Impact of Delegation on LEA Support Services for Special Educational Needs

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Background

This book reports the findings from a research project undertaken at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) into the impact of delegation on local education authority (LEA) support services for special educational needs.

In the past decade, since the introduction of local management of schools under the terms of the Education Reform Act 1988, the organisation and management of support services for special educational needs have undergone considerable change. In some cases, this has been on account of increasing administrative pressure to delegate further resources to schools; in others, it has been a positive response to the more mature position in mainstream schools, where greater expertise and knowledge about learning difficulties have equipped mainstream staff to make their own decisions and arrangements regarding support for pupils with learning difficulties.

Across England and Wales, towards the end of the 1990s, the pattern of support services for special educational needs was complex. Variables included the following:

- full or partial delegation
- service level agreements
- centre, area or 'cluster' administration and organisation of services
- the location of support services in central resource centres, special schools or units attached to mainstream schools
- cross-phase differences in provision available
- variations in services offered in different locations for similar needs
- differences in opportunities for support services to offer structured in-service courses and to further their own professional development
- procedures for monitoring and evaluation
- resourcing formulae.

The variables, operating both intra and inter LEAs, resulted not only in different support options for pupils and teachers but also in different roles and responsibilities

for practitioners engaged in the services, especially with regard to management functions at all levels.

The situation was particularly critical at the end of the 1990s for a clutch of reasons.

1.1.1 The Code of Practice

Schools were engaged in developing responses to the guidance of the Code of Practice (GB. DfE, 1994a). At the time of the NFER research, the Code's initial implementation had been managed by schools, and changes in practices were becoming embedded. However, the situation was dynamic in so far as some of the early responses were proving to be inappropriate or to involve too much time on administration. Schools were still experimenting with the design of individual education plans, which, in many cases, raised issues of support service involvement.

At the same time, not only did the support services play a role in confirming schools' decisions about a pupil's stage, or level, of need (thus developing the moderation role which had been started with consideration of resource allocation in the early years of local management (see Fletcher-Campbell with Hall, 1993; Fletcher-Campbell, 1996)) but the involvement of the support services with a pupil technically placed that pupil on stage 3 of the Code of Practice. Both of these factors had financial implications for the LEA and the school.

1.1.2 Evaluation

Responsibility for pupils with special educational needs variously rested, directly or indirectly, with LEAs, the governing bodies of schools, special educational needs coordinators and classroom teachers. Support services could be a critical arm in the LEA's monitoring and evaluation function, assessing schools' responses to pupils with learning difficulties and the quality of their provision to meet the educational needs of all pupils on roll. At the same time, there was widespread awareness of the need for quality assurance models for support service, though less awareness of how to design these.

1.1.3 Local government reorganisation

At the time of the NFER research, many LEA support services had been, or were, under review, on account of local Government reorganisation. The impact on services flowed from the formation of a new unitary authority (when both strategic and operational policy had to be formed, and budgets created); from adjusting boundaries within the old shire counties (where existing services had to reconsider 'patches' and budgets); and from intact authorities which had to reconsider their use of resources in reorganised authorities (where, for example, there had been significant use of out-authority provision). The turbulence caused uncertainty within services as well as the opportunity for creative structures, particularly by way of cooperative arrangements either within education support services or across agencies.

1.1.4 Inclusive education

Finally, and perhaps most important, was the issue of inclusive education and the part that support services play in facilitating this. Whatever individual responses to the idea, inclusion was at the forefront of debate and a central plank of Government education policy (GB. DfEE, 1997). Towards the end of the life of the NFER research project, the Government adopted the principles of the Salamanca World Statement on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994), desiring that all pupils be enrolled in mainstream schools 'unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise' (p. 44). The Government acknowledged that this involved the progressive extension of mainstream schools' capacity to meet the needs of all pupils, which, in turn, necessitated special services for particular pupils at particular times. The focus of the Government's policy was on an inclusive system – rather than a collection of inclusive ('zero reject') mainstream schools – which would, by its different resources, equip young people to participate in society and flourish in adult life. The longer-term nature of these aims can justify the maintenance of a degree of segregation and discrete support services as, arguably, these meet specific needs which, unless addressed, would lead to isolation within society at a later stage.

There are two perspectives on the role of support services *vis-à-vis* inclusion. On the one hand, the support services can be seen as an integral part of the strategies which

promote inclusion. But, on the other, if too focused on the individual and on 'special' strategies, they can promote exclusion by taking into mainstream schools approaches which are alien to, and incompatible with, those schools. Developments outside of, but tangential to, special education are relevant here – particularly those in the school effectiveness movement. Here the concern is to equip schools to reflect on their own practice and consider how they are meeting the needs of all pupils. The challenge is to meet individual needs by whole-school approaches to the curriculum, rather than by designing 'special' curricula for 'special' pupils. From the schools' perspective, it is important that they have confidence in a service which will negotiate the form of support and address the developmental needs of the institution so that pupils benefit by an improved environment as well as by specific input directed to their individual needs.

1.2 The research project

It was in recognition of the external challenges – from legislation and from critical reflection on institutional management – faced by the support services at the end of the 1990s, that a research project was undertaken at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). The project was commissioned by the Council of Local Education Authorities (CLEA) and ran from November 1996 to December 1997. It built on earlier work on special educational needs carried out by NFER (e.g. Moses *et al.*, 1988; Fletcher-Campbell with Hall, 1993; Fletcher-Campbell, 1996; Lee and Henkhuzens, 1996).

Research aims

The aims of the research were:

- to audit the resources within existing support services
- to describe the services offered
- to explore the different patterns of delegation and the implications and effect of each
- to delineate the management and organisation of the services
- to investigate the use made of services by schools and the effect of interventions on curricular provision and the way in which needs were met
- to evaluate the impact of different models of support on schools' practice in meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs.

Research methods

The study had two phases – first, a questionnaire survey of all LEAs in England and Wales and, second, case study work in five selected LEAs.

In the first phase, a questionnaire was sent in May 1997 to previously identified individuals in all 154 LEAs existing at the time in England and Wales. Of these LEAs, 104 responded in time for all data to be coded and used in the analysis. The responses from these 104 LEAs are the basis of all numerical data reported. The response rate was 68 per cent. A further four LEAs responded after the deadline for data entry of responses to closed questions had expired. Rather than ignore these four returns completely, it was decided to include the responses given to the open questions in the qualitative analysis reported.

As Table 1.1 shows, the proportion of responding LEAs of each type closely matched the proportion of each type within all LEAs.

Table 1.1 Responding LEAs as a sample of all LEAs

Type	Responding LEAs		All LEAs	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Inner London boroughs	8	8	13	8
Outer London boroughs	14	13	20	13
Metropolitan boroughs	25	24	37	24
Wales	14	13	22	14
New authorities	23	22	37	24
Counties	20	19	25	16
Total LEAs	**104**	**100**	**154**	**100**

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

The questionnaire sought information about:

- whether or not the LEA had support services for special educational needs;
- the delegation of support services;
- the management of support services;
- referrals to support services;
- the organisation of support services;
- the role of special schools in supporting mainstream schools.

An opportunity was also given for respondents to make general comments about the impact of delegation on support services for special educational needs.

Those LEAs which had support services were asked to answer all sections of the questionnaire; those without services were asked to fill in only the last two sections. Respondents were invited to send supporting documentation illustrative of the local situation: 34 LEAs did this.

In the second phase of the research, five authorities were selected for in-depth case study work. They were chosen to reflect different geographical locations and LEA types as well as differences in the delegation, provision and organisation of support services for special educational needs. They were: an inner London borough, an intact shire county in eastern England, a reconstituted shire county in the Midlands and two new unitary authorities – one in the north of England and one in Wales. In this report, they are referred to by pseudonyms. Within the local authorities, interviews were conducted with special needs officers and advisers, a range of heads of services, and members of the educational psychology services. In each authority, visits were made to about five schools (two secondary, two primary and one special) and interviews conducted with the headteacher, special educational needs coordinator, learning support teachers on the staff, learning support assistants, peripatetic teachers working at the school, a sample of pupils with special educational needs receiving external support, and parents of the pupils interviewed. Table 1.2 shows all the interviews conducted across the case study authorities.

Table 1.2 Interviews conducted across the case study authorities

Status	Number of interviewees
Principal education officer (SEN)	3 (+1)
Head of individual support service	12
Principal educational psychologist	5
SEN adviser/inspector	(2)
Area officer/manager	6
Support teachers/assistants (working in case study schools)	30
Other*	2
Total (excluding numbers in brackets)	**58**

**Principal EWO and principal policy and planning officer*

NB Numbers in brackets indicate that an individual held joint responsibility, but his/her interview is counted under his/her main responsibility.

1.3 Structure of the report

Chapter 2 gives a broad introduction to patterns of delegation in the responding authorities and illustrates these patterns by a more detailed discussion of the position in the case study authorities. Chapter 3 examines what was offered to mainstream schools in the responding LEAs. The report then turns to service organisation and operational management at the level of the totality of provision (Chapter 4) and of individual services (Chapter 5) while Chapter 6 considers strategic management. Chapters 7 and 8 investigate the perceptions of those who receive the support – schools and parents and pupils. Chapter 9 draws conclusions from the study and reflects on issues at local, institutional and national policy levels.

Chapter 2

Funding LEA support services for special educational needs: delegation, devolvement, central retention

After the Education Reform Act 1988, and Circular 7/88, which introduced local management of schools, Circular 7/91 required local authorities to delegate to schools a minimum of 85 per cent of the Potential Schools Budget. (Both Circulars have been replaced by Circular 2/94 (GB. DfE, 1994b).) LEAs have therefore been under pressure to delegate services, including support services for special educational needs, which were previously centrally funded, managed and organised.

In the early 1990s, there was much speculation about how support services for special needs might develop in the new delegated system. Some writers saw a future for LEA support services. For example, Chatwin *et al.* (1990) argued that LEA support teams would develop to address whole-school cultural change rather than individual special needs, and Bangs (1990) was optimistic that LMS offered the opportunity for coherent and coordinated services to be developed on an LEA-wide basis. Others wrote about the development of non-LEA services: for example, in a collection of articles edited by Bowers (1991), various options for support services were described, including one marketed from a special school, one run as an agency and others set up as independent consultancies.

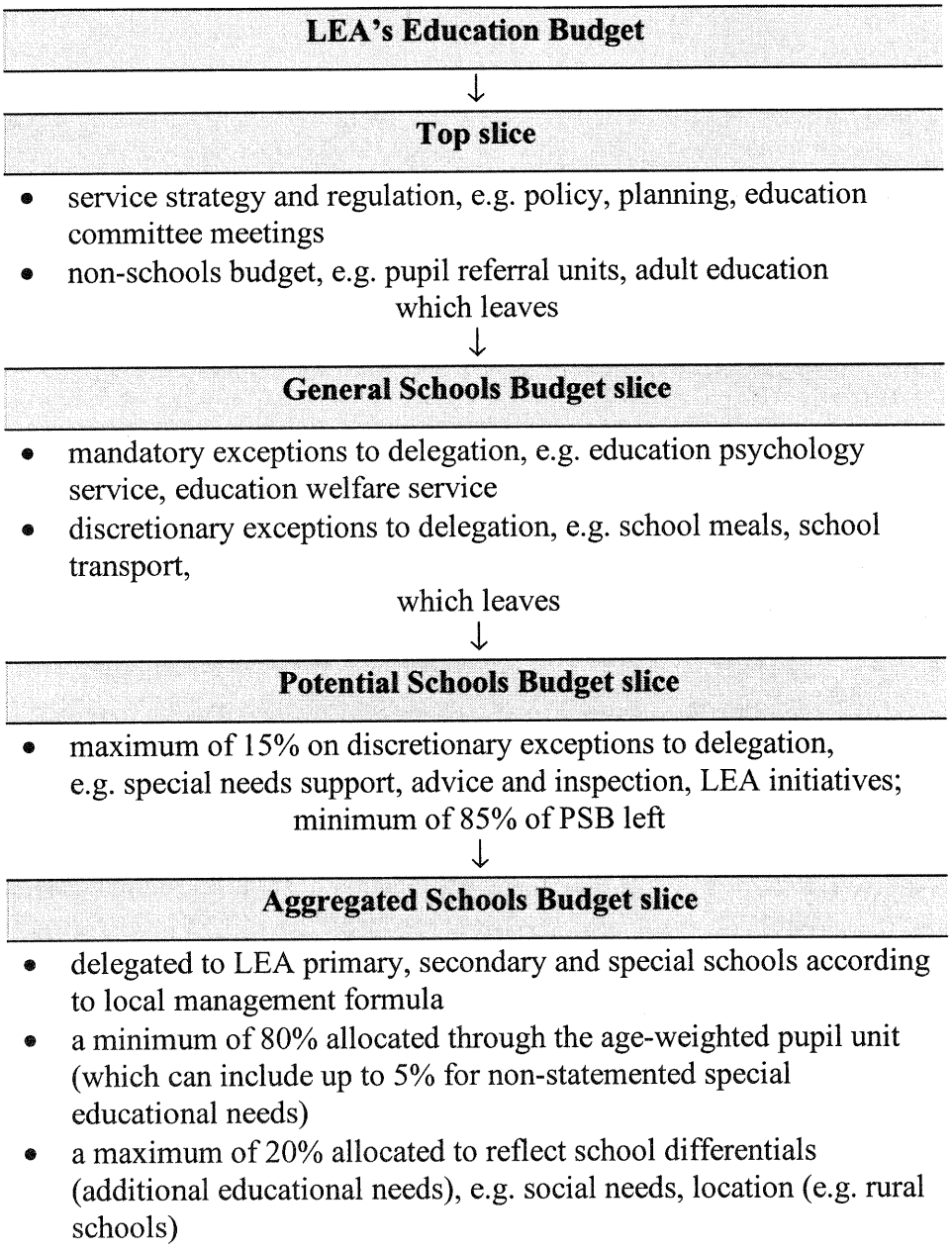
Previous NFER research (Fletcher-Campbell with Hall, 1993) found that the main concern dominating support services was their possible dispersal or disintegration as a result of the budgets resourcing them being delegated to schools. At that time, however, only two of 81 responding LEAs had delegated special needs support services but a large proportion of the remainder were drawing up proposals for delegation. A later NFER study (Lee and Henkhuzens, 1996) found that LEAs which

had delegated most or all of their funding for special educational needs had had to disband their centrally based support services, except where service level agreements had been reached, enabling schools to buy in the support of these teachers or support assistants. They found that many staff from disbanded services had obtained posts within LEA schools but suggested that some of their expertise must have been dissipated (and for those who did not find such jobs, the concern must be that their expertise was lost). As a result, they argued, some schools felt insufficiently supported to deal effectively with special educational needs. This then was the background to the present study of LEA support services for special educational needs.

2.1 Funding the support services for special educational needs

The funding of support services for special educational needs may potentially involve all three of the main 'slices' of an LEA's educational budget (GB. DfE, 1994b; Fletcher-Campbell, 1996). The total budget for school-based education in an LEA is called the General Schools Budget. From this, LEAs resource all the mandatory exceptions to delegation including education welfare officers and the educational psychology service. Once these budget heads have been allowed for, the remainder is known as the Potential Schools Budget, of which local authorities have to delegate at least 85 per cent, leaving a maximum of 15 per cent of the Potential Schools Budget available to be retained centrally. If support services are not delegated, they are resourced from this retained portion of the budget.

Figure 2.1 The 'slices' of an LEA's education budget as at time of NFER research



It is possible, however, for LEAs which do not delegate the funding for support services for special educational needs to *devolve* (i.e. earmark) money to schools from the retained portion of the Potential Schools Budget. This has the advantage that schools, which are closest to their pupils, can decide how to provide any support required. For example, some schools may use this devolved money to buy in support teaching from the centrally funded services while others may decide to buy in support from an independent practitioner or to use the money to pay for a learning support assistant in the classroom. Data from the case studies suggested that LEAs which

devolve money in this way have to bear in mind, first, that the devolved money does not count towards the minimum 85 per cent of the Potential Schools Budget which must be delegated; and, second, it may be 'lost' to the LEA through schools' use of independent practitioners. On the other hand, such devolved money remains more directly in the LEA's control than does delegated money – the LEA could decide to take it back, for example, or to direct schools as to the precise purposes for which it should be used.

Support services, although organised as central services, can also be funded, at least partially, not from the retained Potential Schools Budget, but from the delegated Aggregated Schools Budget through 'buy back' arrangements with schools or service level agreements. Thus, some of the funding for support services for special educational needs may derive from a third slice of the LEA's education budget – the money left when the discretionary exceptions have been made. This third slice is called the Aggregated Schools Budget and is delegated to schools via the LMS and local management of special schools (LMSS) schemes. From this portion of the budget, there are two possible ways in which schools may gain funding for pupils with special educational needs. These ways are related to the division of the Aggregated Schools Budget into two allocations: a minimum of 80 per cent which is allocated through the age-weighted pupil unit (AWPU) – which can include up to five per cent for non-statemented special educational needs – and a maximum of 20 per cent reflecting school differentials, such as school size, location (e.g. rural schools), social needs and also, but not necessarily, special educational needs; this element of the budget is sometimes referred to as being for Additional Educational Needs.

In theory, then, it is possible for the support services for special educational needs to be funded:

- entirely from the retained Potential Schools Budget;
- entirely from the delegated Aggregated Schools Budget;
- from the retained Potential Schools Budget but with some money *devolved* to schools;
- partly from the retained Potential Schools Budget and partly from the delegated Aggregated Schools Budget; or

- partly from the retained Potential Schools Budget, partly from the devolved Potential Schools Budget and partly from the delegated Aggregated Schools Budget.

In order to find out how support services for special educational needs were in fact funded across England and Wales, the first section of the 1997 NFER questionnaire asked LEA officers for information about the budgets for supporting special educational needs. Separate questions were asked about the delegation of budgets for supporting special educational needs at stages 1–2 of the Code of Practice, at stage 3, and for statements of special educational needs. This was grounded in the assumption that pupils at stages 1 and 2 would be regarded as 'unexceptional' and the clear responsibility of schools. Respondents were offered set answers including the option 'other', which allowed them to give details of the different situation in their authority. Their responses are set out in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 The delegation to schools of budgets for supporting special educational needs in responding LEAs

Budget	Percentage of LEAs N = 103					
	Stages 1 & 2		Stage 3		Statements	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Fully delegated	64	69	18	25	15	18
Some delegated; some retained	20	19	55	52	36	36
Centrally retained	11	8	21	18	31	27
LEA allocates support hours	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6	5
Other	5	4	5	5	12	13
Missing cases	0	0	0	0	1	1

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Table 2.1 shows that most of the responding LEAs had fully delegated budgets for supporting provision for special educational needs at stages 1–2 of the Code of Practice. The small number retaining this funding may well have allocated special

educational needs funding for supporting early stages of the Code through the AWPU and, because of the wording in the questionnaire, may not have felt that this information was relevant. Table 2.1 also shows that by stage 3 of the Code, most of the responding LEAs operated a mixed system whereby some funding was delegated and some retained. At stage 5 of the Code, the most frequent practice was for LEAs to delegate some of the budget and retain the rest, but it was almost as often the case that the LEA retained this part of the budget. A minority of LEAs fully delegated the budget for statements. As can be seen, most responding LEAs made the same budgetary arrangement for supporting special needs in both primary and secondary schools; a small minority made separate arrangements for the two phases.

A few respondents gave details of practice in their LEA as they felt this did not fit with the set responses provided on the questionnaire. The only important variation in practice was that some LEAs devolved, rather than delegated, some funding for supporting special educational needs. Responses to the questionnaire, therefore, highlighted the unanticipated finding that the devolved funding option was being used in practice by some LEAs.

Key points about funding the support services for special educational needs

From the questionnaire responses, it appeared that:

- Most LEAs had opted for a mixed approach to the budget arrangements for supporting special educational needs which related to the staged structure of the Code of Practice – the earlier, school-based stages being delegated.

- A minority of responding LEAs operated a single budget system for supporting special educational needs, regardless of the particular stage of the Code: that is, three responding LEAs centrally retained the budget for all stages of the Code of Practice for both primary and secondary schools; four LEAs fully delegated; and nine LEAs delegated some and retained some, for all stages of the Code for both primary and secondary schools.

2.2 Service level agreements

Service level agreements were recommended in the Code of Practice:

> *Whether or not funding for a particular support service is delegated to schools, it may be helpful for schools and LEAs to make service level agreements for such services, specifying the scope, quality and duration of the service* (GB. DfE, 1994a, p. 20, para. 2:59).

Of the 103 LEAs responding to the NFER survey, just under half operated service level agreements. The details are given in Tables 2.2a and b.

Table 2.2a Percentage of responding LEAs operating service level agreements

Service level agreement	Percentage of LEAs N = 103
Yes	47
No	53

Table 2.2b Percentage of schools included in service level agreements

	Percentage of LEAs N = 47	
LEA schools included in SLA	**Primary**	**Secondary**
All	49	40
Some	32	32
Other	15	23
Missing cases	4	4
GM schools included in SLA		
All	26	26
Some	13	13
Other*	53	53
Missing cases	9	9

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.
**More details in text*

Of the 47 LEAs operating service level agreements, 40 per cent operated them in all their LEA schools while 28 per cent had service level agreements with some LEA schools. A few responding LEAs operated service level agreements only in one (primary or secondary) phase, or in the grant-maintained sector. Other LEAs used service level agreements in idiosyncratic ways. For example, one county LEA had service level agreements with its primary pupil referral units only while another had service level agreements operating in some special schools in relation to outreach support for mainstream schools. Similarly, service level agreements operated with distinctive sub-sections of the grant-maintained sector in different LEAs: for example, they included some support services but not others, or they included only grant-maintained schools with special units. In one of the new authorities, an interesting variation of the norm had developed where the support service operated a service level agreement with the Chief Education Officer on behalf of LEA and grant-maintained schools.

All five NFER case study authorities used service level agreements. However, practice around, and views on, service level agreements varied both from support service to support service within LEAs and between LEAs. For example, the principal educational psychologists from two of the case study LEAs had very different views on the usefulness for centrally funded educational psychology services of service level agreements. One felt that having a service level agreement with schools introduced market concepts of consumer voice and choice that was out of place in a centrally funded service which schools did not 'buy'. The argument was that because schools did not pay for the service at point of use, they should not have a direct say in what that service offered. As one principal educational psychologist said: '*If I am at somebody's beck and call and they pay me money, that's OK – but I tell them how much I charge. You behave like a commercial organisation and not like a public service.*'

Implicit in this quotation is a sense of there being a trade-off between psychologists' professional judgement, on the one hand, and their renumeration on the other – that is, in this view, as a commercial service, they would be able to set their own scale of charges within the limit of what the market (i.e. schools) would bear but they would

also be prepared to provide what the market (i.e. schools) wanted; but as a public service provided 'free' to schools, it was felt that they should have control over what was offered. For the same educational psychologist, a service level agreement for a centrally funded service was, therefore, 'the worst of both worlds' because it meant that psychologists could neither set their own charges nor determine wholly the nature of the service offered. It could be argued, however, that service level agreements in this context are an important way in which schools can have a voice regarding the kind of service they want and the quality of service they are given.

This was the view taken by the principal educational psychologist in another case study LEA, who believed service level agreements with schools to be a successful means of cementing a carefully negotiated relationship, which was focused on the nature and quality of the service provided:

> *We have service level agreements with schools but if headteachers don't get the service they want, or the sort of psychologist they like, they remind me as to where power relationships lie through their right to buy in from elsewhere. The fact is that no one ever has and we have a detailed service agreement that was genuinely negotiated with representatives of primary and secondary heads. It took 12 months to arrive at and so we have joint ownership. We have just reviewed it and heads have indicated that they are happy and don't want any major changes. It sets out a fair system for allocating our service time* (principal educational psychologist).

In this case, schools were regarded as having a right to a say in the nature of the service. The service level agreement was accepted as defining the 'quasi-market' relationship between the schools and the centrally funded service and was viewed by the interviewee as a useful mechanism which enabled both parties (the providers and the consumers) to have a sense of ownership of the service.

The existence of service level agreements did not seem, of itself, to be the crucially 'helpful' factor for schools and LEAs; rather, perceptions of their 'helpfulness' depended on their being a focus for continued negotiation between headteachers and the LEA. The existence of service level agreements did, however, appear to draw the attention of service providers to the level of demand for their service. In some cases,

schools wanted more than the service level agreement provided and the services had to buy in sessional workers to cope with demand. Given that several interviewees mentioned the lack of a pool of qualified and experienced staff outside the existing services, this raises issues about the quality of some staff sent in to support pupils in schools. One area team leader believed that the occasional need to use sessional staff who lacked appropriate qualifications and/or experience reduced the credibility of the whole service in the eyes of schools (see Chapter 5). In other cases, service level agreements were in operation but only some schools chose to use the service, others going to independent practitioners instead. Service heads could then respond by trying to raise the profile of their service and to market it more successfully to these schools.

In one case study LEA which had centrally retained support services, service level agreements were used to guarantee to all schools a minimum amount of support services' time. This meant that, regardless of the level of special educational need, all schools received a basic amount of support service time which could be used as the school desired. One behaviour support teacher did not like this system, believing that too much of her time was spent offering minor support in schools which, in her view, had no serious problems, leaving less time to work in schools where pupils had greater problems. She would have preferred service time to be allocated purely on the basis of need: '*I find myself going to, say, a rural first school without many behaviour problems and they ask me to spend my time on daft things. My time should be spent where kids really need the support. I have to spread myself too thinly.*'

This quotation demonstrates the tensions that can arise between what support service staff feel ought to be their focus and how schools choose to use them when their services are available regardless of level of need. The problem may be either in the assessment of the situation or in the identification of appropriate action to ameliorate it. In that LEA, the service level agreement applied to all schools and guaranteed them all a certain amount of support. In another LEA, the head of a centrally retained hearing impairment service explained that they had previously tried operating service level agreements negotiated with individual schools but had abandoned them because they were an 'administrative nightmare'.

Key points relating to service level agreements

- Despite the recommendation made in the Code of Practice, just over half of the responding LEAs did not operate service level agreements.
- Where service level agreements were in operation, a variety of practice was apparent from the questionnaire responses.
- From the case studies, it emerged that service level agreements were helpful in so far as they acted as a focus for continued negotiation between headteachers and the LEA.
- Service level agreements drew attention to the level of demand for services.

2.3 Patterns of funding in the case study authorities

In the five case studies of LEA practice, it was possible to look in some depth both at the patterns of funding for supporting special educational needs and at the effect this had on the funding of LEA support services for those needs. In Figure 2.2, a summary of these, sometimes complex, relationships is set out.

