAs with high integration and the other LEAs. In the former, the expectation was that all pupils would attend mainstream schools and that the only pupils in special schools were likely to be those with the most severe and complex difficulties and disabilities (who would have already been identified from an early age). Parents' preferences, therefore, tended to be related to other factors such as geographical location or the presence of siblings at the school. The desire for children to attend a **local** school was seen as the most significant factor affecting choice. In only one of the four high integration LEAs, did the interviewee indicate that there was some pressure from parents for more places in special schools, but that the LEA did not have places to meet those demands and would resist increasing them.

In the other LEAs (with medium and low integration) there tended to be pressures in two directions: from parents expressing a preference for mainstream placements for their children and from parents preferring a special school placement. In the medium integration LEAs the pressure for mainstream placements was seen as less significant in recent years than the pressure for special school places, whereas in the low integration authorities the pressures in both directions were comparable. In all these authorities too, the desire for a local placement was significant in affecting the preferences expressed by parents.

5.3   Preference for special school places

The particular groups of parents trying to obtain special school placements for their children were indicated in practically all the LEAs as the parents of children with autism, specific learning difficulties, or language and communication difficulties. One or two references were made to demands for special provision for hearing impaired children, whilst other demands were very much related to local circumstances. Parents appeared to want such provision on the grounds that special schools could provide a 'safer' environment, with smaller classes and more specialist teaching and facilities. They feared that mainstream schools could not provide the support required by their children. The role of disability support groups in encouraging parents to opt for special school placements will be investigated further in the school-based case studies.

Many of the LEAs were already trying to meet the demand for special provision for the pupils referred to above, by providing or developing units and resource bases attached to mainstream or special schools, thereby avoiding the need to send pupils out of the LEA to independent, non-maintained schools (or those belonging to other LEAs). Interviewees stressed that their LEAs were keen to fulfil parents' requests by establishing new provision in the area, not just to save money but to try to meet the general preference for local provision, referred to earlier.

LEAs were also putting resources into ensuring that teachers were appropriately trained to teach children with particular needs, especially those identified as having specific learning difficulties.

5.4   Preference for mainstream places

Pressure for mainstream places could come from parents of children with a wide range of needs, but several LEA interviewees commented on the numbers of pupils with Down's Syndrome in mainstream placements who would formerly have been in special schools. In two LEAs this was partly attributed to the effects of Portage support being provided to parents and children from an early age, thereby increasing their confidence in understanding their children's needs and their confidence that mainstream schools could meet those needs.

In trying to meet the demand for mainstream places, LEAs were establishing support in a range of different ways: resourced places in mainstream schools, units, area support centres, LEA support teams. However, some pupils were increasingly less likely to have their needs met in mainstream schools: those pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Even in high integration LEAs, where schools have been used to dealing with a wide range of difficulties, exclusions were rising, as teachers felt they could not cope. None of the LEA interviewees referred to the choices of provision **preferred** by the parents of children with these kinds of difficulties. On the contrary, all references to these pupils were in terms of the reluctance of schools to keep them and, even more significantly, to allow new provision to be established within their schools or on their sites. In the high integration LEAs this was seen as less of a problem than in the other LEAs since schools had the expectation that they would take most pupils, but interviewees were concerned that there might be more pressure from mainstream schools to exclude these pupils. In the other LEAs, although the commitment was to mainstreaming wherever possible, provision for pupils with

emotional and behavioural difficulties tended to be discussed in terms of whether the pupils should be in units, special schools or, in many cases, out of county, in residential provision, depending on the existing provision within the LEA.

6 Monitoring and evaluation

LEA monitoring of special needs in recent years has tended to focus on resource allocation, given the growth in statements and the pressures from parents in favour of both mainstream and special school places. However, as a recent OFSTED report comments, 'LEAs' preoccupation with reorganisation of SEN provision in response to recent legislation has left little time to review the quality of that provision.' (OFSTED, 1996). The project was, therefore, keen to ascertain which procedures LEAs used for both monitoring and evaluation, for both quantitative and qualitative issues.

6.1 LEA strategies for monitoring and evaluation

In the questionnaire, LEAs were asked to indicate the procedures and documentation used in the LEA to monitor and evaluate the implementation of their policies for integration. Table 8 shows how many LEAs used each approach.