Figure 2.2 Funding patterns for supporting special education needs in the five case study LEAs (excludes funding for units, resourced provisions and special schools)

LEA	Budgets for supporting SEN			Funding pattern for services	Focus of support services (stages of Code of Practice)
Clyde	**at stages 1 & 2 – fully delegated**	**at stage 3 – fully delegated**	**for statements–mainly delegated; some retained**	**varied by service**	**varied by service**
	• 5% of AWPU plus an element based on take-up of FSM		• learning support and sensory impairment: fully delegated based on 10 levels of need • emotional/behavioural difficulties: retained	• learning support: mainly buy back; some central funding • sensory impairment: centrally funded • emotional/behavioural difficulties: buy back	• learning support: all stages • sensory impairment: all stages • emotional/behavioural difficulties: stages 1 – 3
Dornay	**at stages 1 & 2 – mainly delegated; some devolved**	**at stage 3 — some delegated; some devolved; some retained**	**for statements – retained**	**c. 80% centrally funded; c. 20% through buy back**	**stages 3–5**
	• through AWPU: based on pupils eligible for FSM and banded test results • numbers on SEN Register (based on LEA descriptors)		• LEA allocates support hours in mainstream, or place in unit or special school	• all support services	• stage 3 – buy back • stage 5 – central funding
Forth	**at stages 1 & 2 – fully delegated**	**at stage 3 – retained**	**for statements mainly delegated; some retained**	**varied by service**	**varied by service**
	• 5% of AWPU • 50% of compensatory allocation (based on % pupil take-up of FSM and clothing grants)		• learning difficulties and physical difficulties: fully delegated based on 5 bands of money relating to needs • sensory impairment: retained	• generic service: mainly buy back; some central funding • physical difficulties and sensory impairment: central funding (jointly with other LEAs)	• generic service: buy back – stage 5; central funds – stages 3 – 4 • other services: all stages

Figure 2.2 (continued)

Moray	**at stages 1 & 2 – fully delegated** **at stage 3 – fully delegated**	**for statements - some delegated; some retained**	**mainly centrally funded; some buy back**	**stage 5**
	• numbers at stage3 (moderated)	• primary schools: retained (LEA allocates support hours) • secondary schools: complex-retained; non-complex-delegated • classroom assistants – funding retained except that funding for cover is delegated	• all services	• all services
Tay	**at stages 1 & 2 fully delegated** **at stage 3 – fully delegated**	**For statements – some delegated; some retained**	**centrally funded**	**varied by stage**
	• through AWPU: based on pupil audit (checklists for curriculum, care/medical and behavioural needs) • numbers on SEN register	• delegated based on number of pupils with statements	• all services	• stages 1 & 2 – consultative; • stage 3 – 5 – direct work with pupils

From the data summarised in Figure 2.2, it was clear that there was not necessarily any direct relationship between the delegation of funding to schools to support special needs at stages 1 – 3 of the Code of Practice, on the one hand, and the loss of support services funded from the centrally retained budget (the Potential Schools Budget), on the other. The data from Tay and Moray LEAs illustrate this point. In interviews in both these LEAs, officers and support service staff spontaneously put forward the view that a policy commitment to special educational needs at council level was the vital component in securing the underwriting of centrally funded support services:

> *Council is very thorough in its support of inclusion. The Director himself wrote the inclusive strategy paper. There is a strong belief in equal opportunities, in inclusion working in this way and, therefore, in central services* (head of learning support service).

> *This LEA is a child-centred organisation and special educational needs are high priority. Our special needs children are well served ... because we have a central organisation, centrally funded which means we are all working together* (head of sensory support service).

Yet, although the delegation to schools of funding for supporting special educational needs did not automatically mean the loss of central services, the pattern of that delegation did affect the pattern of funding for the support services and, importantly, the focus of support service work. For example, in Clyde LEA, the service for emotional and behavioural difficulties focused on supporting stages 1 – 3 of the Code of Practice. This work was funded from schools buying back the service from the money delegated to them. Support for pupils with statements of emotional and behavioural difficulties, on the other hand, was not part of the support service brief and was separately provided in centrally funded units and special schools. To take another example, in Forth LEA, high-quality stage 3 support was regarded as a central plank in the LEA's strategy to control the number of statements issued and, hence, this support was centrally funded and was the main focus of the generic support service. Support for statements was delegated to schools and the generic support service only became involved if schools chose to buy back its service.

Within the case study authorities, the varied patterns of delegation, devolution and retention of the funding for supporting special educational needs in mainstream schools related to local policy priorities and to other educational provision but, in themselves, these patterns constrained the scope and focus of the work of the support services, as will be shown below. First, it is important to note the effect on support services of LEA strategies to guide and monitor schools' use of the special educational needs funding delegated to them.

2.4 Schools' delegated budgets for special needs: LEA guidance and monitoring

Once money had been delegated to schools, practice in the five case study LEAs varied as to whether or not guidance was given to schools on effective use of that money, and whether or not schools' use of that delegated money was monitored by the LEA. Overall, the case study data suggested a lack of both effective guidance and of effective monitoring of schools' delegated funding for special educational needs (see also Fletcher-Campbell, 1996).

However, some of the problems raised by delegation to schools were clear. One problem arose when the level of funding delegated to individual schools was calculated on the basis of a primary indicator, such as the numbers of pupils at stage 3 of the Code of Practice or the numbers of pupils with statements. In the three case study LEAs where primary indicators were used to assess the level of special needs to generate the level of funding delegated to a school, the direct result was a steep rise in the numbers of pupils being identified at the stage associated with extra resources. This was regarded by some LEA interviewees as schools 'playing the system' to increase their funding, although there was also some sympathy for schools' desire to protect posts and/or the responsibility allowance of the special educational needs coordinator. This problem, in fact, related to a deeper issue about the relative merits of primary versus proxy indicators of the differential levels of special educational needs among schools (proxy indicators being, for example, the numbers eligible for free school meals). This issue is discussed in depth in a previous NFER report (Fletcher-Campbell, 1996). From the present study, it was evident that, where

primary indicators of special educational needs were used as the basis of allocating funding to schools, there was a clear need for external moderation despite the additional costs incurred by such an exercise.

In one of the three case study LEAs which used primary indicators, a partial solution had been found through the introduction of moderation by the educational psychology service of the pupils placed by schools at stage 3. This, however, created its own problems because staffing levels in the educational psychology service were insufficient to cope with this extra work.

A second problem associated with the delegation of funding for special educational needs to schools arose where schools, lacking effective guidance, used the money for what LEA interviewees felt were inappropriate purposes: an example given by a head of a sensory support service was the employment of cheap, but unqualified, staff to support special needs. In other cases, schools appeared to be using at least some of the budget nominally allocated for special education for other puposes altogether and were perceived to be making inadequate provision for pupils with learning difficulties.

> *One of the difficulties is that when budgets come under pressure, there may be a tendency to move priorities away from special educational needs so therefore there's a great need to monitor the situation very closely – and probably more closely than is happening in practice at present* (head of special educational needs support service).

In one of the LEAs studied, this problem was uncovered in an interesting way. Accountants had been employed to help headteachers cope with LMS in general and the data generated were fed back to the LEA. After the appointment of a new senior officer, this general information was collated to allow examination of the use of delegated funding for special educational needs in particular. The exercise indicated that, while some schools were enhancing the normal allocation, overall, primary schools were using about 10 – 15 per cent for measures not directly focused on provision for pupils with special educational needs purposes – for example, to employ another teacher and thus decrease class sizes. As the senior officer realised, this practice highlighted the fact that funding for special educational needs must always be

seen in relation to funding for education in general. Where there is a perceived underfunding of the AWPU, there is a temptation for schools to use money nominally allocated to support pupils with special needs to enhance provision generally. Although it is justifiable to argue that pupils with special educational needs fare better in smaller classes, it is not clear that they derive any more benefit from this arrangement than do other pupils, so it cannot be argued that resources are targeted on their needs.

These 'problems' flow from the underpinning dilemma of delegation: schools are entrusted with decision-making about the best use of budgets for their pupils and have discretion as to how to meet needs. However, it should be remembered that governing bodies have a statutory duty as regards provision for pupils with special educational needs so there are real opportunities for discussion about 'appropriateness of spending'.

Some examples of strategies of guidance, moderation and monitoring derived from the case study data are set out in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3 Schools' delegated budgets for special educational needs: some examples of LEA strategies of guidance, moderation and monitoring

Moderation of reported levels of special educational need	Guidance on use of delegated funds for special educational needs	Monitoring of how delegated funding was used by schools
• Where numbers appeared unusual, principal educational psychologist and head of learning support visited school and asked school to justify their figures	• Discussion with school support team (educational psychologist, behaviour support teacher and learning support teacher)	• Examination of school accounts by senior officer with responsibility for special educational needs.
• Every school had to send in IEPs of a sample of pupils at various stages of the Code of Practice	• Criteria set out by LEA (draft stage) • Staff training • Meetings with headteachers • Governor training • State the percentage of money expected to be spent on special educational needs	• LEA monitored spending on the basis of guidance criteria (draft stage) • Publishing special educational needs budgets – *'It is quite a powerful mechanism because it only takes one headteacher to be called to account for all the headteachers to be more careful'* (area support team leader). • Use of all LEA advisers to monitor special educational needs provision in schools; regular Quality Assurance Team focus on special educational needs when schools had to account for use of delegated funding and give examples of value – added • Examination by LEA officers of schools' special educational needs policies – followed up where finance was weak – *'It has helped to change the culture. Schools realised they were accountable'* (assistant director of education).

Despite evidence, from the case studies, of insufficient guidance to schools as to how to use the money delegated for special educational needs and insufficient monitoring of that use, it was clear that some interviewees believed that at least some schools made better use of the money delegated to them than the LEA could have made of it. One interviewee, though, made it clear that delegation of money had to be tied to delegation of responsibility:

> *I'm pretty supportive of delegation, provided that the notion of responsibility is clearly there. ... An obligation on schools to meet the needs of the children in their community would be nice. ... I'm for delegation because I think that, on the whole, schools use the money better than LEAs. Of course, mistakes are made, but LEAs make mistakes, too, and at least a school mistake only affects one school* (assistant director of education).

The reference to community needs is salient. Delegation *per se* need not compromise schools' obligation to *all* pupils on roll. However, alongside other educational policies, it *may* encourage schools to become insular, perceive themselves to be in competition with other neighbouring schools, and be too ready to fight their own corner rather than consider the complementary nature of provision within a wider community.

Another interviewee made the important point that it was schools which were already committed to good practice regarding special educational needs which were perceived to use the delegated money 'better than LEAs':

> *In schools which are good in terms of special educational needs, delegation allows them to use their resources more creatively and flexibly to mix and match to meet the needs of their pupils. And some of these schools top up their delegated money now with money from the main budget* (area support team leader).

This comment makes implicit reference to the fact that, in some cases, there can be discussion about the focus of 'expertise' in special education. There are schools which have developed their practice to such a degree that they have, within the ordinary staff, expertise and experience which formerly might only have been available within a specialist support service. In such cases, it is likely that money is more, or as, wisely spent as in a pre-local management of schools situation. But, clearly, where practice is not so well developed, there is need for the LEA to give schools effective guidance on the use of delegated budgets to meet pupils' needs. (Variation in schools' special educational needs support practice is discussed in later chapters of this report.)

This also raises questions: first, about the optimal way of utilising such pockets of expertise more widely. Here, recent Government policy initiatives such as the development of special schools as resource centres, and the identification of Beacon schools may well prove pertinent. Secondly, there is the question of what role support services can have with respect to schools that have already developed mature special education provision. While schools were aware of this problem ('What have they to offer us?'), there was little evidence that support services were addressing it.

Key points about monitoring delegated budgets for special educational needs

If delegation is to have a beneficial effect on the meeting of special educational needs in mainstream schools, delegated funding for those needs must be:

- given with *clear guidelines* as to the purposes for which it is to be used;
- *monitored* to ensure that such guidelines are being adhered to;
- allocated on the basis of *fair indicators* of differential levels of special educational needs among schools;
- *externally moderated* to some degree where funding is allocated using primary indicators.

2.5 Impact of delegation on support services

2.5.1 Impact on services which were mainly centrally funded

Both the data presented earlier in Figure 2.2 and the data from the questionnaire on the continued existence of LEA support services show that the delegation to schools of budgets to support special educational needs had not led to the demise of centrally funded services. Yet delegation had affected all the special educational needs support services in each of the case study authorities in different ways, even those services which remained centrally funded. Some examples will serve to illustrate this point.

Tay LEA

In Tay LEA, central services had been retained but delegation of budgets to schools had affected the size and organisation of the sensory impairment service:

> *We had units for the deaf and for visual impairment. They were ours but they were delegated to schools. That had a profound effect on our service. We lost a third of our budget, which meant we lost economies of scale and for a time it was tight. The units and the staff were delegated, plus the equipment and non-teaching staff. We reorganised the service just because of that* (head of sensory support service).

Ironically, because of the low incidence of sensory impairment, one delegated unit had later had to close as numbers went into a trough, with the result that the staff were redeployed back into the sensory impairment service. In this case, the centrally retained service was able to respond to the requirement to delegate and was also able to re-employ previously delegated staff, thus retaining their expertise for the authority's pupils. It is arguable that, if the sensory impairment service had itself been delegated, such fluctuations in demand may well have led to the loss of these trained and experienced staff.

Experience of delegation has suggested that services providing for low incidence needs, such as sensory impairment, may be in a position different from those for high-incidence needs – general learning difficulties, for example. Not only does delegation of the former constrain the capacity for planning across an authority, it also dissipates expertise. While it makes sense for schools to make their own arrangements for general learning difficulties – most secondary schools will be able to employ more than one full-time specialist – this is not the case with those special needs which occur rarely and unpredictably. With the latter, it is inevitable that specialists will have to cover a number of schools across a wider area.

In Tay LEA, pressure to delegate 85 per cent of the Potential Schools Budget had led to the delegation of funds for advisory and inspection services. A business unit had been set up fully funded through schools purchasing its services. In consequence, educational psychologists and learning and behaviour support teachers found their job remits had been modified, preventing them from providing in-service training to school staff and restricting their freedom to play an advisory role in schools. This led to a decline in job satisfaction for some support service staff. At the same time, because schools had to pay for in-service training, not all schools availed themselves of the opportunities available, which led to a loss of consistency in school staff

development. In this case, then, the delegation of another service had had knock-on effects on the support services for special educational needs and had caused a decline both in the consistent take-up of in-service training opportunities by schools and in job satisfaction for support service staff. Thus, even where support services for special educational needs remained centrally retained, the effects of the delegation which had occurred in the LEA could still be felt.

Moray LEA

The case study of Moray affords another example of an LEA which had retained central support services as far as possible. However, to achieve 85 per cent delegation of the Potential Schools Budget, the LEA had delegated resourced provision (units) and the funding for cover for centrally funded classroom assistants. In addition, funding to support pupils with statements for non-complex needs in secondary schools had been devolved. These exceptions to central retention had an impact on the LEA support services, and on provision to pupils, in different ways.

The delegation of resourced provision meant that this means of supporting special educational needs was completely separate from the support services. Because the host schools appointed the staff in the resourced provision, some interviewees in this LEA felt that delegation, in this case, had resulted in the loss of the support services' role in ensuring the quality of staffing, and thus the quality of provision to pupils supported in this way. Clearly, this view assumes that these services had fulfilled this role effectively in the past.

The delegation of funding for supply cover in the event of the illness/absence of LEA-employed learning support assistants was a compromise agreed between the LEA, which would have liked to delegate funding for learning support assistants, and headteachers, who did not want the responsibility of employing learning support assistants, given the fluctuations in numbers of pupils needing their support in individual schools. In practice, some interviewees felt that the compromise did not always work to the benefit of the pupils. As one learning support assistant explained, although schools had the money to buy in supply cover in the absence of the LEA-employed learning support assistant, there was no pool of people for the school to

draw on and so, inevitably, schools bought in someone untrained and inexperienced. The experience of another learning support assistant was that when she was ill or went on a course, the school failed to buy in cover, despite having the money delegated for this purpose. In practice, then, the delegation of this small aspect of the support services' provision appeared to result, at least in some cases, in the dilution of the quality and even the quantity of support received by pupils.

The devolving of money to secondary schools to support pupils with statements of non-complex needs also had an impact on the centrally retained support services and the quality of provision to pupils. The role of the support services was confined to pupils with statements for complex/severe needs. Interviewees felt that there were advantages and disadvantages to this change. One learning support teacher, for example, recognised that concentrating on complex/severe needs gave more time with each individual pupil but also explained that 'it was hard to lose the pupils we had'. Another learning support teacher found concentrating only on severe/complex needs was more stressful than supporting a wider range of levels of need and also that her new role demanded liaison with, and supervision of, the pupils' classroom assistants, something she had not had to undertake previously. For pupils, the quality of support provided by their secondary schools varied, depending not only on the quality and experience of the staff employed by the school but also on the overall stance and ethos of the school regarding the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. (This point is discussed more fully in later chapters.)

Dornay and Forth LEAs

In the other case study LEAs where support services were centrally funded but to a lesser extent than in the examples above, similar points were made about how delegation impacted on them.

In Dornay LEA, where the generic support service was approximately 80 per cent centrally funded, effects were that:

- the possibility of competition from other agencies for supporting pupils at stage 3 meant that the service as a whole was more focused on ensuring provision of a consistently good service to schools;
- there was an increase in demand from schools for the stage of support funded centrally (in this case, statements) linked to a lack of schools' taking responsibility for the earlier stages of support funded through their delegated budget;
- loss of support services' advisory role coupled with loss of professional control of schools' use of delegated money resulted in a loss of influence over schools' broader approach to special educational needs.

In Forth LEA, where individual services were centrally funded, effects included:

- the loss of resourced provision as an integral part of the service, resulting in lack of access to training and the professional isolation of the staff subsequently employed in units;
- the loss of ability to monitor the quality of support staff employed by schools using delegated funds;
- the delegation of support at lower school phases meant problems for the centrally funded service in planning ahead for supporting pupils at later school phases.

From the case study data, it was clear that even where support services were fully or mainly centrally funded, the impact was felt of the delegation of funding for other aspects of the support of special educational needs.

2.5.2 Impact on services which were fully/mainly delegated

Only one support service within the five case study LEAs was fully funded through schools buying back its services from their delegated funds. This was a small support service for emotional and behavioural difficulties in Clyde LEA. More common were support services which were mainly funded through schools buying back their services, but which also had some central funding. (For details, see Figure 2.2 above.)

Clyde LEA

From the point of view of the head of the service for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, delegation could empower schools to support their own pupils but, in practice, delegation by itself did not ensure effective provision. For example, the use of a classroom assistant to 'mind' a pupil in class might contain a problem, but might not address the need. More appropriate provision might be in-service training for staff, whole-school policy development or additional class-free

time for the SENCO. In the view of the head of service, delegation of the funding for the service to schools had raised two main issues. These were that:

- funding to schools for special educational needs based on a proxy indicator (numbers eligible for free school meals) plus levels of statemented needs did not act as an incentive to improve early support for special educational needs; and
- a lack of monitoring of the use to which schools put the delegated funding at times resulted in ineffective provision continuing unchecked.

Since both these problems related to the way in which delegation was operationalised, the service head believed them not to be intrinsic and intractable problems. In his view, they could be overcome by, first, using support service staff to audit levels of need and to monitor quality of provision and, secondly, by extra funding being given as a reward for high-quality early intervention. The use of support staff to monitor quality of provision in schools is not a straightforward option, however. Other support staff interviewed in this authority believed it would compromise their relationship with schools and were adamant that they did not wish to see their remit being changed to include this function. Moreover, since not all schools bought in the service, the ability to monitor provision overall was limited. The full delegation of this service also raised other problems: specifically, the way in which it failed to relate to the other, non-delegated, support services and to other aspects of provision (units and special schools) for emotional and behavioural difficulties in the LEA. This issue of liaison is taken up further in Chapter 4.

In the same LEA, the head of the learning support service (for which funding was mainly delegated but which retained an element of central funding) also found the basis on which money was delegated to schools to be problematic, as was the lack of monitoring of the variation in schools' use of the money. The strength of delegation, in her view, was that it gave flexibility to schools to employ their own support staff and to take responsibility for providing for the needs of their own pupils. It had also made schools more aware of the money they received for supporting special educational needs and it had ensured that the service focused on quality of provision to schools, knowing that its survival depended on that.

In another case study LEA, where most of the generic special educational needs support service was funded through schools buying its services from funds delegated to them, the same issues arose. In addition, the respective head of service was concerned that the service could only monitor the quality of provision in schools which opted to buy back its service. With delegation, that responsibility passed to the school governors for support at stages 1 – 3 and to the LEA for support of pupils with statements.

Key points about patterns of funding in the case study authorities

The details of the pattern of funding the support services for special educational needs in the case study authorities varied; but every service, whether or not itself delegated, was affected by the pressure on LEAs to ensure that a minimum of 85 per cent of their Potential Schools Budget was delegated to schools.

The recurrent issues relating to the experience of delegation as it affected support services in the case study LEAs were:

1. that *a reduction in size* arising from the delegation of aspects of the service, such as units or resourced provion, could lead to:

- a loss of staff and facilities,
- a reduction in the ability to be responsive to needs,
- a decline in ability to ensure the quality of staff in delegated units/resourced provision,
- an increase in schools' use of untrained and unqualified support staff, and
- the dilution of the quality (and sometimes the quantity) of support received by pupils;

2. that *a dimunition of remit*, arising from the delegation of advisory and in-service functions, could lead to:

- a loss of influence over schools' special educational needs practice,
- a decline in job satisfaction,
- the loss of consistency across the LEA as regards schools' staff development;

3. that the *possibility of competition* could lead to:

- a greater focus on quality of support service provision to schools;

4. that the *delegation/devolution to schools of only some stages of support* could lead to:

- an increase in demand for the centrally funded stages of support,
- greater difficulty in services planning for demand for later stages of support;

5. that *variation in the quality of support provided by schools* suggested:

- a need for monitoring schools' use of the funding delegated to meet special educational needs.

2.6 Summary points from Chapter 2

- The majority of 103 LEAs responding to the NFER survey operated a mixed approach to both delegation and non-delegation for budgets for supporting special educational needs; structures were generally related to the Code of Practice, resources with respect to pupils at stages 1 and 2 being delegated.
- A minority of LEAs operated a single budget system which was not related to the stages of the Code of Practice.
- Just under half of the LEAs responding operated service level agreements, two-fifths of these in all their schools.
- Interviewees in the case study authorities differed as regards the benefits of service level agreements: on the one hand, they encouraged negotiation between services and schools, focusing on the nature, extent and quality of the services offered; on the other, the 'consumer voice' could be at odds with attempts at strategic planning by a centrally funded service and sometimes services felt that schools did not use their expertise wisely.
- Patterns of delegation affected the scope and focus of support services and the way in which services could guide and monitor schools' use of their budget share for pupils with special educational needs.
- Schools with established 'good practice' and expertise in providing for pupils with special educational needs were generally perceived to use delegated budgets – whatever their extent – more effectively than schools which had less well-developed practice; delegation meant that support services were less able to influence the latter.
- There was some evidence that the possibility of schools purchasing from agencies other than the LEA support services had focused the latter's attention on quality assurance.
- Where budgets for pupils at the earlier stages of the Code were delegated, there was a tendency for schools to increase referrals at higher stages, when support might be funded centrally.

- Where delegation had resulted in the loss of intensive provision (e.g. resource units), there was the danger that expertise and skills were dissipated and specialist staff isolated professionally.
- Delegation in the case study authorities had led, variously, to: reduction in size, dimunition of remit, the possibility of competition, increase in referrals at higher stages of the Code, greater difficulty for services in planning, and variation in the quality of support provided for pupils by schools.

Chapter 3

LEA support services' provision to mainstream schools

3.1 Introduction

At the beginning of Chapter 2, reference was made to previous NFER research (Fletcher-Campbell with Hall, 1993) which found that, at the time of writing, staff in LEA support services were greatly concerned that the effect of the delegation to schools of service budgets would be the dispersal or disintegration of the provision they offered to schools. The present 1997 NFER survey showed that this concern was unfounded; recent data indicated the continued existence of support services for special educational needs. Of the 104 LEAs which returned questionnaires, only one had no support services for special educational needs – a very small authority which purchased support services from a neighbouring authority and whose schools traded directly with support services in other LEAs specifically for literacy support. The other 103 LEAs had support services; as will be shown, these varied greatly in size and range. Delegation to schools under LMS, so far, had not meant the disappearance of LEA special educational needs support services.

Delegation had, though, affected the nature of provision made to schools by LEA support services. This section reports the profile of provision, given the varied funding patterns described in Chapter 2. The provision discussed, it must be stressed, is that made by the LEA support services: other provision, such as delegated units or resourced provisions and special schools, which was available in the LEAs but not part of the support services, is not included.

3.2 Areas of special educational need supported by LEA services

The data derived from the questionnaire, on the areas of special educational needs for which LEA support services made provision, are set out in Table 3.1a.

Table 3.1a Areas of special educational needs supported by LEA support services

Principal area of special educational needs	Percentage of LEAs N = 103									
	Provision available throughout LEA		Provision available in some areas of LEA		Provision available jointly with another LEA		No service provision available		Missing data	
	to primary	to secondary	to primary	to secondary	to primary	to secondary	to primary	to secondary	to primary	to secondary
Severe learning difficulties	48	43	3	4	2	2	47	51	1	0
Moderate learning difficulties	72	63	1	1	1	1	25	35	1	0
Specific learning difficulties	94	85	1	0	1	1	4	14	0	0
Emotional and behavioural difficulties	85	83	5	5	0	1	9	10	1	2
Physical disabilities	53	50	4	4	5	6	36	39	2	1
Hearing impairment	83	83	1	2	15	14	1	1	0	0
Visual impairment	82	82	1	2	17	15	1	1	0	1
Language and commun-ication difficulties	59	49	12	9	4	38	22	3	3	2

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

As Table 3.1a shows, where provision was made, it was most likely to be available throughout the LEA. In only a minority of LEAs was support for some types of need patchy and area-specific. This may have reflected the local incidence of such need or it may have shown a degree of inconsistency in provision which could have resulted in

inequitable provision for pupils with similar needs within one LEA. This situation obtained in the previous NFER study which found that one of the effects of local management was a rationalisation of support services to provide greater equity across the authority. The introduction of local management forced LEAs to audit their provision: for many, this resulted in some sharp surprises (Fletcher-Campbell with Hall, 1993). Joint provision of support with another LEA was most commonly used to provide support for low incidence needs, such as hearing and visual impairment, and, at secondary level, for language and communication difficulties. Further analysis of the data indicated that joint arrangements were found mainly in Wales and in some of the new authorities.

Table 3.1b presents the same data as Table 3.1a but gives them in a different format to highlight additional points.

From Table 3.1b, it can be seen that the majority of responding authorities offered support services for each type of need listed on the questionnaire, with the exception of severe learning difficulties. This finding illustrates the progress which had been made in providing for special educational needs within the mainstream school. Support to schools was most likely to be made for pupils with specific learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties and sensory impairment, possibly reflecting the relative 'newness' of specific learning difficulties, the highly specialised expertise required for meeting the needs of pupils with significant sensory impairments, and the perceived difficulty of integrating/including pupils with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Table 3.1b Areas of special educational needs supported by LEA support services (second format)

Principal areas of special educational needs	Percentage of LEAs N = 103					
	Service provision available		No service provision available		Missing data	
	to primary	to secondary	to primary	to secondary	for primary	for secondary
Severe learning difficulties	52	49	47	51	1	0
Moderate learning difficulties	74	65	25	35	1	0
Specific learning difficulties	96	86	4	14	0	0
Emotional and behavioural difficulties	90	88	9	10	1	2
Physical disabilities	62	60	36	39	2	1
Hearing impairment	99	99	1	1	0	0
Visual impairment	99	98	1	1	0	1
Language & communication difficulties	75	96	22	3	3	2

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Table 3.1b also shows that provision to schools was least likely to be made for severe learning difficulties. Almost half (47 per cent) of responding LEAs had no support service to primary schools for severe learning difficulties (although three of these LEAs did make support service provision for this need to secondary schools) while just over half (51 per cent) of LEAs made no support available to secondary schools (of these, eight did make support service provision to primaries for this area of need). It may be that, in these LEAs, children with severe learning difficulties were in special schools. Support service provision for pupils with physical difficulties was

unavailable to primary schools in 36 per cent of responding LEAs and to secondary schools in 39 per cent of LEAs. This is likely to be because their needs were met through provision of a learning support assistant dealing with lifting, toiletting and medical needs, rather than through a specialist support service. Support service provision for moderate learning difficulties was unavailable to primary schools in 25 per cent of responding LEAs and to secondary schools in even more (35 per cent) of LEAs. It is also worth noting that support service provision for language and communication difficulties was much less likely to be available in primary schools than in secondary schools.

The questionnaire allowed respondents to add other areas of need for which provision was made in their authorities. The only real (as opposed to semantic) addition was service provision enabling development of information technology skills across the different areas of special educational need. The questionnaire also allowed respondents to make written comments on provision and from these it was clear that a number of LEAs planned to review and change support service provision. These current and planned changes arose as a result of a number of pressures on LEAs – for example, the pressure of budgetary constraints, the effects of local government organisation, or pressure to cover a 'new' need such as autistic spectrum disorders.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the variety in support service provision in the five case study LEAs as regards geographic coverage, phase coverage, size (as measured by number of full-time equivalent teachers), the targeted stages of the Code of Practice and the main focus of work.