Table 8   Monitoring and evaluation approaches

LEA activities	No. of LEAs
Annual review of statements	40
Results of Ofsted inspections	34
Review of funding arrangements	33
LEA inspections	32
Regular meetings with heads of special and mainstream schools	29
Regular review of pupil placements	26
Regular meetings with educational psychologists	25
Review of performance indicators	11
Review of how National Curriculum delivered	8
Other	6
No response	7

Based on 55 LEAs.

Other approaches included: monitoring by a sub-committee of the council; a link officer for each school; a special needs audit. One LEA explained that monitoring and evaluation was seen as part of the Total Quality Management strategy.

One LEA pointed out that it was their policy to maintain a 'mixed economy' of special/mainstream provision. Another explained that they had no policy for monitoring integration specifically but in looking at the Code of Practice they would include discussion on integration.

6.2 Monitoring and evaluation of integration practice

In all the LEAs visited to carry out interviews it was clear that information on pupils with special educational needs was collected but in few LEAs was any specific monitoring or evaluation on integration carried out. The implementation of the Code of Practice had led many of the LEAs to reflect on the need to tighten up their monitoring and evaluation procedures but this was impeded to some extent by a lack of personnel. The kinds of approaches which were felt by interviewees to be particularly important in looking at integration were:

- a great deal of contact with schools on regular basis: this enabled LEA officers and advisers to get to know schools and their staff and to discuss relevant issues with them from the earliest stages;

- close monitoring of the progress of individual pupils in terms of the objectives set and their achievements, usually at annual reviews or meetings between LEA and school staff;

- the use of OFSTED inspections as a basis for acquiring valuable information on schools; some LEA staff, however, viewed this kind of evidence as inadequate given the lack of frequency of OFSTED inspections;

- LEA inspections, either of particular schools or thematic: these enabled LEAs to collect a large amount of data on individual schools or groups of schools;

- annual reviews: these were seen as an important approach to the monitoring of integration plans and, particularly at transition points, as providing an opportunity for discussion of school placements. However, all the LEAs expressed concern at the problems they had in finding enough staff to attend as many as they would like to attend;

- the use of data collected on the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Code of Practice, since this often included references to integration, most notably on issues of policy and resourcing;

- the use of data collected as part of LEA procedures for allocating and monitoring resources to pupils with special needs.

In addition to this, all the LEAs collected and collated basic numerical data such as the numbers of pupils with statements, the different types of school places available, and the extent to which pupils were in mainstream or special provision.

However, despite all this detailed information it was rare for LEAs to have an overall picture which provided information on the progress of individuals and groups of pupils and the effectiveness (or lack of effectiveness) of particular schools in supporting pupils with special educational needs. One LEA referred to a computerised database which had been set up but indicated that the LEA had not yet decided how the information should be collated and analysed and what use should be made of the results. It would appear, therefore, that even where data are available, they are not (yet) coordinated or collated in such a way as to inform the decision-making process.

7 Emerging issues on integration policy and practice

7.1 Other points raised in the questionnaire

In the questionnaire, five LEAs felt that there was still resistance from mainstream schools to taking in (more) pupils with special educational needs, either because of worries about resources being adequate or because of an adverse image of the school and league tables. LEAs had conducted INSET and other activities but felt that there was a need for continuing awareness-raising of the issues. Five LEAs commented on the effects of parental choices on the allocation of schools and it was pointed out that some parents preferred special school placements for their children, particularly in areas where local special schools had good reputations.

Other comments provided by the LEAs described the activities they had previously or were currently undertaking to increase mainstream provision, with the general approach being towards special units rather than special schools and, in one area, from units to mainstream provision.

All these points were confirmed in interviews and some of the reasons for the changes have already been discussed within the relevant sections.

7.2 Initial findings

The initial findings from the first phase of the project can be looked at in terms of the issues identified at the beginning of this report (p2). They are summarised below.

Resourcing

LEAs which were keen to increase places in mainstream by removing places from special schools were hampered by having insufficient resources to fund the transition, whereby extra resources were needed to support the children newly in the mainstream schools whilst the places in special schools were still being funded.

Most schools now have access to all or most of their funding for SEN but in some areas there was still some central control over, for example, the deployment of NTAs. LEAs were concerned that when schools had complete charge of their funds, the increased flexibility provided might lead some schools to use them in ways deemed inappropriate by the LEA.