Figure 3.1 Some examples of LEA support service provision for different special educational needs (drawn from the case study LEAs)

Aspect of provision	Emotional and behavioural difficulties		Sensory impairment	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment	Learning difficulties		Generic special educational needs		
	New unitary (former county)	London borough	County	New unitary (former metro)		New unitary (former county)	London borough	New unitary (former metro)	Welsh (new unitary)	County
Geographical coverage	LEA-wide	LEA-wide	LEA-wide	joint arrangements with neighbouring LEAs		LEA-wide	LEA-wide	LEA-wide	LEA-wide	LEA-wide
Phase coverage	primary & secondary	secondary	early years primary & secondary	early years primary secondary	early years primary secondary		early years primary secondary	early years primary secondary	primary secondary	early years primary secondary
Number of full-time equivalent teachers	2.6	25	22	35	13.5	5.5	67	70	*(missing information)*	*(missing information)*
Code of Practice stages targeted	stages 1 – 3	stages 4 & 5	stages 3 – 5	stages 3 – 5	stages 3 – 5	stage 3	stage 5	stage 3 stage 5 *(if bought in)*	stages 3 – 5	stages 1 – 2 *(consultative)*
Main focus of work	whole-school issues	individual pupils *(c160 pupils)*	individual pupils	individual pupils	individual pupils *(c321 pupils)*	individual pupils	individual pupils	individual pupils & whole school	individual pupils	individual pupils and whole school

Some of the aspects of provision highlighted in Figure 3.1 are expanded on below.

3.3 The focus of support service work

3.3.1 Targeting

In the section on the special educational needs support services, the Code of Practice recommends that:

> *Schools should always consult specialists when they take action on behalf of a child at stage 3. But the involvement of specialists need not be confined to stage 3. Outside specialists can play an important part in the very early identification of special educational needs and in advising schools on effective provision which can prevent the development of more significant needs* (GB. DfE, 1994a, p.20, para. 2:60).

The NFER survey found, as shown in Table 3.2, that most LEA support services were chiefly targeted at supporting stages 3 and beyond of the Code of Practice, i.e. the stages which technically involve outside agencies. A minority of LEAs had support services which chiefly targeted the school-based, preventative stages of the Code.

Table 3.2 Stages of the Code of Practice at which LEA support services for special educational needs were chiefly targeted

Stage(s)	Percentage of LEAs N = 103	
	Primary	**Secondary**
Stages 1 and 2	16	12
Stage 3	88	76
Stage 4	72	66
Stage 5	79	80
No response	1	3

Respondents could choose more than one option so percentages do not sum to 100.
Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Concern about the negative effects of focusing support mainly or solely on the later stages of the Code was expressed in a number of written comments. For example, one

respondent from an inner London borough wrote that: '*the decision to focus on statutory work was because of financial constraint, not a strategy. Closure of early intervention was followed by a substantial rise in both exclusions and in requests for full assessment.*'

On the other hand, a respondent from one of the new authorities expressed concern about the targeting of support service time at the lower stages, arguing that this '*causes some tension if a pupil requires support at a higher stage of the Code of Practice and the school says no allocation is available*'.

Comments about targeting of support services revealed two main arguments. One was that if support was targeted at the later stages, then a preventative supporting role at stage 3 was lost, with the result that requests for statutory assessment and statements increased. The second argument was that if support was targeted at the early stages, schools could ignore their responsibility for pupils with special educational needs. As a respondent from a county LEA put it: '*We need to encourage schools to do all stage 1 and 2 support themselves. There is still a lot of dependency about – if it's special educational needs, then it's someone else's problem.*'

Clearly, there were advantages and disadvantages for both arguments, suggesting that the targeting of support services is not a straightforward matter. The diversity has implications for the structure of the Code of Practice. As it stands at present, the stages of the Code are characterised by an increasingly wide range of *responsibility*: the class teacher, the special educational needs coordinator and external specialists. This implies that stage 3 represents the intervention of the external support services. However, this can be variously realised as either or both of direct support for a pupil or support for a teacher or, arguably, direct support for a special educational needs coordinator to support the teacher. How 'responsibility' is understood and framed *could* determine the stage at which the pupil is placed. In common practice, it seems to be the case that the needs of pupils at stage 3 require a greater degree of intervention than those at earlier stages: this is borne out by LEA documentation where the intensity of needs is associated with the stages – and a concomitant increase in resourcing. However, as later chapters of this report show, teachers valued

specialist advice – sometimes just fresh ideas – while the pupil may not have needed a higher degree of direct support. Arguably, gaining access to these ideas had cost implications in terms of specialists' time, but these were often negligible.

The evidence is that the 1994 Code's statement that '*there is scope for differences of definition of the stages*' ought to be taken seriously and that it might be helpful to have more explicit guidance about the potential use and role of support services at each stage of the Code. Such a move would also accommodate the fact, corroborated by the NFER research, that some pupils at stage 5 do not receive intervention from the support services, a budget having been delegated, or devolved, to the school which is then able to make its own arrangements.

The difficulty of targeting support effectively in a given context was also suggested by the ten questionnaire respondents who wrote about changes in current targeting which were being, or were about to be, made. As might be expected from the discussion above, some LEAs were changing to focus more on preventative work, while others were focusing on severe identified needs. There was no consensus among LEAs on which was the best approach to targeting support. This can be explained by reference to the diversity among LEAs as regards the provision available and the way in which expertise had been developed within schools, as well as the nature of the authority (size and location). If support services are perceived as complementing and working with other provision and the way in which schools operate, then it is coherent to argue that the organisation of support services must take cognisance of, and respond to, other environmental features.

Both from written comments on the questionnaire, which gave further information about existing targeting of support services, and from the case studies, it was clear that not all services within a single LEA targeted pupils at the same stages of the Code of Practice. Thus, as Figure 3.1 shows, the variation in practice was within as well as across LEAs. Various reasons were offered by interviewees in the case study LEAs for the particular stages targeted by their support service(s). For example, a very low number of staff in a service was felt to justify a concentration of effort on whole-school approaches at stages 1 – 3. Some psychologists disliked the statutory pressure

to concentrate on supporting pupils at stages 4 and 5 and regarded early support as more valuable/productive. In one case study LEA, the focus on stage 5 of the Code arose from a policy of gradual closure of special schools, resulting in pupils with greater needs being placed in mainstream schools and requiring the specialist expertise of the support services. In some LEAs, the targeting difficulty had been solved by offering advice and guidance to schools at the early stages, but direct work with children and families at later stages. In the county LEA studied, for example, it was felt that an active support service presence at stages 1 and 2 helped to prevent the need for intervention at stage 3 and above and also increased the responsibility which schools accepted for special educational needs.

3.3.2 Numbers of staff

The questionnaire asked for the overall number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in the support services, broken down into number of psychologists, teachers, and all other staff. Almost all respondents attempted to provide at least part of this information, but 37 did so with riders of various sorts. It was clear that this type of information was not readily available in all LEAs; this finding may be of significance *per se*. The figures should, therefore, be treated with caution; they are likely to be inaccurate in detail although they may well indicate broad trends in staffing provision.

With the above caution in mind, it appeared that, although the overall range was very wide, half the responding LEAs had ten or fewer psychologists, 32 or fewer teachers, and 15 or fewer 'other staff' in their support services. In Table 3.3 below, the raw figures are related to the pupil populations of the LEAs and to LEA type.

Table 3.3 Staffing levels in the support services for special educational needs (related to pupil population and LEA type)

LEA type (showing number in sample out of total number of each type)		Number of pupils per FTE educational psychologist		Number of pupils per FTE support scheme teacher		Number of pupils per FTE all other support service staff	
		Number of LEAs providing data	Mean number of pupils per psychologist	Number of LEAs providing data	Mean number of pupils per teacher	Number of LEAs providing data	Mean number of pupils per all other staff
Inner London boroughs	(8/13)	5	2,140	7	980	3	6,793
Outer London boroughs	(14/20)	14	3,198	12	1,187	11	5,866
Metropolitan boroughs	(25/37)	24	4,279	24	1,833	21	4,442
Welsh authorities	(14/22)	13	4,199	13	2,289	10	2,854
New English authorities	(23/37)	22	4,668	22	1,614	21	4,931
County authorities	(20/25)	17	4,986	18	2,096	11	7,577
All LEAs	**(104/154)**	**95**	**4,213**	**96**	**1,751**	**77**	**5,112**

From Table 3.3, it can be seen that the London boroughs, particularly those in inner London, had a markedly smaller number of pupils per psychologist than was the case in other types of LEAs. Given the key role of educational psychologists within the assessment and statementing processes, this may reflect greater numbers of children with special educational needs in these boroughs or it may reflect a particular present or past policy stance. For example, it may be that the educational psychology service was restricted to mandatory work or, conversely, deliberately engaged in a wide variety of non-statutory work, including that outside special education. The same pattern seems to hold for support teachers per pupil but not for 'all other staff' per pupil. Welsh support services appear to have had most 'other staff' per pupil. While it is interesting to note such patterns, it may be that not too much can be drawn from them given the uncertainty over the accuracy of the numbers on which they are based.

It is noteworthy that, despite concerns over budgets and moves towards greater accountability, there appeared to be difficulty in obtaining, from centrally held databases, accurate figures for the number of staff working in the support services. At least some of this difficulty is likely to relate to the complex patterns of funding the support services described in Chapter 2. In the case study schools, there were examples of staff technically employed by the LEA but, to all intents and purposes, members of school staffs, whom it may not have been easy to count accurately. The examples included:

- a learning support assistant on a temporary contract, renewable termly (in the previous year her job had been based on no greater security than a day-to-day time sheet);
- two teachers in the same school working for one support service – one was centrally funded to work in the school supporting pupils with statements but the other was bought in from the service by the school to support pupils at stage 3;
- a behaviour support teacher on a temporary, part-time contract doing supply support work.

Added to this, some services, under pressure from schools buying in their provision, employed sessional workers. As one questionnaire respondent wrote: '*Our "other staff" are mostly part-time and fluctuating and therefore their numbers are difficult to assess.*'

From the case studies, the two main issues relating to staffing levels were difficulties in recruitment and the problems of relating the level of staffing to the level of need. Difficulty in recruiting qualified staff was reported in four of the five case study authorities. This was explained as arising partly from the geographic area being perceived as unattractive (e.g. too isolated or too inner-city) and partly from perceived national shortages in particular areas of expertise, such as educational psychology. As one principal educational psychologist said:

> *There are just not enough psychologists. The number in training hasn't changed over the last five to seven years but there has been a modest expansion in services because of the Code of Practice and the general commitment to more children being educated in mainstream schools which puts a premium on our sort of service and support. ... We weren't able to recruit the extra* [staff] *during 1996, but that is a national problem. From September 1997, we are fully staffed but it is very hard to recruit experienced psychologists. We're dependent on newly qualified educational psychologists. People won't move into this area and people don't want to commute.*

The issue of level of staffing relating to level of need was more complex. In only one of the five case study LEAs was the level of staffing explicitly linked to the special educational needs policy. In that LEA, this was done through the mechanism of a ratio of support staff to pupils deemed, according to agreed criteria, to be in need of support. As the number of pupils in need of support rose, so too did levels of staffing in the appropriate service.

In the other four case study LEAs, the level of staffing in support services seemed to be budget driven. For example, in one new unitary authority, a service for low incidence needs was jointly provided by those LEAs formerly comprising one authority. This arrangement broke down as some of the LEAs reduced their contributions to the scheme. Consequently, three staff lost their jobs and the support allocated to schools reduced proportionately. In other LEAs and services, where staffing levels were not explicitly related to need as defined by agreed criteria, services could find themselves operating a waiting list or diluting provision to cope with demand. This was the case in Dornay LEA, for example, where an internal survey of schools' views of the generic service indicated that the main concern was the lack of educational psychologists and therefore the long wait for their support. In

Tay LEA, too, one support service line manager noted that the quantity of provision was '*less highly rated by schools*' than its quality.

A lack of service staff can be perceived as a problem. For example, an area team leader said: '*It's the old cry. Budget cuts mean a lack of money, a lack of people and a lack of time to do the job as well as we would like.*' But it can also be perceived as having a positive effect in that lack of staff and time can encourage services to adopt a role which focuses on what schools can do to support pupils. In Clyde LEA, which had recently become a unitary authority, a service head said of the explicit link between the reductions in size of the service and its changed role:

> [Three years previously] *the service comprised four teachers and 320 schools to support. Not the ideal ratio but in many respects it did the service a favour because it made them focus very clearly on what the operational framework was going to be – one of empowerment for schools. ... Since reorganisation into unitary authorities, the team has shrunk from four to two teachers. ... The service therefore provides whole-school support rather than direct pupil support. It is not an optimal size and there are areas which could be developed but, having come* [myself] *from a large service which allowed schools to become over-dependent, this is the preferred model. Other services started off large and have had to shave off areas of work as budget cuts hit; this service started off small and so was able to identify its remit and priorities from the outset* (head of support service).

In this case, the decreasing level of staffing had pushed the service towards defining its role in terms of whole-school support rather than offering individual pupil support. Given that this may not always be what schools want from an external support service, service personnel may have to address differences in expectations:

> *Given the limits on our time, we prefer to work preventatively to try to prevent things getting to a placement in special school. ... A lot of schools see stage 3 as the door to a statement which, in* [Dornay], *means placement elsewhere and so the school gets rid of the problem. Our role at stage 3 is to help schools to try again with the child. Only then will a decision be made about whether or not a statement is necessary. There is a degree of re-education required in order to achieve this* (educational psychologist).

In Chapter 7, school expectations about the level and nature of provision from support services are discussed further.

3.3.3 Types of support offered to schools

As Table 3.4 shows, most LEA services provided a wide range of types of support, if not within every service, at least across their services for special educational needs.

Some of the 'other' types of support provided, referred to in Table 3.4, included the allocation of special educational needs assistants, general special educational needs policy development, provision of award-bearing special educational needs courses for teachers and assistants, support groups for special educational needs coordinators, and pre- and post-inspection advice.

Table 3.4 Types of support offered to schools by LEA support services for special educational needs

Type of support	Percentage of LEAs N = 103	
	Primary	Secondary
General advice (curriculum/assessment/pedagogy)	98	90
Preparation of individual programmes (teaching/assessment)	95	87
Direct support to pupils in school	94	84
Programmes of INSET open to all schools	90	84
INSET arranged for individual schools/clusters of schools	90	86
Early years' advice and support	89	*not applicable*
Material resources	83	75
Home –school liaison	78	70
Other	11	9
No response	0	2

Respondents could choose more than one option so percentages do not sum to 100.
Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Some examples of the types of support offered by individual support services within the case study LEAs

These examples are based on interviews with service heads – further exploration of the types of support provided to schools by individual services was carried out in the case study schools and is reported in Chapter 6.

Emotional and behavioural difficulties support service –

- counselling individual pupils;
- withdrawal of individual pupils to support particular objectives;
- informing Individual Education Plans, or to target particular behaviours;
- withdrawal of particular groups;
- in-class support (from close supervision of one pupil to a more fluid role helping other pupils, too, with their frustration and motivation);
- close collaboration/team teaching with class teacher;
- input into annual reviews and other meetings with agencies;
- liaison with parents;
- formal and informal advice;
- support surgeries for school staff;
- specific input for newly qualified schoolteachers;
- in-service work with a department or a whole school;
- involvement in school policy development;
- termly journal to disseminate practice and ideas relating to emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Visual impairment support service –

- advisory work, plus specialist teaching in certain areas, such as keyboard skills, mobility training, visual efficiency skills;
- training and working with learning support assistants employed by schools to support pupils with visual impairment;
- equipment loan service;
- drop-in resource area for schoolteachers;
- helping parents fundraise for equipment needed at home;
- provision of specialist reprographics and braille texts;
- in-service for school staff who may also attend the service's own training events free of charge;
- practical advice through published booklets.

Learning difficulties support service –

- supporting individual statements;
- close liaison with school staff;
- provision of information technology materials;
- advice to schools;
- reporting for, and attendance at, annual reviews;
- providing records of visit for teachers to see and use;

- assistance in drawing up Individual Education Plans;
- provision of additional resources;
- liaison with other professionals and feedback to schools;
- in-class support with occassional use of withdrawal with clear objectives.

Generic special educational needs support service –

- (specialist teachers) direct support for pupils in mainstream classes, usually two hourly sessions each week;
- (educational psychologists) intervention work at stage 3 and all the statutory work, including reports for and attending annual reviews.

3.4 Referrals to support services

Given the finite nature of their resources, most support services make their support available to schools via a referral process which also acts as a screening process, preventing the service being overloaded by cases. In effect, referral systems are often used by services to ration schools' use of service support: the way in which referral systems operate is thus of interest. In the NFER questionnaire, LEA respondents were asked who considered referrals for stages 1 – 3 of the Code of Practice, whether standard referral forms were used or not, and for any comments about referrals to the support services within the authority. As Table 3.5 shows, across all the responding LEAs, referrals up to and including stage 3 of the Code of Practice were variously managed.

Table 3.5 Who considers referrals for support at stages 1 – 3 of the Code of Practice?

Referrals considered by:	Percentage of LEAs N = 103	
	Primary	**Secondary**
Relevant senior manager only	29	26
Service staff and/or educational psychologist	17	19
School, link service staff and/or psychologist	16	16
Varies according to e.g. service, stage or type of support	14	13
Other (idiosyncratic to one LEA)	9	10
A panel	8	7
School only	4	4
No response	3	4
Support allocated via a SEN audit	2	1

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Standard forms to make stage 1 – 3 referrals were in use in 61 per cent of the responding LEAs; most of these forms applied throughout the whole LEA but some were standard only for one particular service. School views on the lack of standard referral systems in some LEAs are reported in Chapter 5.

Just under a half of respondents (44 per cent) made additional comments on the referral systems in their authorities. The majority of these gave further details of the existing system in their authority. These comments reflected something of the complexities of the variations in how referral systems have evolved both within and across LEAs. Two examples of this are given below.

Examples of referral systems

LEA 1 (county shire)

- individual services used different referral systems

- some services worked in schools on a weekly basis and therefore a referral system was perceived as unnecessary – referrals were made either after informal advice or as the result of formal stage 3 review meetings

LEA 2 (county shire)

- schools were the primary source of referrals but these were also taken from parents and other agencies
- all referrals were logged on a central database providing standardised information at that point.

A few comments related to a perceived problem with the system then in use in an authority. These included concerns about:

- the use of waiting lists for support from services – this could lead to confusion over responsibility for a child and, as one respondent wrote, '*a waiting culture*'
- some schools duplicating referrals to services to try to shorten the waiting time for support
- increasing numbers of referrals to the support services, not all of which were supported by clear evidence of the school strategies tried.

Ten respondents wrote about changes to referral systems. In some LEAs, the system then in operation was to be reviewed; in others, the system was to be streamlined or a common referral route established.

Data from the support services in the case study LEAs mirrored the survey data, suggesting that referral procedures varied across and within LEAs.

In Dornay LEA, a combination of financial pressure to cut the number of statements (which attracted extra funding) and a desire for greater consistency across area teams resulted in the setting up of a single assessment panel and the development of criteria for placing pupils at stage 3 of the Code. It was hoped that these measures would serve to support budget control and offer pupils and schools within the LEA greater consistency in access to support.

In two of the other case study LEAs, there was a clear difference in referral procedures for accessing the support services for low- and high-incidence needs. Referrals to services for low-incidence needs, such as hearing impairment, could be made directly by the school (or by parents, doctors, etc.) and each would be dealt with quickly by the service. Referrals to services for high-incidence needs, such as learning support, were mediated by a panel. The role of these panels was to ensure that schools had followed the Code of Practice at stages 1 and 2 before referring the pupil to an external support service. One learning support teacher who was also a member of the referrals panel said: '*We're not just trying to defer referrals. A really important part of our job is supporting schools to work as effectively as possible with the children.*'

In Chapter 7, the views of school staff on the availability of support, the ease of access to support and the delay involved are discussed. Data from the case studies, discussed in that chapter, suggest that as schools become increasingly powerful 'consumers', their demands can be in conflict with gatekeeping-by-referral procedures of LEAs concerned about overspend and/or the quality of support offered at stages 1 and 2 in schools. Here it is sufficient to note that the lack of homogeneity in referral procedures reflected a lack of consistency in service approach both within and across authorities. This position has historic roots which were often reinforced by local management of schools (Fletcher-Campbell with Hall, 1993) but is also affected by differences in the frequency of incidence of, for example, general learning difficulties as opposed to visual impairment.

3.5 The role of special schools in providing support to mainstream schools

Although the focus of the present research was on LEA support service provision to mainstream schools, the NFER has studied the role of special schools in providing support to mainstream schools over a number of years (e.g. Jowett *et al.*, 1988; Fletcher-Campbell, 1994). For this reason, a section on the role of special schools was included in the questionnaire. This section was answered by all 104 respondents; that is, including the one authority that did not have its own support services.

All 104 LEAs had special schools and in just over half (53 per cent) these provided support to mainstream schools – a quarter to primary schools, and a fifth to secondary schools – as part of the authority's support service provision. In the remaining LEAs, such support was mainly provided on the initiative of individual special schools. A minority planned some of this support and allowed other types of special school support to mainstream to develop on the initiative of schools or individuals. Only seven LEAs (i.e. 13 per cent of LEAs with special schools providing support to mainstream schools) specifically resourced all special schools to support mainstream schools, although a larger number resourced *some* of their special schools in this way. This meant that 36 per cent of LEAs resourced none of their primary special schools and 40 per cent none of their secondary special schools to provide support to mainstream even though such support happened in practice.

In 22 LEAs, the situation was under review or there were plans to develop the role of special schools. Of the 32 LEAs which commented about the existing situation, most explained the limits of the support offered. The support was often tied to individual children reintegrating into mainstream or to particular areas of special need. A small number of respondents raised issues which they argued were barriers to special schools providing support to mainstream. These included:

- lack of earmarked funding/budget constraints;
- difficulty of negotiating a relationship between special schools and support services;
- special/mainstream divide still strong;
- inimical restructuring of support services after local government reorganisation;
- concern that such support was for marketing purposes.

It may be that if special schools are to take on a greater supporting role, such issues will have to be tackled. This is particulary pertinent in the light of the Green Paper (GB. DfEE, 1997), which encourages special schools to regard themselves as resource centres. From the evidence of the NFER research, it would seem that a considerable degree of strategic planning needs to take place before this outline policy could become a strong feature of practice.

The role of special schools in supporting mainstream schools was also addressed during the case study phase of the research. Some examples of provision made by special schools within the case study authorities are set out in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 Examples of special school provision to mainstream schools drawn from the support services in the five case study LEAs

LEA	Support Service	Special school outreach to mainstream schools
Clyde	Sensory Impairment	• multiple sensory impairment resourced provision based in a special school • delegated resourced provision for autism based in three special schools (little involvement by the service)
	Early Years	service representative attended admissions meetings at special schools
	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	some staff from a special school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties redeployed in service-raised training issues because they had no previous experience of supporting mainstream colleagues.
	Learning Support	some learning support assistants had informal links with special school for pupils with physical difficulties; this improved the support they gave in mainstream schools
Dornay	(no support from special schools to mainstream)	
Forth	Physical Difficulties	special school for physical difficulties operated a support service for pupils with physical difficulties in mainstream (headteacher of school was also head of support service) – support staff bought in by mainstream schools had been trained by special school staff – has increased integration to mainstream
Moray	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	primary special school for emotional and behavioural difficulties has no full-time pupils and operates a large outreach team which supported mainstream primary schools – pupils attending this primary special school link in to support service provision in secondary school
Tay	(no support to mainstream but individual teachers from special schools may be asked to act as consultants in mainstream over specific issues or cases, e.g. difficulties associated with autistic spectrum disorders)	

3.6 Summary points from Chapter 3

- In all but one of the 104 LEAs responding to the NFER questionnaire, there were support services for special educational needs (the exception was a very small authority which purchased services from a neighbouring authority).
- Services were, generally, available throughout an authority; in only a minority of LEAs was support for some types of need patchy and area specific.
- The majority of responding authorities offered support services in mainstream schools for most types of need, with the exception of severe learning difficulties.
- Support was most extensive in the areas of specific learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and sensory impairment.
- Support services were mostly focused on pupils at, or above, stage 3 of the Code of Practice; a perceived disadvantage of this was that services' capacity for early intervention and preventative work was inhibited but it was also felt that schools could become too dependent if support were available at earlier stages.
- There was variation in the targeting of support among services within LEAs; this was prompted by local policy or conditions, such as the small number of staff in a service or the availability of special schools or units.
- It was difficult to obtain accurate comparative data on the overall number of full-time equivalent staff in the support services because the data did not seem to be readily available to respondents, the funding patterns in operation were complex and idiosyncratic, and the fact that some contracts were part-time and temporary, often for fluctuating sessional work.
- Local authorities offered a very wide range of types of support via their support services, ranging from general advice on whole school policy and practice, to direct support and programme planning for individual pupils, to home–school liaison.
- Just over half of the responding LEAs had special schools which offered support to mainstream schools as part of the authority's support service provision; in the remaining authorities, the initiative for this was left to individual special schools.
- Only seven responding LEAs specifically resourced *all* their special schools to support mainstream schools, although more resourced *some* of their special schools to do this.
- Respondents identified a number of issues which inhibited the way in which special schools were able to support mainstream colleagues.

Chapter 4

LEA support services for special educational needs: the organisation and management of provision as a whole

4.1 Introduction

When asked for her views on delegated funding of support services, one support teacher said: '*It all depends on how the provision is managed and overseen*'.

This view sums up the clear message from all the case study data: quality of provision is determined largely by the management and organisation of that provision, even though funding methods affect modes of provision and funding levels affect levels of provision. In this chapter, therefore, attention is drawn, first, to the management and organisation of the overall situation within LEAs – that is, taking the support service provision as a whole. In the following chapter, the focus shifts to the management and organisation of individual services within the overall structure. Throughout, the effects of management decisions on the day-to-day work of support service staff are highlighted. The chapter uses data which relate to the overall, LEA-wide aspect of the role of support service staff; data relating to their role in schools are presented in Chapter 7.

One of the most striking aspects of LEA support services for special educational needs was their sheer variety. The amount of reorganisation of support services suggests that LEAs recognise the importance of adapting structures to take account of a variety of internal and external forces operating on the services.

4.1.1 Last major reorganisation

The questionnaire data, set out in Table 4.1a, indicated that the overall provision of support services for special educational needs had undergone major reorganisation within the previous three years (i.e. 1995 – 97) in 63 per cent of the responding LEAs. A further 24 per cent had undergone a major reorganisation between 1989 and 1994. These findings accord with those of the previous NFER study and suggest that the large authority-wide review may now be a thing of the past as authorities more regularly and frequently address pressures from internal and external change. Respondents were asked to tick all the reasons for reorganisation that applied to them, from a specified list. The list and the responses are set out in Table 4.1b.

Table 4.1a Date of last major reorganisation of the LEA support services for special educational needs

Date	Percentage of LEAs N = 103
1989	2
1990	4
1991	1
1992	3
1993	6
1994	8
1995	7
1996	27
1997	29
Missing cases	14

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Table 4.1b Reasons for last major reorganisation of the LEA support services for special educational needs

Reason	Percentage of LEAs N = 103
Local government reorganisation	37
Other*	34
Profile of services did not match profile of needs	31
Budget cuts	24
Schools' patterns of purchase	11
No response	7
Don't know	5

Respondents could choose more than one option so percentages do not sum to 100.
Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.
**More details in text.*

As Table 4.1b suggests, the impetus for reorganisation varied from LEA to LEA, but some broad patterns did emerge from further analysis of the responses according to type of LEA. Budget cuts were cited as an impetus for reorganisation in each type of LEA but proportionally more so in the inner London boroughs. Recognition that the profile of services did not match the profile of needs was, similarly, apparent in some of each type of LEA but in proportionally more of the metropolitan boroughs. Local government reorganisation was, unsurprisingly, a reason for reviewing the support services in many new unitary authorities in Wales and England. Schools' patterns of purchase prompted reorganisation in a small number of 'old' LEAs of each type. Each of these LEAs had delegated, at a minimum, either funding for supporting stages 1 and 2 or funding for supporting statements. Two had fully delegated all support for stages 1 – 5. This suggests that buy-back arrangements were not affecting the way in which services were organised in many authorities.

Respondents from 34 per cent of the LEAs gave other reasons for the last major reorganisation of the support services. These reasons tended to be closely tied to the context of an individual LEA: for example, the appointment of a new director, the effects of a wider LEA reorganisation, or simply staff changes. Some of the reasons

given did, however, relate directly to the delegation of funding and to the broad requirements that LMS formulae should be consistent and efficient (GB. DES, 1991): the need to improve consistency; a district audit recommendation; schools requesting devolved funding; the delegation of funding and the reorganisation into purchaser/provider structure; the separation of commissioner/deliverer functions; the need to devolve/delegate part of the support services because of LMS. In addition, a small number of respondents cited legislation and the Code of Practice as reasons for reorganising the support services for special educational needs.

4.1.2 The impact of reorganisation: examples from support services in the case study LEAs

From the five case study LEAs, it was possible to gain more insight into the variety of reasons behind, and the differential impact of, major reorganisations of support services. The examples below provide a summary of the views expressed by staff at different levels in the services. The key issues raised are highlighted in each example.

Figure 4.1 Examples of the effects of reorganisation of LEA support services: perceptions of staff at different levels and/or in different services

Example 1 Dornay LEA

Type of reorganisation: New senior management structure; a shift from separate specialist to multi-disciplinary teams.
Reasons for reorganisation: Local government reorganisation (unitary authority); budget cuts; schools' pattern of purchase; impact of other, political, changes in the LEA.

An LEA officer view

Previously *there were advisory teachers for each discipline and separate heads of separate services. The services could never meet demand but operated more on a request basis than they do now.*

Now *statements have increased in number but decreased in value because funding has not increased proportionately. The level of support to children has gone down.*

Local government reorganisation *has been a major factor in this and has had a negative impact on the support budget. The LEA is 72per cent of the former authority and is funded on that basis but needs to provide much the same services as before local government reorganisation.*

This is the third year we have faced ***budget cuts****, which is causing a lot of struggle just to cope.*

An area team leader view

We are all based in one place and we ***now*** *have a good multi-professional team. As a result, I think the quality of service to schools has improved.*

In the past, *we mainly did specific learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties. We were organised as separate services. But at that time we were able to do more creative work, e.g. we ran a really good literacy project and we did a lot of INSET work with schools. We used to do a lot of in-class support and helped teachers with differentiation.*

Now *the advisory service has been split off from support and they do all that. We're not allowed to. It was a tragedy because we had all the resources and experience and, to be honest, they don't have enough people to do it.*

The ***reorganisation*** *took away from us all the things that were good about the* [previous, separate] *service. All the preventative work, all the early years work, all that went. We lost a lot of good teachers then who couldn't cope with the disheartening nature of the changes.*

A support teacher view

There is now a tremendously heavy ***workload*** *on us all. There has been an increase in work but no increase in staff – indeed, we have had a loss of active personnel due to ill health*

Issues to consider

How can the organisation of support services achieve simultaneously the four goals of:

- a sufficient level and quality of support to pupils;
- a sufficient level and quality of support to schools;
- an acceptable level of job satisfaction for staff;
- value for money?

Example 2 Clyde LEA

Type of reorganisation: Cut-backs in size and in management posts.
Reasons for this: Local government reorganisation (unitary authority) and budget cuts.

View of special educational needs adviser/manager of emotional and behavioural difficulties service and of learning support service

With ***local government reorganisation****, my post* [as County Adviser for SEN] *became 'at risk'. In the new structure, the post became county adviser/line manager of emotional and behavioural difficulties and learning support services. I had to go through a series of interviews but I got the job. Subsequently, there was another* ***budget cut*** *and my post changed again to include responsibility for team leading the Learning Support Service. So it is quite a complex role now but my advisory background is useful in leading the service.*

View of head of emotional and behavioural difficulties service

We have ***shrunk*** *from four to two teachers.*
We are now working in schools which [before reorganisation] *we previously had no contact with. Some schools, which had used the service effectively* ***in the past*** *and realised the value*

added of having the service in, tended to reuse it. We were giving a relatively large amount of support to a relatively small number of schools. ***Now*** *we are trying to market the service in a number of ways so that we can have a wider impact.*

View of head of learning support service

Only two years ago there were about 40 in the team. That was halved because of ***budget constraints*** *before local government reorganisation. Now there is myself and 4.5 teachers.* ***Before****, our model of working was with pupils and assessment driven.* ***Now*** *schools tend to carry out tests and assessment and the service helps with interpretation of results and with planning on that basis. We support schools in developing a learning profile from day one.*

View of support teacher in delegated unit for emotional and behavioural difficulties (not part of the service)

We are ***no longer able*** *to take children from* [old authority] *because we have so many children from* [**new authority**].

I feel out on a limb ***now*** *because there used to be two other units. Now there is only one other Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties support teacher.*

Issues to consider

How can the organisation of support services underpin

- a clear special educational needs policy (rather than dictate a change of role divorced from policy);
- Coherent provision to schools and pupils;
- Professional development and job satisfaction for staff?

Example 3 Forth LEA

Type of reorganisation: Some services adopted joint funding arrangements with neighbouring LEAs; others were reduced in size and resourcing to work within the unitary LEA.
Reason for reorganisation: Local government reorganisation (unitary authority).

View of head of outreach support for physical difficulties

Apart from some uncertainty at [planning] *stage, the* ***reorganisation*** *itself did not have much effect on the service. It was agreed to maintain a central service from which the four LEAs would buy in provision. Some differences in procedures exist and documentation is obviously slightly different in each of the four LEAs but that is not really an issue because, largely speaking, the former* [LEA] *procedures have been retained by all.*

View of teacher from the support service for pupils with physical difficulties working in a local primary school

Service still works across all four LEAs. Where there was just [former LEA], *secondary transfer seemed more straightforward. Now there seems to be a greater incidence of appeals for places. Strict catchment areas are enforced through admissions policies and this has implications for pupils with physical disabilities – who may need access to facilities/transport. Some pupils may not be able to go to their local school because it's in a different authority now.*

In some authorities, the criteria for statement banding is being squeezed, making it harder to qualify.

View of head of generic special needs service

*When the **new service** was set up and new systems, such as common record keeping, mechanisms for allocation etc., were introduced, this had a large impact on the service personnel and pulled us together as a team. It gave the service a sense of its own identity and a number of headteachers commented very favourably on how professional the service had become. The status of the team has been raised – we are now seen as experts/consultants rather than the lowly 'reading lady' sitting in the corner!*

View of teacher from the generic special needs service (working in a local primary school)

There have been a lot of changes in terms of the role since [former LEA] *broke up. The service has a great deal of vision. The previous role of 'remedial teacher' does not apply any more. Her role is more advisory now and she feels she is an important link with all the adults who come into contact with pupils. Liaison is so important now. She still does teach and wouldn't want to draw away from that, but this linking of people is the crucial thing. Once you have that in place, things can progress.*

The other important part of the role is to raise pupils' self-esteem. You have to build them up before doing anything else.

These changes have improved the status of [service] *teachers in school. Lots of people come to ask her advice and she welcomes that aspect. Their status within the authority is improved.*

Issues to consider

How can services be organised to prevent problems with phase/school transition?
Service organisation **can** support service cohesion and thus improve the way provision is experienced by schools.

Example 4 Tay LEA

Type of reorganisation: Shift from divisional to area teams; shift from separate specialisms to multi-disciplinary teams.
Reason for reorganisation: Profile of services did not match needs.

View of educational psychologist (area manager)

a) *The **administration** of the service has changed in the last year. ... The divisional system meant that two people had enormous responsibility for great swathes of the county. They couldn't be there for people. I'm now able to promote myself as the local manager, available to people on a day-to-day basis. And people like that access.*

b) *We moved to **school support teams** in 1990 and we're beginning now to enjoy the mature fruits of that change. We've got to the stage of a full acceptance on an equitability of psychologists and support teachers working together. We're quite proud of that. There's a real meeting of minds, a real sharing of expertise. Your background doesn't matter, it's the joint perspective you can bring.*

View of learning support teacher

*Because we work as a three-person **school support team**, it means there is support for colleagues in that small team and that they can work together to be quite creative in working on what the school sees as its needs and on what the team perceives the school's needs to be.*

View of behaviour support teacher (area manager)

a) *It's a good concept, the **school support team**. I've seen enormous changes in the ten years I've worked here. At first, we were all entirely separate – might not even know you were working with the same child. It was a bit loose. I find there is such a cross-over between learning and behaviour problems that it's very helpful to have a close working relationship with the others.*

b) *Changes every year! It's quite exciting but has a bad effect on **staff morale**. As a manager, you have to be aware that people get depressed about it.*

View of school support team in local primary school

Support Teacher A – *We all work in a large number of schools. My area is quite compact so it's comparatively quick to get from one school to another but for people like* [Support Teacher B] *who also works in Southern Area...*

Support Teacher B – *It might be 20-odd miles so it's not easy to whizz back up.*

Support Teacher A – *We try and work so the schools are closest together but it's not always possible to do that.*

Issue to consider

It is important to think through what the negative outcomes of service reorganisation are likely to be and to seek to ensure that the positive outcomes outweigh the negative ones.

As the above examples suggest, in considering the effectiveness of any particular structure which is used to organise the support services for special educational needs within an LEA, it is important to bear in mind the uncertainty and disruption that may arise from reorganisation, as well as the personal impact that it may have on the individual staff members involved. During the period of uncertainty before reorganisation and of adaptation afterwards, there is likely to be a loss of some efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery to schools and to children. Nevertheless, the overall way in which support service provision in an LEA is organised has an effect on the ability of service staff to liaise with each other, and therefore on the coherence, quality and effectiveness of their work with schools and with pupils. For this reason, the effective management and organisation of support services within an LEA are crucial to the delivery of quality services.

4.2 Variety of overall structures of support services for special educational needs

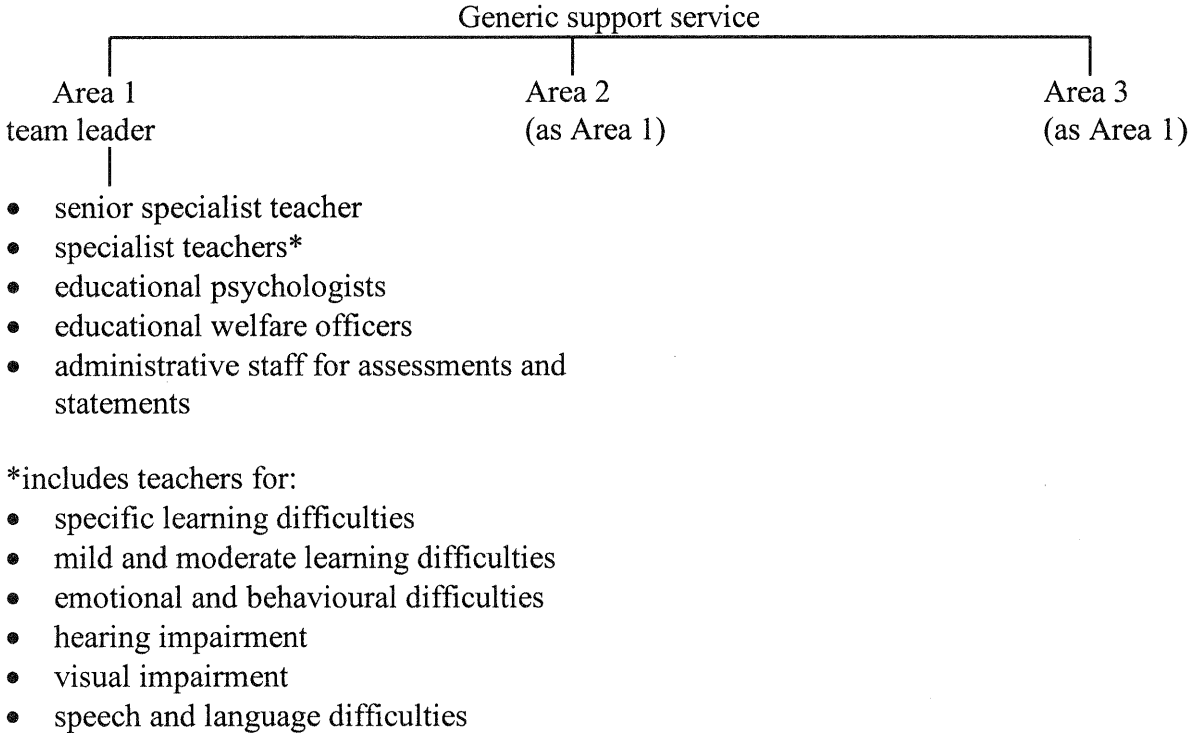
The largely closed manner demanded by a questionnaire made it difficult to collect data about the overall structures used within LEAs to organise and manage support services for special educational needs. In part, this was because of different use of terminology: for example, support 'service', as opposed to a 'team', or, indeed, a single person providing a 'service'. From subsequent telephone conversations with the majority of the respondents to the NFER survey, it became clear that this problem of terminology reflected experience on the ground. For example, even within a single LEA, one person may think of provision as a 'service' and another think of it as a 'team' within a wider-ranging 'service'. In some cases, the term 'service' was used both of the single broad area, support for pupils, and of the separate support provision made for different types of need. During the interviews conducted in the case study LEAs, the different interpretations of 'service' and the lack of distinction made by staff between 'service' and 'team' were very clear. For example, an educational psychologist spoke of the 'educational psychology service' and yet also spoke of its place within an area team-based, multi-disciplinary 'pupil support service'. To give another example, the head of an early years 'team' of eight staff referred to this as 'team' or 'service' interchangeably throughout the interview, although it was also part

of a 'learning support service' which had its own 'head of service'. Given the variety and complexity of the structures which shaped support service provision within LEAs, this lack of clarity is not surprising.

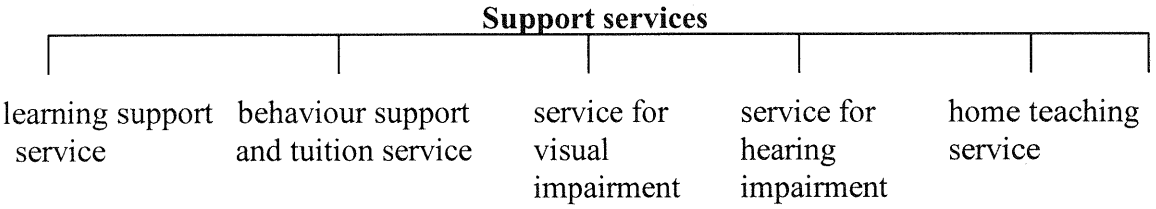
Some examples of different structures for support services are illustrated below. The NFER questionnaire did not impose a definition of 'support service' on respondents. This means that in this account of the findings, the term 'support service' covers a variety of operational arrangements.

Figure 4.2 Some examples of different structures for an LEA's support service(s) (derived from documentation received from case study LEAs)

Example 1 – one service, including support for learning and other difficulties

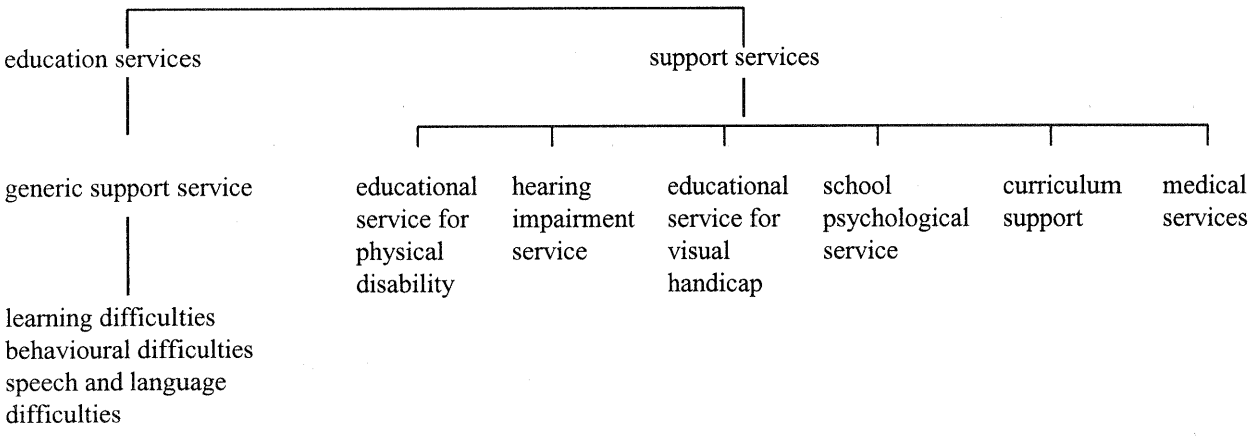


Example 2 – Separate services

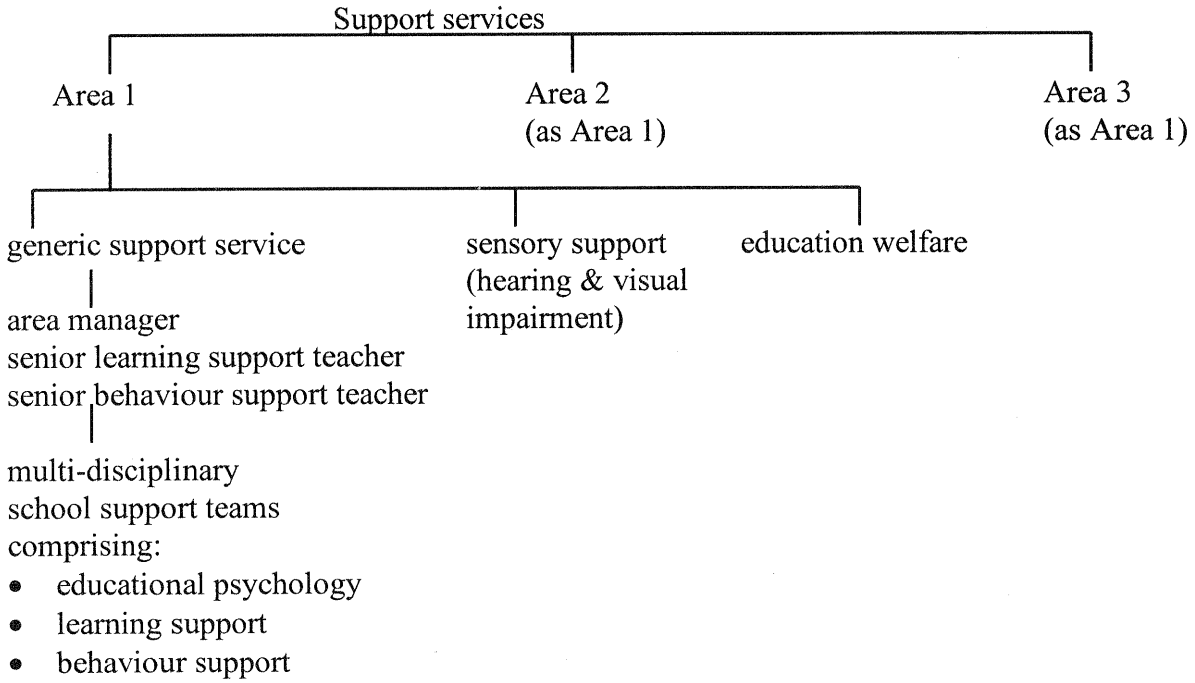


Example 3 – One generic support service plus separate services for low incidence needs

Type 1



Type 2



Despite the difficulties encountered in trying to encapsulate the structures of overall provision of support services, it seems reasonably certain from the questionnaire and

follow-up phone-calls that most responding LEAs (68 per cent) had more than one discrete support service for special educational needs; for example, an LEA might have a learning support service and a discrete sensory support service. As Table 4.2 shows, it was much less common for any type of LEA to have a single support service. Some of the single support services which did exist related only to learning difficulties; others also covered other special needs. Although, as will be shown later, there were some differences between primary and secondary schools in the delivery and availability of support services, in only two authorities (both newly created) were there *structural* differences in the phase level organisation of support services.

Table 4.2 Structural organisation of LEA support services for special educational needs

Structure	Percentage of LEAs N = 103	
	Primary	**Secondary**
More than one separate service	68	68
One service (support for learning *and other* difficulties	18	17
One service (support for learning difficulties only)	9	8
Other*	4	6
Missing cases	1	1

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.
**Details in text*

It is interesting that the Warnock (Warnock Report, 1978) idea of the generic support service remained uncommon. Although the all-embracing term 'special educational needs' is universally used, categorisation is still powerful when it is relevant. The specific needs of children with sensory impairment or behavioural difficulties were still considered to require expert intervention – albeit often via specialist advice to adults working with the pupil rather than through direct intervention with the pupil her/himself.

4.3 Overall management responsibility for LEA support services for SEN

As Table 4.3a indicates, most of the responding LEAs had one person who was responsible for the overall management of support services for special educational needs. In a fifth of responding LEAs, however, overall management responsibility for the support services was shared between more than one person. For example, responsibility was shared among area managers or between heads of different services, or one person had responsibility for services to primary schools and another for services to secondary schools. It might be argued that a lack of coherence in leadership, direction and vision could arise where there was no single person responsible for overall management of the support services. This point is enlarged on in the section below on liaison.

Table 4.3a Overall management responsibility for the special educational needs support services

Overall management responsibility	**Percentage of LEAs N = 103**
Shared (more than one person)	20
Held by one person	79
Missing case	1

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Table 4.3b Post held by single overall manager of SEN support services

Post	**Percentage of LEAs 100% = 81**
Assistant, deputy or director of education	25
Head of service(s)	32
Manager of service(s)	15
Education officer (various ranks)	23
Educational psychologist (various ranks)	5

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Table 4.3b, the variation in posts held by overall managers, shows that only five were educational psychologists. Moses *et al.* (1988) found that heads of educational psychological services were responsible for running other support services in many LEAs. They also noted that, after the Education Act 1981, some LEAs had reorganised their support services to change this practice. The current NFER survey showed the marked trend away from support services being managed by heads of psychological services.

In each of the five case study authorities, responsibility for the overall management of the special educational needs support services lay with one person. In two of these LEAs, the period of the NFER study coincided with change in management structures and the overall responsibility for management of support services had been reallocated in the short term. In one case, responsibility was passed from the senior education officer (special education) to the county educational psychologist; this appeared to have caused minimal disruption, possibly because all the support services had main offices on one corridor of the county buildings and communication and relationships were good. In the other LEA, some of the problems of lack of coordination and liaison between the services raised by interviewees may have arisen from insecure management in this temporary situation.

In the case study authorities, there were different ways of giving overall direction and leadership to what could otherwise be a collection of discrete services. For example, in one of the new authorities, the overall manager post had been a recent creation. This new post was welcomed by some service staff as raising the profile of special educational needs but also caused anxiety about the possibility of one person being able to push his/her own agenda. The new manager tried to allay such fears by setting up 'planning in partnership' groups and hoped that, in time, service management decisions would be legitimised by the LEA development plan.

In another LEA, the support services for special educational needs had a role within the overall LEA goal of inclusive education. With a public and transparent LEA policy, the services manager's role was unlikely to be seen as one of pushing a personal agenda since overall management decisions had to be in accordance with the

policy. The LEA's policy on special educational needs thus set the policy framework for the decisions taken by the overall manager of the special educational needs support services.

In the LEAs where responsibility for different aspects of special educational needs was allocated to different managers, the coherent implementation of policy was sometimes problematic. In two of the case study LEAs, the responsibility for advisory services was separated from that for the support services; this caused problems all the way down the hierarchy of management to the service received by schools:

> *I can tell you there is a real turf war going on between* [the two managers] *over the advisory role in schools because* [the advisory side] *is so limited in size – we could do it much better* (support service teacher).
>
> *Since these* [advisory] *business units were set up, some services to schools have decreased and we are now the only service regularly in schools* (head of support service).

In another case study LEA, management responsibility for the assessment of special educational needs had been separated from support. As one manager said: '*There is a tension there. It seems a recipe for disaster but it actually works because we get on as two individuals.*'

This example highlights once more the crucial importance of effective working relationships to the success of special educational needs provision at every level.

4.4 Liaison between services, and between services and other agencies

Coordination and coherence in the delivery of support to schools require effective liaison between every level of LEA support staff, regardless of the service structures and/or professional specialisms which distinguish between them. The same is true of liaison at every level between staff in the education authority support services and their counterparts in Social Services and the health authorities/trusts. Good management decisions are required to prevent structures and specialisms which

distinguish different forms of support from being divisive. Coherent support helps schools to use LEA services effectively.

4.4.1 Liaison between services and with other organisations

From the interviews with support service staff, a number of factors emerged which they perceived as enabling liaison between services and with other agencies. These were:

Formal structures, such as

- joint training – for example, on the Code of Practice, on particular types of special educational need, on development planning;
- joint planning and development groups;
- joint policy forums looking at special educational needs across the board;
- joint panels considering, for example, referrals, assessments, placements;
- joint meetings at various levels, for example, at team, area, region, services, management levels;
- multi-disciplinary working which was underpinned by leadership/expertise in specialist areas;
- a designated person having particular responsibility to liaise with another service or agency;

commonalities, such as

- having to deal with the same issues – for example, in Tay LEA, health, education and social services had set up a consultative group to develop common approaches to severe and challenging behaviour;
- having individual cases in common;
- sharing premises;
- having similar organisational structures;
- shared information;
- a shared style of paperwork/ways of working;

informal links, such as

- the professional relationships built up from contact over a period of time – this made it easy to phone a collleague in another service or agency to ask advice or seek information;
- maintaining at an informal level links which had been formally structured prior to local government reorganisation – this helped, for example, where pupils moved from one new unitary LEA to another but remained within the geographical area of the former authority.

As the above list indicates, despite their importance, structures alone were not perceived as sufficient – good working relationships between individuals were regarded as the key to effective liaison:

> *What helps liaison with others is a sense of goodwill, knowing that we are working together in the interests of children. You have to have respect for each other's work. Just knowing people as individuals helps, too. And management structures allowing people to get together – and* their *personal* [i.e.working] *relationships being positive* (senior support teacher).

> *Teams visit* [the pupil referral unit] *once a term to discuss referrals and look at problem-solving, to discuss the pupils we're working with. We* [school support team comprising behaviour support teacher, learning support teacher and an educational psychologist] *meet at the base once a fortnight to discuss our current cases and to process referrals. It's a good concept, the school support team. I've seen enormous changes in the years since I've worked here. At first, we were all entirely separate – might not even know you were working with the same child. It was a bit loose. I find there is such a cross-over between learning and behaviour problems that it's very helpful to have a close working relationship with the others* (behaviour support teacher).

Support service staff were very aware of the problems which inhibited effective liaison and realised that these could occur even when the structures were favourable. For example, one interviewee noted that, despite the benefits of multi-disciplinary working: '*There is the whole issue of pecking orders of status and salaries which you can't get rid of and which gets in the way of working together constructively.*' Another interviewee pointed out that, despite sharing a site with other support services, effective liaison did not occur automatically because: '*Here* [services] *have grown up as separate trees, albeit in the same orchard!*' Other interviewees suggested that such problems could be overcome by making effective liasion a priority within both strategic and operational management. One area team leader put it like this: '*Our lives are so busy we have to give* [liaison] *a high priority and sit down together at the beginning of the year and plan in meetings which we* will *attend. Leadership from the top is important, too, and our* [line manager] *is good and sees us regularly.*' If support services are to be effective in enabling schools to meet the special educational needs of children, managers must recognise that staff time (and therefore money) has to be invested in those factors identified as facilitating coherent support.