Parental choice of school

LEA staff generally seemed to feel that agreement could be reached with the majority of parents on the most appropriate placement for their child. LEAs were developing their provision to try to meet the needs of pupils in mainstream, wherever possible, and where pupils were being educated outside the LEA, they were attempting to develop equivalent support in LEA schools, whether mainstream or special.

Attitudes to inclusion

There appeared to be serious commitment on the part of most LEA staff to increase the numbers of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools, although actual

strategies for introducing changes were not always indicated in documents (as discussed in section 2.1). Where numbers were already high, the commitment was to ensure that the provision was maintained.

LEA staff expressed concern that some schools in their areas were becoming reluctant to take in (more) pupils with statements, but at the same time, some schools were, apparently, realising the benefits of including all children, and the resources which they brought with them.

LEAs felt that some schools were reluctant because they felt that it gave their school a certain image, which might deter parents of children without special needs; on the other hand, they described some schools which were proud of their reputation for providing well for all pupils.

The attitudes of parents towards wanting a mainstream place for their child with special needs varied, with the LEA context appearing significant: where LEAs and schools had the expectation that virtually all pupils would attend mainstream schools, this appeared to be accepted by the majority of parents; where a wider choice of school types was available, the issue could become more contentious.

The effects of the National Curriculum
As described above, some schools were thought to be resistant to increasing the numbers of pupils with special needs, and in some cases this was attributed to fears that these pupils would not score highly in National Curriculum assessments or GCSEs, thereby lowering the position of the school in league tables.

Many of the concerns about increased levels of statementing, and parents' worries about the ability of mainstream schools to cater for their children, have been attributed to the effects of the National Curriculum. In the past, schools might have provided alternative curricula for some pupils, according to a range of criteria, enabling them to follow different courses, where necessary. Some of that flexibility was reduced by the National Curriculum, since all pupils are required to follow the same curriculum, with the effect that pupils with learning difficulties, in particular, may need more sustained support than they would have needed.

The perceptions of schools towards these LEA-based findings willl be explored further in the school-based case studies.

7.3   Current work
Since this report was written, case study work has been taking place in a small number of mainstream secondary schools in five of the LEAs previously visited by the research team. Since the project does not have the resources to conduct case studies in all types of school (primary and secondary, mainstream and special schools) the decision was made to focus on mainstream secondary schools, for the following reasons:

- the inclusion of pupils with a wide range of needs is perceived as more problematic in secondary schools than in primary schools;

- if inclusive policies are to be implemented successfully, it is the strategies to support pupils adopted by mainstream, rather than special schools, which need to be developed and sustained;

- although the case studies are based in mainstream secondary schools, information on links with primary schools and special schools will also be elicited from secondary interviewees.

Two visits will be made to each case study school. In the spring term, interviews and document collection in schools focused on the following issues:

- school policies on special needs and inclusion;
- arrangements to support pupils with special needs in school, particularly those with learning difficulties;
- LEA support and training provided to learning support and other school staff;
- parental preferences and attitudes.

In the summer term, return visits to the schools will provide the opportunity to interview a wider range of staff and to participate in some lessons where children with special needs are being supported in mainstream classes.

Analysis of all the data collected will take place over the summer of 1996 and final reports on this project and that on the Code of Practice will be produced in the autumn.

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THE INTEGRATION OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS INTO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

Children with special educational needs are increasingly being educated in mainstream schools as a result of legislation, LEA policy and changing attitudes. However, pressures on resources, competition between schools, and the effects of greater parental choice may affect whether a child attends a mainstream or a special school.

The NFER project is investigating the impact of recent educational and resourcing strategies on integration, at LEA and school level and this report covers the first stage of the enquiry.

This interim report draws on data derived from a questionnaire survey of LEAs and follow-up interviews with key LEA staff. It gives details on:

- LEA policy on integration;
- LEA support for implementing their integration policy;
- the placements of pupils with statements of special educational need;
- parental choice of school;
- LEA monitoring and evaluation strategies.

The emerging issues from this phase of the work are also discussed and reference is made to the areas being investigated in school-based case studies, as part of the second phase of the project.

Further copies of this report and the accompanying report on the Code of Practice may be obtained from the Dissemination Unit, NFER, The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, SL1 2DQ.