4.5 Summary points from Chapter 4

- The management and organisation of support services were perceived to be as crucial as patterns of funding.
- Across England and Wales, a wide range of management structures were represented.
- The majority of authorities responding to the NFER survey had undergone major reorganisation of support services for special educational needs within the previous three years (i.e. 1995 – 97).
- Just over two-thirds of the responding LEAs had more than one discrete support service for special educational needs: further categorisation within the broad category 'special educational needs' was thus prevalent.
- Overall management of support services was generally lodged with one person, through in a fifth of responding LEAs it was shared.
- In only four responding authorities was the overall manager the Principal Educational Psychologist.
- In some authorities, there were tensions where different aspects of special educational needs were allocated to different managers (for example, where advice was separated from support, or assessment from support).
- Good working relations as well as facilitating structures were perceived to be crucial for effective liaison within and between services, and between services and other statutory agencies.

Chapter 5

Individual LEA support services for special educational needs: organisation and management

As Table 4.2 showed, it was relatively uncommon for an LEA to have only one support service. This means that in most LEAs there were important management issues relating to individual services operating within the wider structure of service provision as a whole.

5.1 The variety of structures

Table 5.1 shows the information from the questionnaire survey regarding the variety of ways in which individual services within LEAs were organised and structured.

Given the difficulty of defining a support 'service', as outlined in the previous chapter, it is unlikely that the details of the findings from the question on this topic were accurate. However, it is more likely that the broad trend – namely, that the majority of support services were organised from one central office – reflected the situation across the responding LEAs. The organisation of support services from area offices was the second most common practice. Support services were least likely to be organised from a unit in a mainstream school. Taken overall, there were no statistically significant differences in the organisation of individual services to primary and secondary schools although, within some individual LEAs, there was some slight variation in the detail of service organisation at phase level.

Single services covering more than one area of need were the most common form of provision. There was rarely a separate service for pupils with physical disabilities; but where there was, it was most likely to be organised from a special school. This reflects the fact that once initial needs assessment and environmental audit have been undertaken, the needs of pupils with physical disabilities are usually met by

Table 5.1 Organisation of individual support services for special educational needs

Individual support service covering ...	Percentage of LEAs organising individual support services in particular ways 100% = 103													
	from one central office		from area offices		from special school		from unit in mainstream school		other		no separate service in LEA		missing information	
	prim	sec	prim	sec	prim	sec	prim	sec	prim	sec	prim	sec	prim	sec
... more than one area of need	54	50	14	9	0	0	1	1	4	4	26	36	1	0
only moderate learning difficulties	8	6	4	4	5	5	0	0	3	6	81	80	0	0
only severe learning difficulties	3	3	0	0	7	8	0	0	1	1	89	88	0	0
only specific learning difficulties	21	21	3	5	1	1	5	5	3	5	67	63	0	0
only emotional behavioural difficulties	18	15	8	8	3	3	4	3	14	14	53	58	0	0
only physical disability	11	11	2	3	10	9	0	0	4	4	74	74	0	0
only hearing impairment*	38	40	11	10	5	4	4	4	13	14	30	29	0	0
only visual impairment	28	29	7	6	6	6	5	5	12	13	42	41	1	1
only language and communication difficulties	8	10	1	0	0	2	12	7	12	8	67	74	1	1
only educational psychology	59	59	26	26	0	0	0	0	3	2	11	13	1	0

Percentages rounded off to nearest whole number

**This line includes 12 LEAs which gave information about a joint HI/VI service.*

care/support assistants with regular, but infrequent, monitoring visits from someone with specialist knowledge. Services for learning difficulties tended to be generic, but where specific services existed, they were most commonly for specific learning difficulties.

The NFER survey adopted the Code of Practice definition of special educational need which excludes, for example, English as a Second Language. However, when respondents were invited to add other services to the list provided on the questionnaire, some added areas such as Education Welfare, English as a Second Language, Travellers, Home and Hospital Tuition, Portage and Early Years support. Of more interest is the fact that other LEA respondents suggested that they no longer perceived their support services as relating only to special educational needs; rather, they saw their supporting role as being all-encompassing. This approach was a recent development and was not manifested in the earlier NFER survey (Fletcher-Campbell with Hall, 1993). It seemed to be fuelled by the overall school improvement and school effectiveness movements, the focus on raising standards of attainment, and by developments in perceptions of inclusion. The extreme position as regards inclusion, allied with criteria for effectiveness for community schools, has the potential to render the concept of special educational needs increasingly redundant. These issues recurred in the case study data, as the following extract from an interview illustrates:

> *I have just a slight problem with the NFER's description of services as 'special educational needs' support services. I think that is how most people see us, and most services, but our own philosophy is that we are here to help children and schools and that, for example, able children who are not special educational needs within the context of the 1996 Act are none the less a focus for us; home-related problems, not SEN in the context of the '96 Act; and also, for example, we have developed over the last two to three years a critical incident framework by which about a third of my service is committed to downing tools at any point when we get a telephone call to go to a school which has suffered a tragedy. Just really to illustrate that we see ourselves as involved in education and not just in special education* (line manager of generic support service).

The interviewee went on to describe service involvement in the LEA's school effectiveness and support strategy explaining: '*The idea behind this is that the better schools are, the less individual SEN will be referred.*'

The broad picture provided by the questionnaire responses of the variety of ways individual support services were organised was reflected within the case study authorities. Figure 5.1 provides some examples of this variety.

Figure 5.1 Examples of how individual support services were organised in the case study LEAs

LEA	Organisational base
Moray	All five support services organised from offices in central site
Tay	All support services organised from area offices – heads of services had offices in central site
Forth	Generic special needs service organised from central office. Physical difficulties support organised from special school
Dornay	Generic special needs service organised from area offices
Clyde	Some services organised from central office; others from Child Development Centre

The way in which the service was organised was one factor which could help or hinder good communication between the staff working in the support services and, hence, could influence the quality of service delivered to schools.

5.2 Communication within support services

Just as there are factors, outlined in Chapter 4, which further the development of liaison and coherence between separate support services, interviewees from the case study LEAs made it clear that there are also factors which foster close, coherent working practices within individual support services.

5.2.1 Fostering good communication within services

Communication between service staff at different levels and in different locations worked well when, for example:

- there was regular contact between service staff visiting a school and the learning support assistant(s) working in the school with the same pupil(s) – this could

include planning lessons/support together, reviewing work done with the pupil(s), liaising over timetabling support sessions and discussing problems;
- there was an assigned link service teacher per school/unit – this improved both school to service communication and, where a number of peripatetic support teachers visited one school, allowed each to coordinate his/her work with colleagues and to have a link with the service office;
- peripatetic service staff had non-contact time designed to be spent in the main office where they could meet with office-based staff and join in shared activities, such as staff development, planning, meetings;
- lines of communication worked both up and down the staff hierarchies of pay and responsibility – staff valued being given space to raise issues with their managers but also wanted managers to be proactive about making time to discuss with them how work was going: this could take the form of regular supervision visits by managers to service staff working in schools and units;
- staff had the opportunity to visit and observe their colleagues who worked in different locations, such as mainstream schools, special schools, units, the area/main office;
- professional support/expertise was available for staff working with any type of special need – this could be a specialist adviser/manager or non-service staff in a special school or unit;
- all service staff were managed within one structure.

Factors such as these helped individual support staff working in schools to play a professional and coherent part in the provision of support to schools and pupils. Where these were absent, staff working in schools could feel isolated from professional support and resources.

5.3 Different ways of managing the allocation of support staff to schools/cases

Across and within the five case study LEAs, there was variation as to how service managers allocated support to schools.

Although the variety of mechanisms for allocating support to schools was great, the basic underlying differences were few. These were allocation on the basis of:

- special educational needs only (gauged in a variety of ways);
- a basic entitlement to support, plus a needs-related element (formulae for both parts devised in a variety of ways);
- a total number of cases determined by service but prioritised on the basis of level of need.

Once the amount of support to a school was decided, the service manager then had to allocate staffing to provide that support. Again, there was variation in how this was done. Some examples of different methods for dividing up the total caseload included:

- the service determined how many stage 3 pupils could be supported – each support teacher worked with about 100 pupils (equivalent to 20 minutes of support per pupil per week);
- cases were allocated on the basis of individual support teachers' strengths and interests but staff were encouraged to work in different phases;
- support teachers worked in a small number of schools;
- the LEA was divided into areas and:
  - support teachers worked in one area but across phases; or,
  - support teachers worked in one or two secondary schools (depending on level of need) and all their main feeder primary schools;
- schools were divided into clusters – support teachers worked across two clusters.

Interviewees raised a number of issues relating to the caseloads of staff, some of which were mainly of concern to managers and some of which were problematic for both managers and staff. One concern of managers was whether to operate a waiting list (which made it easier to argue the case for growth in the service since it demonstrated demand) or to 'dilute provision' (which meant that pupils with identified needs and sometimes 'desperate' schools were not left completely unsupported). In one LEA, this tension was resolved by finding another mechanism by which a service could demonstrate the need for growth. Heads of services for low-incidence needs seemed to take pride in ensuring that their services never refused support to schools, even if this meant that cases had to be prioritised and caseloads reallocated. Where services were larger, this type of responsive approach was easier; in very small services, it was almost impossible.

A second issue which concerned one or two managers was the tension arising between services and schools as one result of having rationalised caseloads such that individual staff spent most of their time in a small number of schools. In one service, most staff were allocated to one school each on an almost full-time basis. As the head of that service said:

> *This doesn't amount to delegation, but it does raise issues about who has line management responsibility for the staff.* De facto, *the SMT of the school will feel them to be part of their set up, but we hold the view that the professional management of those staff as members of a group focused on* [service] *issues still rests with me. It's become an interesting area of discussion* (head of support service).

While some caseload issues mainly concerned managers, others were problematic for both staff and managers, although their views were not always identical. One of these problems was the logistics of arranging caseloads to minimise travel. Heads of services had responsibility for case allocation (see above) but they expected staff to arrange their work within that pattern so that travel time was minimised and time with pupils and schools was maximised. For service staff, the need to travel from school to school was a drawback and too frequently cut into their lunchtimes and breaks. It also deprived them of time to speak to the teachers of the pupils supported (see also Chapter 7). This was not only a professional loss – in their view, this was the best way of passing on information about their work and the pupil's progress – but it also involved a personal loss of the only adult company they were likely to enjoy all day. The following quotation represents widely shared views on this issue.

> *If you're* [in school] *either leading up to playtime or lunchtime or at the end of an afternoon, then there's a gap where you can get together* [with the teacher/s]. *But if* [you're in school] *first thing in the morning or afternoon and then you're dashing off to another school, you more or less send the child back with a note saying what you've done* (support service teacher).

Obviously, the fewer schools involved and the shorter the distance between them, the more the burden of travelling time was lifted from staff. Nevertheless, it remained an issue even for staff working in as few as two to four schools. For those working in 20 or more schools, it had a correspondingly bigger negative impact. This is something managers need to recognise when caseload allocations are made. There was evidence of unease where staff were simply 'expected' to use their lunchtimes and breaks without any acknowledgement of the problems this creates for them.

Service managers and staff also shared a concern about the difficulties of timetabling support staff visits to schools. Even heads of service and staff working in centrally retained services, which therefore had a degree of control over timetabling, found it a

problem and it was even more so for those working in services which were partly delegated. When schools were using their delegated budgets (cash values) to buy in support, they wanted that support to be delivered at the time of their choosing. This could play havoc with the best laid plans of staff and managers trying to avoid excess travelling. If schools are to be given more delegated money for special educational support, there may be a concomitant need for services to be large enough for flexible and responsive ways of working. This can only be achieved at some financial cost.

Timetabling was further complicated by the need to liaise, not only with all the schools in which staff worked, but also with the other agencies and services which also supported the same pupils. For example, a language support teacher tried to avoid visiting a pupil with speech problems on the same day as the health authority speech therapist or the Hearing Impaired Service audiologist. This type of situation reinforces the need for effective systems of liaison and communication between support services and other agencies.

In addition, support service staff were aware that some of the pupils on their caseload benefited more from input at certain times of day, usually in the mornings. Therefore they tried to ensure that, at least at some point within a school year or within a school term, those pupils were allotted a morning slot. Another timetabling problem arose for support staff who were in the habit of trying to relate the work they did with pupils to the work already done by their usual classteacher. They found that, if the school made frequent use of supply teachers, their good intentions could come to nothing as they could not depend on any given lesson having been taught. Managing the problems associated with their caseload allocation, then, was very much part of the job of support service staff but one which, they felt, was not always sufficiently recognised by schools or service managers.

Partly in answer to such problems and issues, some heads of service had instituted various ways of monitoring and reviewing the caseloads of their staff. One way of doing this simply involved letting the staff know that such problems could be raised with line managers. Others felt this was too reactive and so, proactively, made a point of bringing up the caseloads issue at regular supervision meetings. In one LEA, a head of service collected in weekly movement sheets from staff and used these to

review caseloads regularly. Other service managers in different LEAs used the review of caseloads as a means of encouraging staff to 'exit in a skilled way'. Closing cases was one way of helping service staff to manage the size of their caseload. The important point to note is that the decisions made by service managers on caseload allocation had a big impact, for good or ill, on the day-to-day working lives of support service staff.

5.4 The management of time on different tasks

In addition to managing the distribution of caseloads, managers also had to make decisions about the time allocated to different tasks within the support teachers' remit. In three of the five case study LEAs, at least some services operated time allocation models for managing this. For example, one educational psychology service allocated every school a set number of visits of three hours each; educational psychologists were expected to allocate 50 per cent of their time to work in school. This strict time allocation model was due to be reviewed, however, because on the one hand, schools were getting better at early identification of needs as a result of the implementation of the Code of Practice, and, on the other, the LEA had linked delegation of money for supporting the school-based stages of the Code to numbers identified at stage 3, as validated by referral data from the psychology service. The result was that psychologists found themselves under pressure, as the service head recognised: '*Currently we don't have enough flexibility to cope with our statutory demand, our early intervention work, as well as the processing of cases up to stage 3 of the criteria.*'

In another LEA, the generic support service, which included educational psychologists, operated on a time allocation model by which about a quarter of staff time was spent on schools' entitlement visits, focused on support at stages 2 and 3 of the Code. Views on the effectiveness of this time allocation varied. For one psychologist, it was helpful in achieving a balance between statutory and preventative work:

> *Each of us takes 26 per cent of our time, minimum, on stage 2 and 3. The rest is to do with statutory demands, our broader support interests, administration and our professional development. As*

> *long as we can keep an active presence at stage 2 and 3, then I think it follows that stage 4 demands will be kept in proportion. It's only when we withdraw stage 3 that schools feel left alone and jump into stage 4. Whilst we're valued at stage 3, the balance is right. The challenge to the service is to ensure that what happens as stage 3 is perceived as vital and constructive* (educational psychologist).

Other staff interviewed from this LEA were not so keen on the idea of all schools being entitled to visits, believing that it would be more effective to give more time to schools with more problems even if this meant that some schools with few problems had less time as a consequence. The time allocation model in place did not allow for this type of professional judgement. Interestingly, though, the model had been adapted as a result of local parental pressure. Parental concerns about a lack of provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties had resulted in learning support teachers within the service having to work to a model which focused about an eighth of their total school visits' time on supporting this particular area of need. Although not all staff thought it ideal, this time allocation model ensured a consistent level of provision and enabled the service to have an influence across all schools in the LEA.

Although not all services operated time allocation models, all had explicit or implicit expectations about how staff should use their time. For example, one head of service made a termly analysis of time-use by staff to ensure that they worked inclusively and did not spend undue time on one-to-one support. In other services, managers sought to ensure that most time was spent on direct pupil support and not, for example, on paperwork. Other expectations included that staff would spend time liaising with classteachers or that most time would be spent on statutory work.

One concern which was raised by staff in almost every service was the lack of time to do all aspects of the job adequately. The following comments are representative: '*Non-statutory aspects* [of the job] *are done in extra time basically*': '*I regularly work a 70-hour week rising to 100 hours at busy times such as when annual reviews have to be written*'; '*Colleagues are coming to me saying they haven't got enough time and asking for guidance. You have to do statutory work but it's difficult to manage – juggling plates*'. Many interviewees said that support service staff routinely devoted their own time trying to ensure that the job was well done.

5.5 Management of the role adopted by staff

Decisions about allocation of time to different tasks relates to a further management decision – the nature of the role adopted by support staff. Basically, service managers could choose to determine this role in some way or they could decide to allow their staff to adjust as appropriate to particular schools.

As has been shown, time allocation models, as well as more general expectations about how time should be spent, both determined to some extent the role adopted by staff. Roles could also be determined by stipulating that support had to be delivered by withdrawal from the class or, conversely, through in-class support. Sometimes this was determined, not by the service manager, but by a strict interpretation of a pupil's statement. For example, one senior support teacher resisted pressure from a school to support in class because she felt this would not allow her to fulfil the terms of support on the statement: '*I am a teacher responsible for meeting the provision on the statement.*' (In Chapter 8, school views on the roles adopted by support service staff are discussed.)

Staff valued being allowed to make autonomous professional decisions about which form of support was appropriate in a given context. They felt it added to their effectiveness. For example, one support teacher adapted her way of working, having realised that, by withdrawing the pupil, an opportunity for influencing classroom practice was lost: '*I got fed up doing withdrawal – a lot of the work I was doing wasn't being transferred into the classroom.*' She began to support the pupil in class and was able to work alongside the teacher. Another had changed from in-class support to withdrawal work because the former had been misinterpreted as '*an extra body in the classroom*'. Flexibility was valued, then, both for the professional autonomy it offered and because it enabled support teachers to negotiate their role with the school staff.

Some staff were aware that professional autonomy, though offering the benefits of such flexibility, could be abused. For example, a support teacher might choose not to support in class in order to avoid dealing with a difficult teacher rather than for any

professional reasons to do with meeting the needs of the pupil. It was felt that such practices by even one or two staff could bring a whole service into disrepute. The determination of staff roles needs to be considered by service managers.

While managers chose to determine roles to a greater or lesser extent, support staff in schools were aware of other influences which affected the role they could adopt. For example, one support teacher felt that her professional autonomy was increasingly constrained by wider issues affecting schools, such as the pressure to improve results in national tests. Schools in her caseload had adopted setting in response to this pressure and, consequently, her role had to be adapted to make the best of that situation. In her view, the positive side was that it allowed her to work with the whole set, rather than with an individual, but the negative side was that it had increased behaviour problems in groups of low-achieving pupils. She felt very aware of a conflict between her view of good teaching practice for pupils with special educational needs and some teaching methods adopted by schools to raise test scores.

Other support staff, including a number of educational psychologists, felt that their roles had been constrained by the Code of Practice, which was perceived as having the effect of focusing support on individually identified pupils. As one head of a behaviour support service put it:

> *The Code of Practice has lots of merits as a model but legislation since 1981 has suggested that the main task is to identify the problem .... We get bound up into the notion of individual assessment and the notion that special educational needs are vested in marginal, identified, individual pupils when they are not – especially EBD, which are mostly tied in to social dynamics, including how teachers respond to pupils who have difficulties* (head of service).

This view was shared by those who argued that the Code had encouraged a move towards individual targets and intensive withdrawal work and away from the broader supporting role which might have included involvement in whole-school issues.

In some new unitary authorities, services had been reduced and therefore support staff had been forced to adapt their role away from direct teaching of pupils towards more advisory work.

5.6 Job satisfaction/dissatisfaction

LEA support service staff working in the case study schools also raised a number of issues which affected their job satisfaction. These are set out in the box below.

5.6.1 Issues affecting job satisfaction

Workload. Where services had decreased staffing but had not correspondingly decreased commitments, individual staff were left to cope with sometimes 'tremendously heavy' workloads resulting in a loss of quality and of job satisfaction.

Professional disagreements. Where there was poor liaison between different parts of a service and a lack of service leadership, damaging disagreements could arise over the use of particular methods. For example, in one hearing impairment service, new staff were employed who favoured oracy rather than total communication and this caused problems of continuity in some units and a loss of job satisfaction for those staff who felt their previous work was undermined.

Divisive job descriptions/status/pay. Where managers had failed to address changing circumstances which had eroded job description differences in day-to-day work. For example one support assistant said: '*God knows what the difference is but there you go! It causes a lot of resentment because* [one grade] *get paid a lot more. Basically,* [second grade] *are doing a* [first grade] *job now but without* [first grade] *money and that really aggravates me.*'

Low pay, where support assistants felt that managers refused to recognise the responsibility of their jobs and failed to offer appropriate remuneration (in one LEA, support assistants had gone on strike over the issue).

Feeling devalued as a service professional. Where new recruits were offered a lower pay scale than had been customary, existing staff felt devalued. For example, one support teacher said: '*This means the job is not being accounted as being of as much worth and so they attract less experienced teachers. This devalues the service as a whole.*'

Hierarchical management. Where services had a number of management layers, this could cause dissatisfaction for staff at the bottom of the scale if they felt that not all these layers were necessary.

Lack of resources, where managers had failed to ensure that a change in service emphasis was accompanied by a change in emphasis in its material resources. For example, in a service which had traditionally focused on primary school provision, teachers operating in the secondary school phase complained of a lack of suitable teaching materials.

It could be argued that, even in circumstances where management could not prevent the problems arising, it remained the responsibility of service managers to deal with the dissatisfaction caused by these problems. Support staff, both teachers and learning support assistants, need themselves to feel supported in their job. It is not sufficient for managers to say that staff can raise problem areas with them; managers must be proactive in bringing up for open discussion difficulties faced by the service.

Although there were clearly a number of issues where a failure to manage caused dissatisfaction with the job, it is also true that many support service staff reported their sense of job satisfaction and their enjoyment of their work.

However much support staff employed by LEAs enjoyed their job, a lack of job security was a problem for many, particularly for learning support assistants. Learning support assistants (given a variety of titles) had the lowest status within LEA support services and yet, paradoxically, were often the staff who spent the most time delivering direct support to the pupils with the greatest level of special needs.

A few examples of some learning support assistants will give a flavour of the level of support provision they made and the insecurity of their jobs. (Pseudonyms have been used.)

- Mrs Armitage supported three pupils, each with different needs (learning difficulties, dyspraxia, behavioural problems). She was on a temporary contract, renewable on a termly basis – previously, she had been employed on a *daily* basis.
- Ms Brown supported small groups in three different classes. Despite working full-time and for three-and-a-half years in the same school, she was on a termly contract – not surprisingly, she felt her post was vulnerable and was '*always job hunting for a permanent post*'; she found that her job necessitated unpaid preparation work at home.
- Miss Connelly worked with one pupil with physical disabilities and her job was linked to that specific pupil remaining in the school. Her job was constantly under threat from budget cuts – she negotiated independently to transfer with her pupil to secondary school and obtained a fixed-term contract with a promise that it would become permanent.
- Mrs Dodd worked with one pupil in each of two different schools; both pupils had very different special needs – she could be redeployed at any time by the LEA.

Some attempts had been made by service managers to address the insecurity felt by such staff. For example, in one case study LEA, management had ensured that

support staff, including non-teaching staff, were given a permanent contract after two years. (Their jobs remained subject to redeployment by the LEA.) In most cases, however, it seemed that learning support assistants suffered from insecurity of employment, had to be flexible about where they worked, and often ended up doing unpaid extra work to plug gaps in support. A recent NFER study (Lee and Mawson, 1998) provides further information on this. Since a sense of job insecurity is likely to have a negative impact on the quality of support delivered to pupils in schools, support service managers need to ensure that this issue is addressed. (This is also a problem where support staff are employed directly by schools using delegated money. In this case, the position is often worse because the school is unable to offer the possibility of redeployment should changed circumstances necessitate a job loss.)

5.7 Staff development: opportunities and take-up

From the case study data, it was clear that support service staff felt that job satisfaction was enhanced by the opportunity to take part in development and training.

5.7.1 Effective staff development

Analysis of the interviews suggested that effective staff development and training for support service staff involved:

- the identification of such needs at different levels – i.e. at LEA level (to respond to national initiatives and to local policies), at service level (for, example, to learn about new areas of need), and at individual level (for example, to strengthen areas of weakness and to follow up areas of interest/expertise);
- the will to do something to meet those needs (formally or informally) – again at LEA level, at service level and at the level of individual members of staff;
- the ability to resource staff development; for example, using GEST (now Standards Fund) funds available at LEA level, allocated budgets within services, or self-funding by individuals); and,
- access to provision organised at different levels – LEA-wide, service-specific, for individuals – including, for example, staff training days, staff meetings, specialist courses and/or conferences.

Some services undertook an audit of training needs, based on regular team meetings which covered professional development, or arising from the processes of evolving service development plans.

The case study LEAs varied in the arrangements made for staff development. In one LEA, for example, each separate service made its own decisions about training. This resulted in differences in staff development opportunities for staff working in different support services in that LEA. For example, in one service, staff development needs had been identified but there was no discrete budget to make provision for those needs – this was to be phased in from the following financial year. In other support services in that LEA, budgets had been set aside for this purpose and all service staff were involved in training activities. In another LEA, where the support service was organised generically, one person had responsibility for staff development and had succeeded in obtaining funds for setting up provision which could meet identified needs.

Other case study LEAs had consistency inasmuch as each service had specified staff training days but there was variation between these LEAs and within LEA services on the number of days set aside. The number of days ranged from three to 12. Set training and development days sometimes caused problems if they happened to clash with staff development taking place in the schools where staff worked. Most service managers resolved such problems by allowing staff to choose which provision was most important for their needs, so long as a minimum number of service days were attended in total. At least at a professional level, the need for staff development was acknowledged and, in most cases, some provision was made.

Provision made included:

- **LEA-wide** – organised courses
- **service-specific** – specialist training events; service-run conferences; staff development meetings
- **for individuals** – professionally relevant diploma or degree courses; short courses on specific topics; attendance at relevant conferences.

Despite such opportunities, it was clear from the interviews with support service staff, from managers to learning support assistants, that there were a number of problems relating to staff development and training.

5.7.2 Staff development and training: the problems

- **No access to provision** – This mostly affected the learning support assistants. For example, one interviewee said: *'At the end of the day, none of us are specially trained – we have just learned as we've gone along.'*

- **Limited availability of provision because of contract type**. This mostly affected part-time support teachers whose contracts allowed them to attend service training days (which usually meant them attending in their own time) but did not allow for them to attend externally provided courses or conferences (unless they paid for this themselves and went in their own time).

- **Lack of time to undertake development activities**. This resulted from pressures of work and managers' failure to ensure staff development was regarded as high-priority. For example, one support teacher said:

  > *I go on local courses. I apply for external courses. I need them – but I tend to make them low on my priorities because of the workload. You know, I'll think, 'No, I don't have time to go on that course after all'. Because of that, my professional development is poor although I'm keen to keep up to date and to develop my professional expertise. So it's not lack of opportunity; what I need is more encouragement to go* (Senior support teacher).

- **Lack of time and/or procedures to enable the dissemination of knowledge gained**. This meant that the full benefits of, sometimes costly, external courses and conferences were wasted.

- **Inappropriate provision**. For example, it was aimed at those working in a different phase; this problem suggests either a lack of suitable opportunities or poor identification of suitable opportunities.

- **Suitable provision unavailable**. Interviewees identified specific areas where it seemed that staff development provision was unavailable: for example, training in the new technologies associated with provision for visually impaired pupils and training in techniques and materials suitable for use with secondary-aged pupils with specific learning difficulties.

In many cases, deficiencies in the training and staff development provided by and through services were alleviated by the commitment of individuals at all levels who undertook training and development activities on their own initiative, thus incurring

costs and using their own time to enhance the quality of their work. There were examples in the case study authorities of staff on some of the lowest pay scales making their own provision for training. For example, one learning support assistant paid to attend a learning support course; another approached the parents of a pupil with physical difficulties to request permission to spend time with the family during the summer holidays so that the family could train the assistant in how to meet the needs of the pupil; another learning support assistant self-funded attendance at a course and there found out for the first time (despite using them in school) the thinking behind the use of Individual Education Plans.

From the case study data, it was clear that the retention of at least some central funding was important if LEA support services were to provide structured and coordinated opportunities for staff development and training. In services which were mainly delegated, it was necessary for the head of service to give priority to this area to enable provision to be made; where such a commitment was not evident, it was difficult for staff to obtain LEA-funded training and development. In addition, it was noticeable that in many services, the lower the status of a member of staff, the less likely they were to be offered the opportunities for training and development which, it might be argued, are the prerequisites for a quality service.

5.8 Summary points from Chapter 5

- There was evidence that support services were developing a broad learning support role that related to overall school and classroom effectiveness as much as individual pupils with special educational needs.
- There was a range of ways in which caseloads were allocated to service staff: by *per capita* 'entitlement'; according to individual teachers' strengths and interests; and by 'patch' schools or clusters of schools.
- Common concerns of service managers were whether to operate a waiting list or dilute provision; and how to determine lines of management where a service teacher was allocated full-time to one particular school.
- Where support teachers visited a number of schools, valuable time was spent travelling, which deprived the teachers of opportunities to talk with ordinary class teachers about the pupils whom they were supporting.
- Timetabling support teachers' visits was difficult for service managers, especially where schools were purchasing and demanding that the support be delivered at their convenience, and where a number of services/agencies were supporting a particular pupil.

- Some authorities operated time allocation models to recognise the optimal balance between different tasks within the service's remit.
- Quality support was compromised where there was uncertainty or dispute about the role of the support teachers in school.
- A range of issues relating to service management and working conditions affected the job satisfaction of support staff.
- Professional development and training for support service staff was sometimes unsystematic and inaccessible.
- There was a wide range of patterns of organisation of individual services; this affected channels of communication.

Chapter 6

The strategic management of support services

6.1 Planning for all the SEN support services within an LEA

In four of the five case study LEAs, at least some of the data necessary to plan effectively were collected. The nature of these data and the method of collection varied in each of the four LEAs as follows:

- the assessment team gathered levels of need and numbers of statements from each service head, enabling the overall manager to plan ahead for future provision;
- the overall manager organised the analysis of all schools' SEN registers and held regular meetings with service heads to monitor the incidence of need and the adequacy of provision, thus enabling a regularly updated projection of future requirements for provision to be presented to the Education Committee – budget pressures required this level of monitoring and strategic planning;
- the overall manager admitted that planning was poor but was beginning to address this through an analysis of the pupil:teacher ratios which were written in to statements, thus enabling a projection of future levels of staffing to be presented and defended at Committee level;
- an audit of likely future needs was carried out based on an analysis of all forms stating the supportive action taken to meet the needs of every pupil identified as having special educational needs.

In the fifth case study LEA, the new overall manager had inherited a system which lacked any mechanism for collecting the local data necessary to plan ahead for the support services. As he said:

> *Our data collection is not as good as it should be. We don't use the statistics we have. We are mostly guided by national figures, not local figures. ... We do get into a pickle over some provisions because we haven't seen the demand coming. But we are beginning to plan for, for example, unit placements*

because people who know what is going on spoke to each other and alerted those who needed to know what was coming (assistant director of education).

In this case, good working relationships and close liaison had partly compensated for unsystematic data collection.

However, a number of senior managers interviewed made it clear that quantitative data alone were not enough to ensure adequate planning; other issues also had to be taken into account. For example, an awareness of the level of special educational need in the under-five population helped support service managers to plan ahead, but this was complicated by the degree to which needs changed at that age and also by the degree of demographic change within an LEA. A mobile population made planning difficult. So, too, did the 'waves' of what one interviewee called '*the socially and politically constructed disability groups*'. While it was accepted that in many cases pressure groups operating at a national level addressed the genuine needs of families, yet they could have the effect of causing unpredictable demands on support services. It was suggested that there was a need for much greater debate at national level about this issue. These wider influences on planning ahead for support service provision included, then, changes in societal expectations. Such changes could also arise from a new direction in Government policy – for example, towards inclusion – and thus affected how support service managers planned ahead. As an assistant director of education said: '*In planning, it isn't just statistics which you have to take into account, it is also social expectations. The Green Paper will be significant in that respect so long as it is clear in its philosophy and expectations.*'

At the overall, LEA-wide level, planning for the support services was an amalgam of corporate planning in accordance with LEA policies, predicting future trends on the basis of local or national data, and reacting to unpredictable changes and to wider pressures.

6.2 Planning for individual support services for SEN

For heads of individual support services, the ability to plan ahead was crucial to ensure the continued survival of a robust service. On the one hand, therefore, they

had to be able to demonstrate to the Education Committee the need for a certain level of funding. As one head of service said:

> *One of our service commitments is to identify the data we need, to work out how it's going to be analysed, and how it's going to be used for forward thinking and planning. This is an education department which is managed by people who are data-literate. You do not get change or action from this LEA if you just go and talk persuasively – you have to provide hard data which will be scrutinised thoroughly.*

On the other hand, they had to ensure sufficient stability of provision to keep schools happy. As another service head put it: '*If you make year-on-year arrangements, you're not doing much for your relationship with schools. You simply invite arguments about how the* [formula for support] *is set.* '

For low-incidence special needs, robust data on which to base plans were vital because numbers peaked and troughed and the services had to be able to predict this through some way of identifying the numbers of pupils requiring support, and recording their level of disability and support needs.

Given such problems, how did the various services go about strategic planning? The methods used in the case study LEAs are set out in the box below.

6.2.1 Strategic planning: methods used in the case study LEAs

- information gleaned informally from support staff knowledge of levels of need within their caseload schools
- detailed databases of information collected from referral forms and assessments
- analysis of school special educational needs registers
- prediction based on early years and primary phase levels of need
- extrapolation of local needs from national figures
- audits of need based on a range of school-by-school measures
- targets and objectives arrived at through consultative processes built into service development plans.

Where services were centrally retained, it was easier for service heads to gather the data needed to inform sound planning than where services were mainly subject to 'buy back' arrangements and, hence, did not necessarily have contact with every school each year.

6.3 Quality assurance: monitoring, evaluation and review of services

The responsibilities of any service manager usually include monitoring that agreed work is done, evaluating the quality of that work, and reviewing whether any changes need to be made in order to ensure the quality of the service offered. Information was sought both in the NFER questionnaire and during the case studies about the extent to which these responsibilities were discharged by managers of LEA support services.

In the NFER questionnaire, respondents were asked about the use of specific quality assurance mechanisms – performance indicators, common evaluation criteria and formal reviews. The findings are set out in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Monitoring, evaluation and review of the support services for special educational needs

Strategy	Percentage of LEAs N = 103		
	yes	no	missing
Performance indicators for *individuals*	16	80	5
Performance indicators for *each* service	40	55	5
Overall performance indicators for support services	20	78	2
Criteria for evaluation common to *all* support services	8	90	2
All support services regularly formally reviewed	37	60	3

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

The main point to note is that each of the quality assurance strategies asked about in the questionnaire was only in place in a minority of LEAs. Further analysis showed that only four per cent of responding LEAs used *all* the strategies listed in the questionnaire, although most LEAs (61 per cent) used *some.*

In 35 per cent of responding LEAs, there was none of these strategies for evaluation and review in place – this group included all LEA types, with the exception of Welsh authorities; metropolitan boroughs and the new authorities were proportionately less

likely than other LEAs to have had any of these structures in place. Taking open answers on the questionnaire into account, it emerged that eight per cent of those LEAs which used none of the strategies listed in the questionnaire in place did operate other systems of quality assurance. For example, in one of these LEAs, support services had to make an annual report to elected members; in another, there was an annual cycle of target setting and reporting; and in a third, some support services had performance indicators but these had still to be developed for the other services. A further 31 per cent of the LEAs with none of the listed strategies in place were in the process of developing evaluation and review systems for the support services or were reviewing the need for such systems. Concern was also reflected at another point in the NFER questionnaire. When invited to comment on the management of support services in their authorities, further details of the existing situation relating to monitoring and evaluation made up 16 per cent of the responses, while current or planned changes involving this area were described in 14 per cent of responses.

The NFER survey suggested that the monitoring, evaluation and review of support services were characterised by good intention but slow progress and warranted further development. This situation appears little changed from the last NFER survey of support services for special educational needs (Fletcher-Campbell with Hall, 1993).

6.3.1 Quality assurance in the support services in the case study LEAs

The five case study LEAs reflected the mixed, overall picture as regards management strategies for quality assurance in the support services for special educational needs. Interviewees were asked about monitoring, evaluation and review of all support services within one LEA (i.e. the overall picture); individual services; and the use of the service(s) by schools.

At each of these levels, the key question was how 'quality' ought to be defined and recognised in operational terms. Although the details of how 'quality' or 'success' were defined varied from service to service, the data suggest that, implicitly or explicitly, quality provision was understood to involve the following seven elements:

- pupil progress;

- successful integration or inclusion;
- satisfied schools;
- requests for support;
- the fulfilment of statement entitlements;
- the completion of necessary administrative returns; and,
- staff trained in meeting the needs of the pupils they support.

It was clear that none of these, taken on its own, was felt to be a fair indicator of quality. For instance, while there was broad acceptance of individual pupil progress (as measured against the targets set out in Individual Education Plans) being used to monitor and evaluate support service provision, it was also argued that the quality of the support service could not be judged only on this basis because there were so many other factors, perhaps most notably the school, which had an impact on pupil progress or lack of progress. As one head of service said:

> *The job can be very difficult. In working with some children, there are many reasons for progress not being made which have nothing to do with support service staff. In some instances, it can be because of lack of support in the school although we do everything to* [try to] *correct that and to sort out problems* (head of support service).

Equally, integration was not always regarded as a fair indicator of a quality service. For example, in one LEA, the Chief Education Officer was keen that one performance indicator for the service for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties should be the rate of pupils successfully reintegrated from pupil referral units to mainsteam schools. This was resisted by a senior member of the support service who argued: '*If you are going to have performance indicators of that sort, you must have some control over the intake and admissions criteria.*'

Another definition of support service 'quality', therefore, seemed to concern the relationship between school and support service staff. This attitude was summed up by one head of service as follows: '*We are all accountable. Every time you walk into a school you are monitored because you are only as successful as your last telephone call or visit.*'

However, this on its own was also felt to be a poor definition of quality provision because some schools did not have a supportive attitude towards special educational

needs and, for example, resisted attempts by service staff to provide support which would mean particular pupils remaining in the school (see also Chapter 7). One service head suggested that, for this reason, quality should also be understood as encompassing the level of expertise offered by the services in relation to the needs of the community of pupils: '*I think we could use performance indicators in connection with staff development, as a process way of looking at achieving goals in relation to our training needs, our level of expertise. That way, we can use PIs to say that we, as a service, are equipped to meet the needs of children in schools.*'

Only when quality provision had been defined, either implicitly or explicitly, could the monitoring, evaluating and reviewing of that provision be meaningfully undertaken.

Figures 6.1a and 6.1b summarise examples of methods for monitoring, review and evaluation.

Figure 6.1a Examples of strategies for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the overall quality of support service provision within the five case study LEAs

LEA	Strategies to monitor and evaluate	Strategies to review	Problems raised/comments made
Clyde	• statements monitoring team	• SEN reviews carried out through meetings and consultation	• monitoring should be done by support service professionals who have more experience of judging progression
Dornay	• internal inspection • collation of statistics on assessments and on annual review outcomes	• self-review	• an unwillingness to use the indicators set out by the Audit Commission • over time, annual review data will feed in to value-added analysis of money spent on special educational needs
Forth	• OFSTED inspections of LEAs • HMI surveys		• plan to introduce quality assurance team to inspect individual services on a rolling programme
Moray		• service development plans	• would like to involve local advisers and inspectors in monitoring and evaluating services – '*like a pre-OFSTED*'
Tay	• quality visits to schools by middle managers • biannual survey of schools	• annual consultation with headteachers over the LMS scheme (services were centrally retained)	• quality of provision was consistently perceived as 'above average' by schools (quantity of provision was more problematic)

Figure 6.1b Examples of monitoring, evaluation and review strategies used by individual support services in the case study LEAs

Monitoring/evaluation strategies
• regular visits by head of service to service teachers in school
• service development plan targets monitored
• feedback from schools (informal); visits to schools to invite feedback; quality standards for procedures and documentation monitored
• shadowing of service teachers by senior service staff
• regular audit of schools' views
• part of SEN adviser's role
• complaints procedure
• steering group for service
• service level agreements
• LEA monitoring officers
• questionnaires to parents
Strategies for review
• regular supervision with line manager
• regular report overall manager
• individual appraisal
• regular meeting, e.g. by area or at middle management level to ensure consistency
• reports to LEA
• regular meetings of service staff with school to review provision and plan ahead
• service development plans
• video of staff at work – used for reflection on practice

6.4 Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the use of support services by schools

Support service staff who worked in the case study schools tended to think about the use the school made of what they offered in relation to the impact, first, on individual pupils and, second, on the school's provision for special educational needs in general. Almost all the staff interviewed, including learning support assistants, attended their pupils' annual reviews and most thought of this as one way of monitoring the impact of the service's input on their pupils' progress. Other support teachers argued, however, that annual reviews were not sufficient and that the service impact on a pupil's progress ought to be monitored through a more frequent analysis of support and outcomes – examples from practice included the use of a detailed journal as the basis of review, termly review days with a pupil's schoolteacher(s), quarterly reviews with teachers and parents, and reports on pupil progress which went to the LEA.

Assessment of a school's response to support service provision was not undertaken by any of the support staff interviewed. (In one LEA, support teachers were involved in another type of monitoring, namely, monitoring the appropriateness of the funding band allocated to pupils with statements.) In general, support staff did not want to play a monitoring role on behalf of the LEA, believing that this would jeopardise their relationship with the school and be counter-productive, since the quality of the relationship between support staff and school was the key to influencing practice.

In exceptional circumstances, a few support staff had raised with their team or service concerns about practices in particular schools. For example, one support teacher had reported concern at some of the things she had witnessed in a school to her service head, who had passed the information to the LEA; in consequence, the LEA was monitoring the school.

In contrast to this, one support staff member interviewed commented that she recognised the lack of positive feedback to a particular school which, in her view, was doing excellent work in special educational needs in difficult circumstances and which worked alongside the support staff to achieve common aims. As she said:

*'There's not enough **positive** reflection.* [Feedback] *all seems so negative – but I love coming to this school! I really enjoy working here!'*

From the point of view of service managers, the quality assurance approach adopted in relation to the use of services by schools largely depended on the degree of delegation of those services. As one education officer said: *'In a delegation situation, at the end of the day schools decide themselves how to use the money they are given.'* This freedom included the right not to use LEA support services – in one delegated service, the service head found that: *'Schools which are using us are using us very well and getting a high level of service. The main problem is where schools haven't invited us in or haven't spent sufficient time considering what we can offer.'* His response was to market and promote the service in a number of ways in an effort to widen the influence of the service on schools. However, in another LEA, a service which was funded part centrally and part through schools buying in the service found that schools chose to buy the service to protect service jobs because the influence of teaching unions was strong and resulted in schools feeling a sense of solidarity with their teaching colleagues in the support service. But it seemed to be the case that where funding for a service was delegated, the role of that service in monitoring the quality of support in schools diminished.

By contrast, where support services had been centrally retained, it was possible for service managers to stipulate how money for supporting special educational needs in schools was spent. For example, one line manager said: *'The LEA makes the decisions about which pupils are supported. The support services state the terms in which they will work. It's all negotiated, of course, but there are expectations on the part of schools as well as the services. And because we retain the budget for SEN, we can decide how it's spent.'*

This type of control made it much easier for centrally funded, as opposed to delegated, services to monitor and evaluate schools' use of support for special educational needs. However, even within a centrally funded service like educational psychology, one principal psychologist commented on how the broader climate of delegation had affected service ability to influence schools: *'Schools are very*

independent these days.' This was also noted by managers of services which had lost their in-service training role as a result of delegation.

The issue of school and service expectations mentioned by the line manager cited above was something that other service managers, too, felt was important – if the service was to have an influence on how schools used its support, expectations about that support had to be discussed.

6.4.1 Setting expectations: examples from the case study LEAs

- initial visits to schools during which the operational framework of the service was described and mutual expectations discussed
- regular meetings between the service and appropriate staff from cluster schools during which the broad principles of support delivery were agreed
- service level agreements used to set out basic mutual expectations of how the support from the service would complement school based support
- Code of Practice recommendations adopted as a model for school and service to follow – training in the Code for headteachers and special educational needs coordinators could facilitate this.

Although, then, service managers sought to address mutual expectations, a number of those interviewed felt that the impact service support could have on a school was mediated by school – and other – variables.

6.4.2 Variables which helped services to guide schools' use of support

- having a role in in-service training
- having time to spend in schools talking to teachers – for example, lunch-hour working groups
- school staff being able and willing to watch support teachers at work
- school staff willing to include pupils with special needs rather than seeing these pupils as a problem
- liaising with a special educational needs coordinator who was supported by colleagues given time and administrative support commensurate with the number of pupils on the special educational needs register

- liaising with a member of staff who had status within the school and the ability to initiate change
- working with a cohesive school – usually this meant smaller schools where it was easier to ensure that teachers adopted broadly similar approaches to supporting special educational needs.

Although it was clear that service managers felt that these conditions were not always met, a number were aware that their support services did affect how schools used support. In services dependent on schools buying them in, service influence was perceived as being entirely dependent on the quality of support offered and the good relationship built up between service and school personnel. In centrally funded services, services could influence schools in structured ways – for example, working with every LEA school or arranging LEA-wide training initiatives, such as developing assertive discipline or classroom management policies.

The mechanisms mentioned by service managers for monitoring how schools used their services were similar to those set out in Figure 6.1b above. The main difference was that service managers put more stress on the role of OFSTED in this regard. There were mixed views about whether or not services should monitor schools' use of their support. One principal psychologist pointed out that since LEAs' powers to intervene in schools had diminished, it was difficult to do anything about schools which had not developed adequate systems and procedures for using the service – he believed that: '*only OFSTED can change things radically*'. In another LEA with centrally funded services, discussions were taking place about involving service staff in alerting the LEA to perceived problems in a school but it was acknowledged that this could have a detrimental effect on the bond of trust built up between school and service personnel – despite this, one manager thought that monitoring the use of service support would inevitably become part of the job once more money was devolved to LEA schools.

6.5 Summary points from Chapter 6

- Service managers considered that strategic planning involved not only systematic data collection but also good working relationships and an awareness of societal expectations at both a local and national level.

- Evidence in the form of hard data was often needed to persuade the Education Committee of necessary levels of funding.
- It was of particular importance to monitor low-incidence special needs which saw fluctuations year-on-year.
- Data collection methods included analysis of support staff caseloads, information from referral and assessment forms and SEN registers, extrapolation of local figures from national figures, annual audits of need.
- There was evidence that quality assurance mechanisms could be stronger in many authorities.
- Success criteria included: pupil progress, successful integration/inclusion, satisfied schools, fulfilment of statements, administrative efficiency, staff trained to meet needs encountered; however, 'success' was generally perceived as being dependent on the professional relationship between the school and the support service.
- Support service staff felt uneasy about monitoring schools' special education provision on behalf of the LEA.
- Schools' independence under LMS made controlling their use of delegated support service funding problematic.
- Support service managers nevertheless tried to clarify mutual expectations and identified a range of strategies which enabled this.

Chapter 7

The support services in schools

One of the central research questions concerned the way in which any external support available was used by schools. This relates not only to efficient and effective use of resources within institutions and the local authority but also to the strategic management of inclusion and the realisation of local authority policy. Did external support complement the expertise which had been developed within the school to meet pupils' needs? Was there mutual understanding about the point at which external support was necessary and about the nature of the external intervention, and what had most influence in terms of inclusiveness and overall school effectiveness? How had delegation shaped perceptions of support for pupils with special educational needs?

This chapter reports the data from school staff and the views of service staff relating to their work in schools.

7.1 School responses to support

The research data suggested a very mixed picture. There seemed to be three broad groups of school responses to support – although there were variations within each of these groups. First, there were those schools which had developed expertise (both as regards specialist teachers and ordinary classroom, subject teachers) and looked to external support to plug the gaps where necessary. Some of these schools owed their degree of expertise and self-sufficiency to the support services: over the years they had developed provision under the guidance of peripatetic teachers. They were clear on the particular expertise which they were lacking and for which they relied on the relevant support service, either in the short term (while they were developing new provision) or in the long term – for example, for pupils who had low-incidence needs and for whom it may have been neither efficient nor effective to develop expertise in-house. These schools may have been in a relatively strong position, in terms of in-

house expertise, by virtue of the fact that, in the early days of local management, they had specialist teachers transferring to their establishment; this happened where such teachers were, effectively if not officially, full-time members of the school staff. Other schools had developed their expertise and self-sufficiency by necessity, through the lack of a relevant support service or because of the poor quality of the service that was available.

Secondly, there were those schools which perceived the needs of their pupils to be so extensive that they were grateful for any pair of hands to share the load, as it were. These schools tended to be those anxious to meet the needs of pupils but either heavily involved in other initiatives or with staffing problems or large classes or, simply, with a very high proportion of pupils on the special needs register. It was not a question of offloading problems but, rather, of addressing problems with what was deemed to be a more appropriate level of resources. While all learning needs have to be addressed via the whole school curriculum, it is all the more essential that this is the case where a high proportion of pupils have been identified as having learning difficulties; otherwise, the majority on roll will be detached from full involvement with the curriculum on offer.

Thirdly, there were schools which wished for a greater degree of external support but felt that what was available did not meet their needs and offered nothing different from what they could do by themselves. These schools were aware of pupil needs and aware that they lacked expertise and that there was room for development, but they were dissatisfied with what was available from the support services.

Each of these categories relates to issues of management as outlined in the previous chapters – for example, the mechanism of allocation of the resources of the support services to schools; services' ability to influence school practice; and management, review and evaluation of what support services offered to schools.

As will be seen later in this chapter, there was evidence that schools were very aware of what they could do as well as the support services. This alone said nothing about the quality of any of the provision: high-quality provision in schools could match

high-quality provision from the support services and low-quality provision in schools could be matched by low quality in the external support services. What it did say was that schools were aware that they wanted to buy in something that would 'add value' and be different from what already existed. Having a degree of control over the purse strings meant that they no longer used the service just because it was an allocation to which they were entitled and free at the point of delivery.

From the evidence in the case study authorities it was apparent that not everywhere was the quality of the service discussed in any systematic or helpful way with service managers or the local authority advisers or officers; in some cases, quality was commented on simply by schools not using the services available. Opportunities for mutual review and evaluation of support appeared to be limited; this was a pity as school effectiveness and increasing inclusive practice need a multi-pronged approach. This seemed to be an adverse effect of delegation in so far as 'ownership' by schools of support services was often tenuous and, equally, there was no widespread evidence of a corporate initiative to meet needs – with schools and support services collaborating with the aim of providing for the authority's children. The data, rather, spoke of the inevitable 'gatekeeping' and rationing of limited resources and of different perspectives on 'the problem', albeit alongside far more 'user-friendly' practice.

All the mainstream staff interviewed welcomed support and the dataset supported the contention of one interviewee that the situation had moved from one of 'not in my classroom' to 'we haven't enough' and of another that '*we can get by without support but that is not good enough*'. However, there were a number of anxieties about the way in which support was organised and received and these sometimes resulted in – perhaps understandable – reluctance to use the service.

7.2 Delay

A common reason for practitioners not using support services was the delay in response following a request for advice. In most cases there was a referral procedure (see Chapter 4). Though this often promoted some degree of rationality in resource

allocation or, at least, enabled prioritisation of cases, its lack of immediacy was not regarded as helpful by those working in schools. The issue at stake was that practitioners – usually special educational needs coordinators – wanted help as and when they requested it. They only needed help when they had exhausted strategies and expertise available within the school; it was '*when things are not working that we call in the educational psychologist*'. 'Booking ahead', as it were, was not always possible as it was difficult to foresee when this position of inadequacy would be reached, particularly in the light of the guidance of the Code of Practice that all available class- and school-based strategies should be tried before moving a pupil to stage 3 of the Code – stage 3 being the technical point at which external support is tapped (though see Table 3.2). During the wait, the pupil's difficulties would either escalate – particularly in relation to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties; or would simply remain static – so that the pupil was not deriving maximum benefit from the curriculum; or there would be a combination in that frustration over unmet learning difficulties would lead to disaffection and behavioural difficulties. Furthermore, in-school resources in terms of support time would often have to be targeted on that pupil with the result that they were not available for other pupils, whose needs might thus, in turn, accumulate. A special needs coordinator interviewed during the NFER research commented that teachers in schools had to live with the pupils day by day and could see their successes and failures daily whereas support services could distance themselves and 'walk away'. Classteachers had 'to contain the pupil in the mean time' – during the wait for external support. These difficulties were largely eliminated where specialists were attached to schools for all the working week or a large proportion of it.

For a number of years, comment has been made about the way in which pupils are perceived as 'the problem' which can be passed to someone else (see, for example, Moore and Morrison, 1988). The data reported above would seem, on first sight, to be a classic example of this. However, the situation is not quite as simple. Very few of the staff interviewed in the course of the project were uncommitted to meeting the needs of their pupils and there was compelling evidence that they merely wanted support to maintain the pupils within ordinary classes – rejection was not apparent.

Rather, the confusion seemed to lie in the nature of support service intervention and the way in which this related to the context of the school; this will be discussed below.

7.3 Quality

Special educational needs coordinators, aware of both the time and direct budgetary implications of calling in support, tended to be wary of external services unless convinced of the value that they would add. Availability and ease of referral (see Chapter 4) were not in themselves sufficient – services had to be seen as worth having. A special educational needs coordinator in a primary school said: '*I can call them in but I don't. I suppose it's my fault. I suppose I should call them in ....*'

She reckoned that she had a degree of expertise and experience equal to that of her colleagues in the support services. Another interviewee said that she used delegated funding to train the school staff themselves to cope; she only bought in support when there was no existing expertise in the school and when she was confident about the quality of the particular support she would receive. As other colleagues, this practitioner spoke of the frustration felt when money was spent on a visiting teacher merely telling ordinary teachers what they already knew. Generally, support had to be 'special' – something different (though, as discussed below, there were schools where staffing pressures were so great that the sheer human resource was greatly valued).

Criteria for quality also included the degree to which what the external support teacher was doing made sense within the classroom and the curriculum. Good support made a difference – either to the pupils' progress, achievement and confidence or to pedagogic techniques and teacher confidence. A primary headteacher remarked that teachers wanted to feel the impact of the support services but often did not – she considered that this was a matter of accountability. Remarking on the excellence of the support she received in her school, a teacher in a primary school commented that the support teachers '*help you to do it better*', by giving positive criticism, advice and feedback. This could relate to pupils at any stage of the Code of Practice. Where support service staff worked with pupils at the lower stages, it was usually a matter of

extending teachers' repertoire of strategies or informing them of new materials or approaches. With pupils with statements, it was a matter of helping teachers design special programmes or, as important, helping them to implement a programme designed by the support service.

7.4 Nature of support

As important as timing and quality of support was the nature of support – what was actually done. A composite list of the activities in which support services engaged in schools is as follows:

- monitoring programmes
- designing Individual Education Plans
- reporting for, and attending, annual reviews
- reporting for parents
- carrying out assessments
- supporting pupils in class
- teaching pupils in withdrawal sessions
- supporting teacher in class
- managing learning support assistants
- delivering in-service education and training
- engaging in interagency liaison
- advising on curriculum materials
- advising on information technology
- advising on technical aids
- facilitating meetings for special educational needs coordinators
- helping with homework clubs and reading clubs
- attending departmental, year/key stage team meetings.

The list of activities in which support services engaged has changed very little from previous NFER studies of support services (Moses *et al.*, 1988; Fletcher-Campbell with Hall, 1993) although there are indications of specific tasks associated with the Code of Practice (for example, the design of Individual Education Plans) and there is an increased emphasis on information technology. However, the list itself is largely contingent; what the research showed to be critical was the way in which support was *used* and the degree to which it was integrated into, and informed, the schools' curricula.

In what might be termed the more mature, or more inclusive, schools, where mainstream teachers had acquired experience and expertise in differentiation and meeting a range of needs, practitioners tended to want the support services to provide consultancy either to the school specialists (the special needs coordinators and/or learning support staff or assistants) or, particularly in primary schools, to the whole staff. One primary school coordinator said that she wanted regular staff development sessions from the support service on a range of needs in order to maintain class teachers' capacity to meet needs as and when they occurred; in this particular school, there was less desire for targeted support for individual pupils.

In another primary school, a practitioner commented on how she wanted help in assessment: '*I can see the underachievement but not necessarily the reasons for it.*' She felt that the support service intervention aided her understanding. Yet a special needs coordinator in a different primary school spoke of the frustration when support service staff came in to assess pupils and merely reported what the school knew anyway:

> *The children go to the special needs classroom to be assessed. The parent usually comes in too. The specialist teacher will usually feed back to me but this is difficult if it is during class time. The reports from these sessions tell us where the child is at .... but sometimes it is frustrating because the advice does not go beyond what the class teacher is doing anyway. Yet the process has to be gone through and this is what is so frustrating.*

The danger of offloading problems was referred to above; the research data gave evidence that classroom teachers were generally not inclined to do this. There was far greater concern that the external support was not useful to them in their day-to-day life in the classroom and they were aware of incoherence. A primary school class teacher commented: '*I honestly don't know how the work they're doing fits in with the work I do with the children.*' The fact that a specialist teacher was working with pupils in her class had had no impact on her teaching practice and she was carrying on with her own approaches to meeting special educational needs in her class and devising her own materials. In this particular school, the special educational needs coordinator's perception was that feedback from the services was good; however, although adequate reports may be made and be available, they may not be accessible to those with whom

the information needs to be shared. This relates to a general issue about communication (see below).

Although advice was what was most commonly sought, particularly where the number of pupils on the special needs register was large, hard-pressed teachers often wanted someone to work, hands-on, in the classroom or to give direct attention to those pupils who needed it in order to engage in the curriculum. These teachers, rather than shirking their responsibilities for all pupils in their class and passing over 'the problem', regarded it as a team teaching situation. There were, in fact, cases where the support teacher took the class, thus freeing the classteacher to work with the pupils with special educational needs. Again, teachers were positive where they recognised the difference that support made: one commented that the support teacher was invaluable for motivating a pupil who found class work challenging (*'he gives him the oomph to get on for the rest of the week'*).

7.5 Differences in nature of need

Special educational needs coordinators were generally more ready to call on the external services where there was a case of 'low-incidence' needs (sensory impairment or a recognised syndrome), although issues of quality remained. Interestingly, referral procedures for low-incidence needs were often different from those for general learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural support. Moreover, sensory impairment can, to a large degree, be anticipated, and forward planning and tracking and monitoring pupils are far easier where there is a recognisable condition which will probably be relatively static.

A Year 6 teacher spoke of how her attitudes to external support had changed – not only because the support obviously met the criterion of high quality but also because she realised how it was complementary to and different from what she could offer herself:

> *The only external support I have is Mary – the specific learning difficulties teacher. This is the second year of her involvement and I'm very happy with it now ... as we were setting it up last year, I was not happy. Mary wanted the*

children to go to her in pairs ... She argued that this was more effective. She said that their specific needs were very different. And she was right. She knew her job and did it very effectively ... She was always very professional. She gave us a timetable and notified us of any changes ... she kept in close contact with us ... She supported us in every way ... She wanted the work to be different from their classwork. And she was right. It was remedial. There was a specific problem, she knew how to deal with it and she did it ... She is very good at her job – it may not be effective with a less good teacher. Those two hours of very close contact with an adult who knows the problem – the results were there in the SATs and in the increased confidence and competence of the pupils ... Both of us Year 6 teachers were sceptical at first. Partly, it was because we'd had support for general learning difficulties and that is not always helpful because these tend not to go away. The problems are still there afterwards ... In talking things through with Mary, it has increased my awareness of the problems these [dyslexic] *children have and of their need of help.*

7.6 Personality and skills of the support service teacher

Staff in schools were clear about criteria for quality intervention and they were clear about individuals who were 'good'; negligible reference was made to criteria for effective *services* – the quality assurance model was not well developed in the case study authorities. Many mentions were made of the strengths or weaknesses of individual support teachers. Schools compared individuals from within the same service who maybe visited in adjacent terms. Most of the characteristics which they appreciated were, in fact, to do with operational issues and, in management terms, there was no need for them to fluctuate as, clearly, they were doing. For example, schools appreciated support teachers who maintained regular timetables and kept appointments, who had access to curriculum resources and brought them into the school when they said that they would, who would negotiate access to particular pupils with the class teacher and not make unreasonable requests. Irregular withdrawal made life difficult for class teachers responsible for pupils' overall learning experiences. A primary school classteacher said: '*I do have to say "I'm sorry but it isn't convenient now".*' Such situations raise serious questions about the effective and efficient use of resources.

Comments were made about the overall skills profile of the support services. There were cases where it was felt that phase expertise was lacking. A secondary school

special needs coordinator said: '*There is no one in the service with upper school experience. Basically, we are left on our own.*' Elsewhere, the range of skills on offer was felt to be opportunistic and made support rather a lottery for the pupils on the receiving end. For example, a teacher reflected on different staff from the behavioural support service: one had particular skills in drama therapy while his successor was an artist. Each met the needs of particular children but not of others; this could mean that an individual pupil could make good progress one term and then not the next, on the change of teacher. Schools seemed resigned to the fact that 'they got what they were given'; it was this lack of consistency, affecting long-term planning, which prompted some to make their own support arrangements and buy in people known to them. There were several instances of former support service teachers setting up their own independent consultancies.

7.7 Monitoring and evaluation

As mentioned above, schools seldom remarked about the quality of services – only of individuals within them – but they did make the point that they were rarely involved in any monitoring. As one primary school headteacher said: '*All I have to do is to sign her hours*'; and another said that she was never asked about satisfaction with the service – '*this is where it all falls down*'. Although schools were sympathetic to services' recruitment problems – often resulting from the impact of delegation – and/or location (an unpopular area) – they nevertheless were dissatisfied with the 'series of supplies' or constantly changing staff which many experienced. They desired consistency, both for the sake of internal management – the visiting teacher could get accustomed to school routines and ways of working – and also for the sake of the pupils, for whom consistency was generally important.

There was particular concern in one case study authority where schools felt that they had been promised additional support with respect to an increased number of pupils with statements being moved into mainstream, but then this support had not materialised. They felt that it was offered as a bribe to further LEA policy but that no one benefited as a result – neither the pupils with statements, who needed the support,

nor the pupils at earlier stages of the Code, from whom support was withdrawn in order for the schools to meet the greater degree of need without additional resources.

Delegation had made schools aware of the costs of the support services (hourly rates quoted were around £35) and, more immediately, of the fact that colleagues were earning additional salary points; this was a source of grievance when they considered not only that the advice received was no different from what they themselves could produce but also that there were no lines of accountability and that service staff could 'get away with it'. It was the perception of one special needs coordinator that, in her area, support staff could decide their own work schedules and could focus on a particular school that they liked rather than on one where they were needed or which they found more demanding.

A primary school special needs coordinator did not like the way in which the support service worked at her school yet did not feel able to do anything about it, presuming that he had inherited the situation and could not challenge it or suggest other ways of working which might suit the school better:

> *I would be happy if they gave us something we could work on, i.e. specialist help. I think they should read our IEPs before they write theirs! I would like the way of working to be tightened up. We have no choice over which individual teachers we get coming in and some of them are better than others, some of them do recognise what the school has already done and build their support on that. I think that the educational psychologist does stay with the school but I'm not sure ... No, I am not involved in any monitoring or evaluation of their work ... It would be useful to be able to evaluate the support we get as a school, say termly. But I know that their budget has been cut and that they are really busy. I phoned up recently just to ask for a chat on the phone about one of our children and the teacher said that I would have to ask her boss for permission.*

As this example shows, some practitioners were uncertain about the 'rules' of the game – they did not know the facts of service delivery (see also comments about referral above). There were instances in which there was, in fact, ignorance on the part of the special educational needs coordinator as to what was available. One interviewee, for example, said that she had only the previous week discovered that the authority had an advisory teacher for specific learning difficulties – she did not know

'*whether it was free or not*'. Similarly, there was confusion as to the point at which support could be requested. It did not seem to be that the post-holders had not bothered to find out – most were eager to audit all that was available. Rather, the lines of communication had broken down – for whatever reason. There was evidence, from documentation submitted to the NFER, that some LEAs produce very comprehensive materials (often in loose-leaf format for ease of updating) for schools – some of it the result of the Code of Practice – detailing the support available and criteria of eligibility. The challenge is to ensure that the materials are in the possession of the right people.

7.8 Resourced schools and units

Higher levels of delegation offer increased opportunities for mainstream schools to take responsibility for attached 'units'. In the early days of local management, mainstream schools managed their own budgets but any attached units for pupils with significant special educational needs were retained and managed and financed by the local authority. Gradually, management and budgets became delegated. The units could represent very different practices and degrees of integration; what they had in common was that the school was allocated a sum of money with respect to a group of pupils with the same type of learning difficulty (for example, a group of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, or hearing impairment). The financing and management of these units have been discussed in previous NFER reports (see, for example, Fletcher-Campbell with Hall, 1993; Fletcher-Campbell, 1996; Lee and Henkhuzens, 1996). The point of interest in this present project was the way in which support focused on the pupils in the unit was melded with the general support available within the school and also with the external support services. There was evidence that delegation had, in fact, led to a more incoherent situation and greater fragmentation of the total support system, though individual schools may, arguably, have strengthened their own resources.

It was disturbing to find that there were authorities in which units for a particular special educational need were clearly regarded as stand-alone and had no contact with the relevant support service. There seemed to be various reasons for this. First, there

was simply an overall shortage of resources; overstretched support service personnel had to prioritise and simply assumed that adequate provision was being made in the unit(s). The second reason was related to structure and the way in which support was made available through a number of channels; this raises questions about the way in which the Code can be interpreted and implemented.

Three case examples

Example 1

In two attached units for primary phase pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, unit staff had no contact with the relevant support service in the authority. In one case, the head of the unit had apparently given up hope: only once in the five years she had spent in the unit had she had any external support. She said that she had no specialist qualifications and had 'learned on the job', having been appointed from the mainstream school. There are some fundamental questions here about the degree of specialist expertise – as opposed to effective teaching techniques – that are needed to teach pupils with behavioural difficulties – perhaps this teacher was well equipped. But, if she were, then there is a further question to be asked about the sharing of experience and expertise within the local authority: there was little opportunity in this case. The teacher remarked that she did occasionally ring up the support service but mostly got her support from her colleagues and from the headteacher.

Example 2

In a similar unit for secondary age pupils in another authority, there was a similar state of affairs but more complexity, occasioned by the operationalisation of the Code of Practice in this authority. Theoretically, the Code is intended to give greater coherence to provision in that it represents bringing-in an ever-widening circle of expertise. However, empirical evidence suggests that the Code, as so many other externally imposed initiatives, is often made to fit the local situation: what happens at stage 3, the brief of the support services and the pattern of resource allocation. In the local authority in which the case study school concerned was located, the support services only worked with pupils up to and including stage 3. Once stage 4 was initiated, they ceased to have involvement. All resources for statements were delegated in cash values and schools were responsible for making appropriate arrangements by employing relevant staff to meet the pupil's needs as specified on the statements. This, by itself, is perfectly acceptable and gives those closest to the pupil the flexibility to make the most suitable arrangements throughout the school year and in relation to particular curricular needs. However, an added factor in this particular case was that the school concerned also had a resourced unit; the budget for this was delegated and used to employ staff to work with the pupils concerned. The unit was for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Thus there were three discrete ways in which such pupils could be supported within this school, each with its own funding source and its own staffing: within the unit – dedicated staff; via the support

services – for pupils up to stage 3; and in mainstream with a statement and staffing attached to that statement. In theory, delegation provided an ideal situation for all the budget components to be pooled and for the school to operate a whole-school behaviour policy informed by a range of different staff with different experience and expertise. This was not the case, however, and the unit teachers did not have any contact with the behaviour support team staff while the mainstream staff 'attached' to pupils with statements did not have any dealings with the unit staff.

Example 3

In another school, there was a structural gulf between the unit for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and the mainstream school: although the budget had been delegated and amalgamated with the mainstream, the idea of corporate approaches and 'amalgamated working', as it were, was not in evidence. An interviewee said: '*Pupils in the main school only see the unit teachers with naughty kids and don't treat them as proper teachers.*' The same held for the mainstream classteachers, who never asked the unit teachers for advice or guidance. The only contact which the unit staff had with the behaviour support service was via the special educational needs coordinator; furthermore, there were no longer any joint meetings for the staff of specialist units within the authority as there had been pre-delegation. The interviewee remarked: '*There's a big block – the support services, strong on theory, are not meeting with the unit staff, whose practical experience is not filtering through to the mainstream classroom.*' In an effort to overcome some of the difficulties, the unit staff were going to start attending year group meetings.

Such situations raise important questions about the part that support services play in whole-school effectiveness. The message would seem to be that there needs to be awareness on the part of senior management. Without this – which has implications for headteacher training – all the elements of support, both internal and external to the school, were operating at less than maximum efficiency and effectiveness. Regardless of the quality of each of the individual components, and that is not under dispute, the arrangements did not make sense in management terms. Categorising was being led by funding mechanisms and administrative procedures rather than by relevant needs of either pupils or the staff working with them. If schools are to be encouraged to become more inclusive, as present Government policy suggests should be the case (GB. DfEE, 1997), then the educational infrastructure needs to be collaborative and complementary rather than merely parallel or alternative.

Schools resourced for several different 'units' were, effectively, running mini-support services. One secondary school headteacher was keen to further this work; he was

seeking a third unit, already having two. He was keen to develop staff's capacity and increase the range of needs which they could address. In this case there appeared to be a more holistic, inclusive approach to the support, giving evidence that there are basic fundamentals of differentiation upon which specific approaches for specific needs – such as visual impairment – are built, rather than a completely different set of issues related to each broad category of need.

7.9 The institutional management of support

The internal management of support services has been discussed earlier in this report. Alongside this, however, runs the issue of institutional management not only of external services but also of in-house learning support staff. This was usually done by the special needs coordinator within schools; the demands could be quite severe, particularly where there was a high proportion of pupils at various stages of the Code. Most of the studies of the implementation of the Code have commented on the considerable workload of most special educational needs coordinators (see, for example, Derrington *et al.*, 1996; Lewis *et al.*, 1996; OFSTED, 1996).

First, special educational needs coordinators had to run their own internal team of support staff, including both teachers and assistants. Each of these groups could be heterogeneous. The teachers, were mostly specialists in learning support – staff who were engaged in support for most of the timetable. Although this was the pattern in most of the case study secondary schools, there were exceptions – for example, the school in which all regular staff had timetabled periods when they supported other colleagues. In some schools, there were different groups of learning support assistants, usually determined by qualifications (for example, those with and those without a NNEB qualification), or responsibility (supporting the pupil in the curriculum or with his/her care needs) or funding source (general support for pupils at stages 1 and 2 or support focused at a pupil(s) with a statement). Only in one case study school were the learning support assistants managed by the visiting support service teacher who supervised their work with particular pupils each week and this was largely because the special needs coordinator only had a 0.5 post while having a large proportion of pupils on the register and a considerable number with statements.

Second, the external, peripatetic staff had to be managed; the most immediate concern was timetabling. As one interviewee said: '*You have to make sure that the teacher of the deaf does not visit a pupil at the same time as the speech therapist.*' As parents and classroom teachers valued regularity and consistency of support service visits, so did coordinators who were responsible for bringing together the relevant pupils – or staff – and the visiting teacher.

This had considerable implications for time management, not only for the special educational needs coordinator, though the onus here could be tremendous – for example, one post-holder interviewed had to manage a total of 17 different internal and external learning support staff. The implications extend to general curriculum delivery and issues of effectiveness and efficiency. A number of respondents spoke of the lack of post-sessional feedback from support staff, and the lack of time to engage in any forward planning. There were differences here between needs. One coordinator said that if she could find time '*to set up support in the first place*' and the learning needs were more or less stable, the support then more or less ran itself as she and the peripatetic teacher both knew what they were doing and the support service teacher got on with it effectively. However, behaviour support was usually crisis management and invariably had to be flexible. A primary school coordinator commented how unsatisfactory she found the situation without any time to follow-up or engage in preliminary discussion. There were particular problems in that work from this service was often quite high-temperature and '*kids may be hyped up after sessions*', particularly if they had emotional difficulties. This could make return to class difficult especially if there was no time to hear the thrust of the session first hand; the coordinator admitted that she often got reports 'second-hand' and that other teachers got it third-hand, particularly if she was busy. She also rued the fact that she had no time to talk with the visiting staff about new approaches to behaviour management, which could be put in place within the school to support other pupils. Another support teacher remarked that the general lack of time meant that there was no opportunity to identify whether skills taught in withdrawal sessions were being transferred to the classroom.

Again, this suggests that the efficacy of the services depended on the right framework being established in the school. This framework itself depended on senior management understanding of time and resource implications. There were examples of where this framework had been thought through and was in evidence. For example, in one primary school, sessions taken by an independent visiting support teacher working with pupils on listening skills were video-recorded and later used for school-based training. In another primary school, all the support staff had a termly meeting in which they discussed approaches to pupils on the special needs register. Such strategies help to make a difference to the school, rather than merely to individual pupils, important though the latter may be.

But the generally limited conditions for this difference to be made were quite widespread in the case study schools (which, it should be pointed out, were selected for having significant involvement with support services, rather than on necessarily effective use of them). The restriction was on both sides. An interviewee remarked: '*Support teachers want to discuss problems rather than necessarily to be expected to solve them.*' Behind this is the realisation that some 'problems' may only be resolved by a corporate approach within the school. Recent work suggests that merely importing discrete special education methods into mainstream schools to help minority groups of pupils may fail, regardless of any success that they may have had in special schools (see, for example, Ainscow, 1999; Hart, 1996). From the school angle, a headteacher of a primary school said:

> *It is no good external people being the answer. You've really got to educate the staff to deliver the programme of work and use these small elements of time to discuss the programme.*

7.10 Support services' perceptions of effective institutional management

There is always more than one perspective. So far, this chapter has focused on school staff's perceptions of external support. What of the support service teachers' views of the schools in which they had to work? Interviewees in the support services were asked to identify the features of schools which they found easy to work in and those

which they found difficult to work in. Composite lists were constructed as follows. Although the features were collected from different interviews, and respondents were not asked for 'opposites' and, indeed, did not give them, it is interesting to note that there was consensus about the features of the two categories, and the two lists did parallel each other.

Fig 1: Support service teachers' perceptions of mainstream schools

'Easy' schools	'Difficult' schools
• confident and relaxed	• formal
• willing to listen, teachers receptive	• inflexible timetable
• stable staff – pupils likely to have the same teacher for the whole year	• many supply teachers, making it difficult to plan ahead or know lesson content
• assimilation of special education issues into school culture	• confrontational senior management team
• clear boundaries, structures and systems which the pupils understand	• inconsistent discipline
• common understanding of needs	• insistence on one way of working
• organised teachers who deliver a lesson as planned/agreed	• teachers with very strong views of their own
• mainstream lessons with a clear introduction and focus	• idiosyncratic teaching styles
• SENCo able to implement suggestions	• SENCo does not pass on information to class teachers
• opportunities to see all members of staff (e.g. not split-site or staggered break times)	
• time for liaison	

7.11 Summary points from Chapter 7

- Schools' responses to the LEA support services were varied and were driven by attitudes towards, and provision for, special educational needs within the schools concerned.
- Schools' responses had implications for the management issues of resource allocation, services' ability to influence school practice, and the monitoring, review and evaluation of what support services offered.
- Opportunities for mutual dialogue between schools and the support services about the nature and quality of support offered appeared to be limited.
- Schools were deterred from using support services by delay in response following a request for advice.

- Mindful of the time and budgetary implications, schools were wary of requesting external support unless they were reasonably sure that it would add value and be different from what they could provide from their own resources.
- Schools wanted external support to 'make a difference' – either to the pupil(s) or to staff practice.
- Most schools had a formidable menu of activities in which the support services would engage but there often seemed to be a tenuous relationship between these activities and day-to-day classroom concerns.
- Schools were generally more ready to request support from services focused on low incidence needs – the referral systems for these were often different from those for general learning difficulties.
- The quality of individual support teachers was more often commented on that the quality of the service as a whole, although the characteristics mentioned were often functions of service management – for example, punctuality, reliability.
- Schools were rarely involved in monitoring the work of external support staff and were sometimes unsure about the terms and conditions of support.
- There was evidence that communication between staff in the support services and staff in unit provision was often poor despite the fact that some of the units were, essentially, mini-support services.
- The effective management of both internal and external support, in order to maximise its effectiveness, posed a considerable challenge for special educational needs coordinators, who rarely had adequate time to devote to this.
- There was a considerable degree of consensus among support service teachers as to the characteristics of schools which were, respectively, easy and difficult for them to work in.

Chapter 8

Pupils, parents and the support services

8.1 Pupils

At first sight it may seem strange to consider the effect on pupils of different patterns of delegation of support services. However, different patterns have different propensities. Among the advantages, for example, is the fact that if in receipt of delegated funds and able to employ their own staff, schools can embed support within the existing staffing structures, thus offering pupils greater consistency as regards the specialist staff with whom they work. Instead of a pupil seeing a visiting teacher once a week, say, for a short period of time, the pupil can have more frequent attention from a permanent member of staff whom s/he is likely to encounter at other times. Among the disadvantages are the possible dilution of expertise that results when one learning support teacher is working with pupils with a range of needs and the potential isolation from other specialist colleagues – but both of these are contingent rather than inevitable.

The data showed the situation to be complex and influenced by other factors in the school environment. Most importantly, they cast doubt upon the degree to which pupils are involved in their own target setting – particularly, for the group being considered, in relation to their Individual Education Plans - and in reviewing their work.

Most pupils interviewed in the course of the NFER case studies made positive comments about the learning support staff with whom they worked and considered that they got more work done and were more in control of it as a result of their intervention. But what was noticeable was the fact that this positive orientation was often established by pupils contrasting their relationship with learning support staff with their relationship with other staff:

> *More support would be good because normally the teacher would boss us around but when the support teacher is there, the teacher keeps away. The history teacher shouts a lot but when X* [the learning support teacher] *is in the class, the teacher shouts at someone else* (Year 9 boy).
> *She doesn't mind helping us* (Year 6 boy).

Comments suggested that pupils saw the learning support staff as the avenue towards their understanding of the lesson. Although support staff mentioned that they worked with the whole class in order to free the class or subject teacher to work with pupils with special educational needs, the pupils interviewed did not mention this arrangement. Clearly, this may have been because the question was not asked explicitly but there was evidence that pupils regarded themselves as 'special' and 'different' (this was borne out in the interviews with pupils' parents). It seemed that in many cases the regular work was insufficiently differentiated so the pupils did not understand the task in hand: '*You have to wait a long time for help if there is no support and you get behind.*' It is no surprise if behaviour becomes inappropriate in such circumstances.

Pupils were often confused about support – where it came from and what it was supposed to achieve:

> *Tons of people come to see me. They come at different times. It's very confusing. They nearly all give me reading tests. Some give me an eye test but it's a different one than I get at the optician* (Year 9 boy).

Another pupil was visited by five different internal and external staff, in addition to the physiotherapist whom she did not mention. The confusion of such situations was compounded where pupils were in schools with a high staff turnover: of a group of three Year 9 boys interviewed, all were on their third class tutor and one was on his third learning support teacher (that year). A Year 9 boy claimed that he did not know what he was aiming for in his supported sessions '*but she tells me how I am doing*'. It is not entirely clear how 'you are doing well' can be educative for pupils unless it is tied very tightly to reasons and evidence, which should be linked to targets. (For example: 'You are doing very well because you are keeping the writing on the line and starting the new line right up against the margin'.) Other pupils spoke of being withdrawn from lessons (obviously for one-off assessments) but having no idea who

'the lady' was or what she was doing with them. Other comments showed the workings and priorities of a child's mind, certainly, but at the same time, the lack of engagement of the pupil with his/her learning. One pupil's main cause for celebrating support was that '*Those who don't need help have to rub out the words they get wrong and it takes ages to rub out*' (Year 3 boy).

Pupils were asked about the reactions of their peers to their need for support. In the majority of cases, they spoke of peers' acceptance and, indeed, envy rather than derision: they were 'special' in a positive sense – '*here comes your teacher*'. There were instances where there were tensions. One Year 9 boy said: '*More support would be bad because others laugh at you.*' A salutary, if ironic, example was that of the Year 10 boy who told an NFER researcher that he was receiving help from the behaviour support teacher and from another support teacher with respect to his low level of literacy. He was seeking support from the former because of his tendency to lie – something that he wanted to stop. Because other pupils would 'take the mickey' he said that he had to lie about what he was doing when he went to his support session; equally, he had to lie so that peers did not know that he was getting reading support. Where there are such tensions, it is likely that pupils do not derive as much benefit from support as where the support is embedded in the curriculum so that it becomes an accepted and unstigmatised part of classroom life.

8.2 Parents

Interviews were sought with the parents of pupils with statements of special educational needs; the respondents represented a wide range of needs and backgrounds and were mostly non-professional. These interviews had common features as regards the parents' responses to the provision made for their children.

8.2.1 Parents' general response to their child's difficulties

Parents showed a keen awareness of their child's needs and an equally keen desire for their child to be helped. The awareness was usually couched in 'unprofessional' terms. They 'knew' or 'felt' that 'something was wrong' and that their child needed help. They were often inarticulate about the situation and could not describe the

'case' in 'professional' or technical language but were anything but inarticulate about the personal impact that the difficulty had on daily life and, especially, the way that their child fitted, or did not fit, the norms of expectations. They also presented the child perspective by citing things which were obviously 'after-school' accounts from their child and which illustrated the way that professional practice is interpreted by other parties. 'Cases' which it might take a file-full of formal reports for a series of professionals to describe were encapsulated in simple narrative and personal statement. Parents who maybe had difficulty managing their own lives were yet seeking something better for their children:

> *All I wanted was for P to be in school – that's all the support I wanted ... When he sees the professor* [at the hospital], *I don't get told enough then. I'd like to know more about this condition .... I've read books about it and watched documentaries and it sounds bad. It's scary to think about what will happen to him when he gets older. On the documentary they showed you this boy who had been on the medication for years and then when he was 16 they just took him off and it was terrible. I want to know what will happen when P gets older. Will he grow out of it? Will he get support in school when he's older ... I'm worried about the fact that there's no support after junior school. When he goes up to* [local comprehensive], *there's no support there and he'll end up getting excluded. I've seen it happen to others. I'm worried about that and what will happen after age 11, and then about what will happen when they take him off the medicine.*

Now this parent attended the annual review with the family's education welfare officer and got a daily behaviour report about P's behaviour from the special unit in which he was placed. Lines of communication thus seemed to be in place. Nevertheless, the broad picture was missing and she was clearly anxious about the future. 'Professionals' have a firm grip on the future in so far as they are aware of the general position regarding support systems as well as the course that certain conditions are likely to take. This is lacking for parents living with a particular child at a particular time and having to cope with difficulties on a day-to-day basis. The data showed that this sort of thing is all part of the potentially divisive discourse which gives 'support service' a different meaning for people in different (perhaps less powerful) positions.

Another parent's comments showed confusion and fear: '*He sees so many different people, I can't remember which is which. I got four or five pages from Mrs R about what she's found out – quite frightening really.*'

Moreover, she did not know who Mrs R was (she was, in fact, an educational psychologist). The majority of the parents interviewed were prepared to trust professionals and did not feel that it was their place to question – or even seek information about – the support received, but clearly felt let down where this trust did not seem to be justified. '*He can't read and if he can't read there's something wrong ... If you can't trust a teacher, who can you trust?*'

Several of the parents interviewed showed concomitant concern, ignorance and fear, reflected in the language: 'I don't know ... I suppose ... I don't like to ask ... I think'. One mother thought that going out of class for reading support (as her daughter did) was what happened for all pupils; her fear was of her daughter wandering around the school by herself. In the interview, however, she began to worry if anyone at the secondary school, to which her daughter was soon transferring, would know anything about the girl's reading difficulties. The usual concerns of parents about transfer were compounded when they had fears about their child's learning difficulties.

8.2.2 Parents' awareness of discontinuities in their child's support

Parents were aware of discontinuities in their child's support and it was important to them that their child 'got on with' the support teacher. Again, this parent perspective contrasts with the 'professional' view of change in personnel – which was, generally, that different staff had different strengths:

> *They do one-to-one support here. The only problem is that he's had four different support teachers since he's been here and that's not so good because they get used to one and then they have to get used to the next. He is put out when a teacher he likes leaves ... They all have their own styles as well.*

This parent also pointed out that there had been periods when no external support had been available, when the school special needs coordinator had to take over the support.

Parents commented on the support situation. One mother remarked that her son was no longer receiving individual support. What might have been an attempt at peer support or role modelling was interpreted by a parent thus:

> *It is a distraction. He came home and told me that the other boy shouts out the answers and puts him off. I told him 'You should have told me this before, John'. And I told him to make sure he told you* [researcher] *because it makes it hard for him to concentrate. I spoke to Mr J* [SENCo] *and he explained to me that the boy has problems that make him like that ... I didn't tell John that. I told him that the other boy had problems like his but different. I'd prefer it if he got less time, but on his own so that it was valuable time* [rather] *than his two hours where he can't make the most of it.'*

Although uncertain how best to support the child themselves, parents interviewed nevertheless made every attempt to understand and take an interest in their child's progress – for example, by looking at work taken home. Their responses were acute and identified apparent anomalies in school practice. The scope of the case studies and issues of confidentiality did not allow critical incidents to be taken back and discussed with other actors in the scene but it was clear that there were tensions between different perceptions. Regardless of whose perception was accurate, and what was or was not a misreading of the situation, it was clear that if only more time could be spent in home – school dialogue, support could be better coordinated and reinforced and parents might usefully contribute to it in various ways:

> *I've never sat in on these support lessons so I can only go by what he tells me but from what he says I think they are too rigid. I feel they are a bit laboured. For example, he comes home with words and I say to him 'You've had these before and you got them right. You know those words'. And he says 'I know, Mum but that's what she gave me'. I don't know if it's because of the change of teacher or what, but if that was the reason you'd think they would leave a note or something for the new one, wouldn't you?*
>
> *They do these phonetic sounds and I said to my son 'It might work for these words but it won't work for all the words' and so I was contradicting the teacher ... he had problems with grammar too but the teachers don't seem to*

correct that. The history teachers don't think it their job to correct English – that's the English teacher's job, you know.

Bearing in mind not only that the pupils concerned were those for whom life may be particularly puzzling anyway, but also that the pupil interview data suggested that pupils found support confusing, the fact that these children had to deal with apparent contradictions between home and school cannot be helpful.

Parents' perceptions of the way in which they were involved reflected that of parents generally. One mother commented that the school only contacted parents if there was a problem – rather than for routine monitoring and for saying how well things had gone; equally, parents only contacted the school if there was a problem.

There was evidence of positive parental involvement in some schools and the fact that the effect on pupils with learning difficulties was beneficial underlines the point (illuminated in other research) that pupil progress is enhanced by parental involvement. This raises the question of the extent to which there has to be a certain infrastructure in order for specialist support to yield maximum benefits. One of the case study schools gave responsibility to one of its special educational needs specialists to engage in home – school liaison; this resulted in parents coming into school not only for English classes (for parents for whom English was an additional language) but also to help with the school's literacy project. The teacher concerned told of how a pupil with a statement *'had been really helped'* by her mother coming in to the classroom to hear other pupils read.

A mother interviewed spoke of how she gave the classroom assistant information about what her daughter was capable of at home – to raise expectations – and together they were planning the girl's transfer to secondary school. The classroom assistant had, in fact, spent a week at the girl's home before she started supporting her at school in order to get to know her and gain advice from her parents about her care needs. In another case, a mother went in to school once a month to talk with her son's teacher; there was a team approach to the boy's behavioural difficulties. The result was a significant improvement in the boy's behaviour to the extent that he no longer needed

so much support from the classroom assistant and this in turn improved his learning, as the assistant had tended to do too much for him and restricted the development of his independence.

8.2.3 Parents' experience of systems delaying or preventing support reaching their child

Whereas the professional regards 'the system' as, at best, facilitating, ensuring quality and maintaining equity, or, at worst, an administrative necessity to keep an organisation in operation, parents' experiences were imbued with emotion. Although parents were sympathetic to systems and, indeed, it was striking that they realised the stresses which services were under in terms of limited resources and undue demand, they nevertheless often experienced them as blocking what they wanted for their child at a time when day-to-day experience of that child caused the parent to call for help. Again, whether or not the views held were accurate is not the point; the main point is that parents perceived that they were not getting the support that was reasonable.

> *We went through the statementing process three times. One time they lost the notes and we had to start again. Then they moved offices and lost the notes again. The third time we got nearly all the way to the end and were told we had to get the last report in by the end of December or we would run out of time and have to start again. I got on the phone and I was told that she was sixth on the list and I asked when the report would be in. 'Oh, January!' they thought. Well, that was too late and so in the end I threatened them. I went to see the headteacher and I broke down, I was crying – it was the third time we had been through the process ... I understand there's not the money but it was so frustrating when they could see that she needed help. They all agreed that she needed help. Every report confirmed that and yet we had to go through all that three times before she got the statement.*
>
> *It's hard enough having a child with problems and they seem to make it so difficult. It's as if we're being punished for having a faulty good.*
>
> *The point is not to make up all these reasons why, but what are they going to do to resolve the problems he's got?*

Again, there was evidence that the anger surrounding parents' responses either to their child's learning difficulties *per se* or to the lack of support can be dispelled by the right word in the right place:

It was interesting when they first said to me about it [son's learning difficulties]. *You see, I knew myself because I worked with pre-school children but I didn't want to admit it – I felt angry about it. But by the time he went to school I accepted it and was quite happy. My husband didn't want to talk about it. Now it's part of my life and the thing is, you want what's best for them. The learning support teacher said to me when I was worried about the stigma of his going off in the blue bus, she said to me 'You want him to get the support he needs, don't you? Well, that's all the blue bus means – that he's getting the support he needs. It's what's best for the child that matters.*

There are issues as to whether this was 'what's best' and whether the unease could have been resolved in other ways but the point is that the parent perception was changed because the teacher bothered to explain the situation and relate it to the particular case.

Another parent spoke of the value of parent support groups for, as it were, filling in the gaps in support; these gaps were, in fact, where professional ways of working and parental ways of working did not fit. The parent concerned said: '*You see, we didn't realise that we could have put in a submission. That's why I now help other parents to do this ... The LEA does have a leaflet about it but we weren't given the support we needed to give our views at the time.*'

8.2.4 Parents' perceptions of the effects of support

Parents, almost more than teachers, were quick to articulate the change that they had noticed in their children when support seemed to be working well. Although the responses had yielded 'soft' data in so far as they did not cite increases in reading age or National Curriculum levels – as would a professional – and the progress may have been influenced by factors other than the support received, none the less the progress described by parents was clearly significant in their terms:

I'm not sure how many days she sees [the support teacher] *but she has come on in leaps and bounds. I can see the improvement. She's reading at home now – proper books.*

I put up with it [unclear description of need on statement] *because I can see he is progressing and that he is doing well at school. He's confident now and before he was such a timid person.*

It's as if he sees there is something in school for him. Now he has a smile on his face.

He's come on such a lot; it seems to be right for him.

Parents readily picked up – from their children – pupil – teacher relationships and the effect that these had. One parent lauded the learning support staff '*for not belittling*' the pupils with learning difficulties, while another commented: '*He won't do anything for her because she won't do stuff for him.*'

8.2.5 Parents' response to delegation

Generally, parents' awareness of the source of support amounted to knowledge of the statementing process and the fact that their child was being supported by services which were limited in resources. In one case study authority, however, a parents' group had been influential in altering the proposed pattern of delegation. This group was opposed to the authority's plans for delegation of money for statements on the grounds that a central base represented consistency of approach and an objective view which parents could access if in dispute with the school; they were also concerned lest delegated money be diluted and not used to the direct benefit of pupils with special educational needs. The campaign resulted in a compromise, with some statements delegated and some retained.

8.3 Messages from interviews with pupils and parents

The messages from this chapter reinforce those from the previous chapter: namely, that support is not maximised unless there is excellent communication and understanding among all partners. The key ingredient for achieving this is, it would seem time. Regardless of the inaccuracies of certain perceptions, the fact that they exist is the salient point: it is a management responsibility to ensure that the situation is free from tension which may further inhibit some pupils enjoying a positive curriculum experience and school career. There is increasing empirical evidence that the meeting of special educational needs is a community matter; it is severely restricted without collaboration with a number of stakeholders. The final chapter will

examine the way in which delegation has enhanced the capacity of the community to respond to pupils with special educational needs.

8.4 Summary points from Chapter 8

- Pupils generally appreciated any additional support which they received, considering that it aided their understanding and increased their ability to achieve the tasks set.
- Pupils were, however, frequently confused about the source and purpose of support and what it was intended to achieve for them individually.
- Some pupils were subject to teasing and bullying on account of their receiving support.
- Parents were generally keenly aware that their child had difficulties with learning but were often confused and frightened about the child's future.
- Parents were able to identify support teachers who helped their child's progress in so far as they were able to cite evidence of the child's improved performance, attitude or confidence but they often had little idea about the source or nature of the support that their child received.
- There was a sense of frustration among some parents at delays in securing help for their child; they were intolerant of bureaucratic barriers.
- Parents were rarely aware of the impact of the administrative arrangement of delegation unless there was collaborative action from a parents' support group.

Chapter 9
Conclusions

It is important to distinguish between the administrative infrastructure (local management – now Fair Funding (GB. DfEE, 1998a)) and the role of the support services for special educational needs within the education system. The focus of the NFER research was on the impact of delegation on the support services – that is, taking the administrative arrangements as given and investigating the way in which they had influenced practice. While the policy changes brought about by the Education Reform Act 1988 and subsequent related legislation were born, essentially, of political expediency, those concerned with improving the educational experiences for pupils with special educational needs are interested in the way in which the changes have encouraged or discouraged those practices which other research has shown to serve this purpose and the way in which practices which have proved effective can be maintained despite national policy changes.

This final chapter will reflect briefly on the implications of the broad findings from the NFER research project and suggest issues, grounded in the research data, which policy makers and senior managers at local authority and institutional levels might like to consider in relation to the support services for special educational needs.

The NFER study of the delegation of support services for special educational needs serves as a reminder that any one policy initiative emanating from the centre, at national level, can have multifarious effects as it is interpreted at local and institutional levels and as it is implemented, within these interpretations, into a context shaped by past policies and practices. As previous chapters have shown, there are many patterns of delegation and no manager of special education services in one local authority could hope to change posts and find another authority in which provision was organised in exactly the same way. The overriding factor across local authorities at the time of the NFER research was commitment to maintaining support services in some shape or form: services have not withered at the local authority level

as was feared that they would before empirical evidence about the effects of delegation was available. This shows that the benefits of retaining and providing services centrally are acknowledged. It is not just a matter of statutory obligations: the responsibilities for specific pupils with special educational needs (notably those with statements) with which authorities are charged *could* be fulfilled by contractual agreements with schools appropriately resourced to be providers. Thus central services have been retained for positive reasons at the turn of the century.

As in so many cases, it is difficult to separate out the impact of delegation from the changes which would have arisen anyway as a result of developments in policy and practice not only in special education but also in general education. But these changes often reflect back on arrangements under local management. There is a clutch of issues which are pertinent here and which are, essentially, to do with management at either the local authority level or the institutional level – sometimes both, particularly where the issues can only be resolved by negotiation and collaboration.

9.1 Issues at local authority level

9.1.1 What services provide: staff development within the support services

While there was evidence that one of the features of a delegated situation, where schools held budgets to buy in or buy back external support, was that many schools were more discriminating about the support they bought and would only purchase what they were unable to produce from within the regular staff establishment or school resources, it is not clear that this was caused solely by delegation. Over the past two decades, many mainstream schools have become increasingly confident about providing for a range of pupils with special educational needs, and some special educational needs coordinators, especially in large comprehensive schools and schools with resourced units, now have the degree of expertise and experience which, 20 years ago, might only have been available from a specialist support service or a special school. These practitioners are now looking to the support services to provide whole-school INSET, to keep them updated about recent developments (for example, in relatively new and fast developing areas such as information and communication

technology, autistic spectrum disorders or attention deficit disorder) and to facilitate networks. Clearly, these demands, in turn, have implications for support services and the staff skills that are necessary.

If they are to be in demand and thus financially viable, support services need increasingly to offer 'tailor-made' provision as well as routes to cutting-edge expertise. One of the consequences of this is that support service staff may need more time to engage in their own development – reading and keeping abreast of research, for example – in order to support colleagues who want new ideas, information and approaches. This itself reflects back on the situation of delegation: if all the budget is delegated for schools to buy back specific services, there is no means of funding service staff's professional development, unless this is implicit in the charges made to schools. The case study data from the NFER research showed that the professional development of support service staff was, in fact, often a neglected area and attention to it was unsystematic across authorities. The challenge for senior management is to ensure that service staff are equipped to provide what schools want and need. The maintenance of an identified source of specialism within the support services is particularly critical given the greater degree of inclusion and relatively lighter use of special schools. More pupils with significant needs are now placed in mainstream schools. It is essential that the sort of expertise that accrues when staff have a concentrated and wide-ranging experience of these pupils is maintained. There is the danger that special educational needs coordinators may become over-confident, thinking that they can cope with anything; while, concomitantly, there are others who will lack confidence when asked to manage the education of a child who might hitherto have been placed in segregated provision. By definition, inclusion means systemic change. The support services are part of that system.

9.1.2 Quality standards

A recent development has been the development, by the Teacher Training Agency (1998a) of the standards for specialist teachers. It is interesting that the Key Outcomes of Specialised SEN Provision highlight the complex inter relationship between pupils, special education specialists, learning support assistants, governors and parents/carers while one of the areas for the core standards is evaluation of the

effectiveness of specialist teaching and support. The NFER research evidence is that these are both areas that will benefit from greater attention and understanding but that the implications will range widely to other related areas – for example, training for headteachers, governors and learning support assistants and, where relevant, professional quality standards.

9.1.3 School demands

The NFER research data showed that where budgets were mostly delegated to schools and schools became the purchasers of specific inputs from the services, the overall management of the service, particularly in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, became more problematic. Services' dealings with schools needed to foster a high degree of understanding and provide opportunities for negotiation so that, on the one hand, each agency was cognisant of the restraints under which the other was working and, on the other, could comment on and influence those restraints.

The research data reported in previous chapters showed that schools had various demands of support services, the most indisputable of which was that support should be reliable in that staff should keep to an agreed, planned timetable, be punctual and provide what had been agreed in advance. Furthermore, schools appreciated consistency of staffing so that there did not have to be a two-way familiarisation process each term with a new support teacher. In some cases, there appeared to be confused lines of accountability and monitoring.

While different arrangements may suit different situations, there would seem to be a case for all services to have a code of conduct and for mutual expectations to be made clear. For example, while any of the above could be easily monitored or represent performance indicators for the support services, schools could, in turn, make life easier for the support service staff in similar ways – there was, it should be remembered, consensus among support service teachers interviewed as to the features of a school that provided a facilitative environment for support work. The research data suggested that both parties would welcome time for planning and feedback – this is something that has to be built into timetables and caseloads by senior managers.

Schools' desire for consistency was generally satisfied where support teachers had 'patches' rather than accumulating a series of individual cases. Clearly, this is not always possible, especially with low-incidence needs and in situations where it is important for individual pupils to have continuity. But the patch system, if based on 'families' or clusters of schools, can accommodate following pupils through normal school transfer. Furthermore, there is evidence that, under local management, resources for special educational needs can usefully be 'pooled' within a family of schools so that they can share human and material resources. Senior managers in schools and support services might usefully explore how to set up such arrangements to the mutual benefit of all parties involved.

There was evidence from the NFER case studies that support service staff sometimes felt uneasy about schools' perceptions of the support role that they should play and schools' attitudes towards pupils with learning difficulties. Support staff interviewed mentioned the apparent effect of other initiatives with which mainstream schools were involved – for example, target setting and raising standards of achievement. In some cases, schools which had control of the money seemed to be setting the agenda in a way which was neither conducive to the support service's optimal working nor in the interests of pupils with special educational needs to whom their work was committed. There would seem to be issues here which can only be addressed by dialogue between schools and the authority about, for example, what 'raising achievement' means in the context of particular schools rolls. Support service staff might usefully comment on strategies to enhance the attainment of those pupils whose progress is slower and who can sometimes be neglected as, despite improvement, they will not influence the measurable target areas of getting an extra GCSE (any grade) or moving from a D grade to a C grade. This relates to the way in which senior managers are trained to scrutinise and analyse performance data, the way in which assessment takes place in the school, and the range of achievements which are valued within the school community. It was interesting in that the NFER project found evidence that some support services were perceiving themselves to be engaged in whole-school effectiveness rather than the more traditional role of supporting pupils with special educational needs. This suggests that the advice of some special educators, who have

long argued that 'best practice' in special education enhances the performance of all pupils, is being heeded.

9.1.4 Anomalous profiles of support resulting from particular patterns of delegation

The NFER case studies brought to light instances of incoherent practice, where different teachers were supporting pupils with similar needs independently of each other but within the same school. This resulted from situations where different parts of the budget was delegated in different ways – for example for pupils with one of the 'resourced places' agreed with the school, for pupils at stage 3 of the Code of Practice, and for pupils with statements. There were examples of schools where different teachers were assigned to working with the different groups of pupils (who might all have the same special educational needs – behavioural difficulties, for example) but did not have the opportunity to collaborate; the opportunity was denied by the visiting teacher's timetable/brief and/or by the internal management and organisation of the school.

In such situations it is probable that there is an inefficient and ineffective use of overall resources and the pattern of delegation has led to fragmented provision; the situation is alien to the holistic approach which has been shown to be necessary for maximum inclusion. There is a challenge to senior managers to identify such anomalies and to resolve them either by amending the pattern of delegation or by ensuring that practice is not adversely affected by the patterns if amendment is not possible.

This fragmentation can result in a piecemeal and opportunistic response by schools to addressing the needs of the pupil roll as a whole. Some schools, particularly comprehensive schools, may have a range of resource streams – for example, with respect to English as an additional language, low levels of literacy, social disadvantage, disaffection. The most effective way of addressing all these needs may be by way of whole-school approaches rather than addressing needs on an individual basis. This suggests a coherent, unified funding stream and possible support by way of an analysis of how the whole-school could be more inclusive and a focus on raising

standards rather than on special educational needs as traditionally understood. The germs of such an approach can be found in those LEAs where support services were located in school effectiveness units.

9.1.5 Relationship with educational psychology services

There was some evidence that in some authorities, the relationship between the educational psychology service and the special needs support services was weakening. Few support services were managed by the principal educational psychologist, for example. This may be influenced by delegation in so far as the psychology service is a mandatory exception while the support services are, if retained centrally, a discretionary exception. Many psychology services have undergone change through the last decade (see, for example, Wolfendale *et al.*, 1992) and have extended their brief to include a greater degree of counselling and general behaviour management, for example.

What is important is that the psychology service and the support services are complementary and mutually supportive and, whatever their brief within a particular authority, it is made clear to schools. In some cases, the psychology service was perceived as mostly having an assessment function and serving as a gatekeeper to the support services. There was evidence that frustration and dissatisfaction could result where the assessment was undertaken satisfactorily but subsequent action in the form of support was either delayed or did not materialise. There are, clearly, structural issues here which have to be addressed and which may not be aided by a delegated situation.

9.2 Issues for schools

9.2.1 The use of services in school: implications for senior and middle managers

One of the most striking findings of the NFER project was the way in which, regardless of the particular pattern of delegation in an authority, the pupil's experience of support – and, doubtless, the benefits that s/he derived from it – was often heavily influenced by the internal organisation of the school and the attitude towards special

educational needs within that school. This is hardly an original finding but it does, perhaps, have particular implications within the present climate of systematic management training at all levels.

The research data showed that special educational needs coordinators often had a considerable time commitment in managing and organising the visiting support teachers, not only making practical arrangements but also overseeing curriculum planning. The role has, clearly, grown considerably since the implementation of the Code of Practice and this is recognised not only by the burgeoning number of training courses and support networks but also by the design of the Standards for special educational needs coordinators (SENCos) by the Teacher Training Agency (1998b). In order to fulfil their functions, SENCos need support from senior management, and it is salient to note that the headteacher standards now include reference to this (TTA, 1997).

9.2.2 The relationship of support work with the curriculum

The relationship between support service teachers' work in schools and the regular curriculum was not always clear. While comments can be made on this from various perspectives and, clearly, teacher/school attitude was an important factor, the practical reality seemed to be that it was lack of adequate time for dialogue, planning and feedback that led to support staff's work not being effectively integrated into classroom and school practice. Were adequate time allowed for this, there would be more extensive opportunities for staff development and for the preparation of classroom and subject teachers to enhance their skills of differentiation. This is not unrelated to the present Government support of inclusion – see below.

9.2.3 Work with parents

Considerable attention has been paid in recent Government policy to fostering positive relationships with all parents and, in particular, the parents of pupils with special educational needs (see, for example, Wolfendale, 1997; Wolfendale and Cook, 1997). While the NFER interviews with a sample of parents of pupils receiving interventions from the support services showed that they had all, at some point, been in dialogue

with the school and were positively disposed towards the support that the child was receiving, nevertheless their comments showed that relationships need maintaining and that this sometimes seemed to have been neglected. This has considerable time implications for staff in both schools and the support services. Yet if time were to be made, it might reap rich dividends in terms of parental involvement and support.

9.2.4 Work with pupils

The NFER interviews suggested that, in some cases, support could be both a confusing and an uncomfortable experience for pupils. While the sample was small and no firm statements can be made about the degree of confusion or discomfort among young people with special educational needs, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that time might usefully be spent in making support arrangements clear to the pupils concerned and in giving attention to the acceptability of such support within the school culture.

9.3 Issues relating to national policy

In the NFER case studies, interviewees made reference, unsurprisingly, to national initiatives which they considered were having an influence on the support services and, more widely, the field of special education.

9.3.1 Inclusion

The preferred policy of the present Government is inclusion (GB. DfEE, 1998a), albeit tempered with a recognition of the role of special schools. If schools are to become more inclusive, there are significant challenges *vis-à-vis* the delegation of support services. Very obviously, the support services will need to engage in staff development in order to expand mainstream teachers' repertoires of teaching approaches, particular expertise and awareness of relevant resources. This may be a challenge in some cases, particularly where uncharted waters are being entered. Research studies have, in the main, focused on the way in which schools *qua* communities have moved towards greater inclusion: there is, to date, minimal evidence as to the optimal profile of specialist support – for example, whether it should be embedded within the school establishment in the form of full-time members

of staff or whether injections of external expertise are critical; and, in either scenario, how it is best disseminated throughout the institution.

If there is a challenge for the support services within schools aiming to become more inclusive, there is also a challenge for them in schools reluctant to move in this way. Here, where services are delegated, there is evidence that the preferred local authority policy is harder to implement as support services have to answer schools' demands rather than influence schools to follow authority policy. The way in which money is allocated within delegated budgets, by rewarding preferred practice and penalising 'undesirable' practice (for example, by resourcing schools appropriately, encouraging them to offer places to pupils whom they may perceive as difficult to educate), may be more important here than the issue of delegation itself.

9.3.2 Raising standards

The present Government is committed to raising standards at all levels and has put in place a clutch of strategies to bring this about. While Government policy is, clearly, on raising standards throughout the ability range (GB. DfEE, 1997), the way in which this is interpreted, particularly where there is a focus on 'raw' examination scores, can militate against pupils with special educational needs. Support services staff interviewed in the course of the NFER research made reference to this, feeling that what they were being asked to do sometimes promoted agendas other than those focusing on pupils with learning difficulties. Moreover, staff working with pupils with special educational needs often comment on the lack of feedback regarding their pupils' progress by way of national assessment. There are few helpful measures by which support service staff can assess the difference which they are making to pupils in terms that are comparable across schools and services. Means of publicly marking the progress of pupils with learning difficulties not only in the traditional areas but also in those which have not, traditionally, been the subject of public scrutiny are needed (see, for example, the assessment scales in GB. DfEE, 1998b). The celebration of this broader base for marking achievement needs to take place at institutional, local and national levels.

9.3.3 Disaffection

Another strand of present Government policy aims to address social exclusion; part of this focuses on the incidence of disaffection amongst pupils. There are, clearly, implications here for support services for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It will be remembered that the present NFER research project gave minimal attention to such services, as a parallel project, also sponsored by CLEA, was taking place simultaneously (Kinder *et al.*, 1998, 1999a and b). However, there is evidence that low achievement generally and low levels of literacy and numeracy feature strongly among the heterogeneous group of young people termed 'disaffected' and amongst those who present challenges in other ways (see, for example, NFER research on the education of looked-after children (Fletcher-Campbell, 1997) and on alternative educational provision at key stage 4 (Cullen *et al.*, forthcoming)). There are questions here to be asked about the efficacy of strategies to address difficulties with basic skills earlier in pupils' educational careers. In the light of the NFER's evidence that monitoring and evaluation were not the strongest features of support services for special educational needs, it could be suggested that there needs to be a more strategic approach to resource allocation and support for pupils who present challenges to the education system at whatever level or key stage. There seems little indication of longitudinal evaluation by way of outcomes at the end of key stage 4.

Furthermore, there is evidence that disaffection requires a multi-agency/professional approach, particularly when it has become embedded at key stage 4. In some cases, learning support services are involved in local consortia (for example, in New Start Partnerships) but this is the exception rather than the rule.

9.4 LEA services in the future

All this points to the fact that, in the future, LEA support services for special educational needs are going to have to be increasingly aware of the whole environment in which they are located. Things have moved on a long way from the time when support services were largely composed of remedial teachers, and the past decade has seen a trend towards greater professionalism and more explicitly managed support services. If some of the predictions for the education system of the future

materialise and learning in the future is largely driven by the individual and delivered electronically, the structure, organisation and expertise of the present-day support services may prove inappropriate for the twenty-first century. The way in which services have responded to challenges in the past gives every confidence that they will do so in the future.

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Impact of Delegation on LEA Support Services for Special Educational Needs

Since the introduction of local management of schools (LMS) under the terms of the Education Reform Act 1988, the organisation and management of support services for special educational needs have undergone considerable change. This book reports the findings from a research project undertaken at the National Foundation for Educational Research into the impact of delegation on these local education authority (LEA) support services.

The report provides information on:

- the variety of patterns of delegation, devolvement and central retention of support services within authorities
- the range of LEA support services' provision to mainstream schools
- the ways in which services are organised and managed at strategic and operational levels
- the relationship between support services and schools
- the relationship between support services and pupils and parents.

The report concludes with issues raised by the research that will be of interest to LEA officers, practitioners in support services, schools and policy makers concerned about making the best use of LEA support services for special educational needs both now and in the future.

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