

Report of a survey of Special Educational Needs in mainstream schools

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ETI: Promoting Improvement in the Interest of all Learners



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Executive Summary

The Northern Ireland Audit Office published a report in June 2017 on Special Educational Needs¹ (SEN) which focused on SEN provision in mainstream schools. Arising from the recommendations eight and nine of the report, the Department of Education (DE) commissioned the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to carry out an evaluation of the impact of SEN provision in mainstream schools and support on pupil outcomes, with a particular focus on effective early intervention strategies. A full ETI evaluation of the quality of the provision for SEN was inhibited by action short of a strike by four of the teaching unions which make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) and which declared industrial action primarily in relation to a pay dispute. This action includes non-co-operation with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

As a consequence, twenty primary schools and ten post-primary schools which had been evaluated previously through ETI inspections and district visits as having highly effective provision for pupils with SEN were selected for an evaluation of the SEN provision, with a particular focus in primary schools on the use of, and effectiveness of, early intervention strategies.

The available data from school admissions shows a continuing rise in the numbers of pupils with SEN. In addition the evidence from schools is that the needs of pupils in mainstream schools are more complex, with an increasing number of children beginning school with under-developed communication, social and self-help skills. It is evident, and understandable, that schools which have proven reputations for effective support for pupils with SEN experience increased enrolments arising from pupil transfers from other schools.

The schools in this survey vary in geographical location, size and management type, but all have pupils with a wide range of complex SEN. Some of the schools in this survey are in areas of high levels of social deprivation and are able to draw on additional funding, however others are not and are experiencing very significant challenges to managing their budgets, particularly with regard to SEN. The schools have developed a comprehensive variety of systems and strategies to provide competently for these pupils. The strategies and resources used vary depending on the particular needs of the pupils, the school's resources and the professional development opportunities for SEN available to them. It is possible, however, to identify common factors which have proven to ensure a high quality mainstream school provision for pupils with SEN.

Characteristics of effective practice for SEN identified:

- Highly effective leadership throughout the school.
- Well informed, confident leadership from the principal.
- Whole senior leadership team involvement.
- Whole school ethos for the inclusion of all pupils.
- High expectations of staff for all pupils.
- Skilled and motivated teaching and support staff.

¹ Special Educational Needs, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) June 2017

- Specialist skill and knowledge of the SENCO and learning support/SEN team, who are able to provide in-house support for individual pupils and continuing professional development for staff.
- Seeking out relevant development opportunities.
- Dissemination of effective practice within the school.
- Willingness and ability to customise strategies to meet individual needs.
- Detailed tracking of progress by pupil and by intervention.
- Multi-disciplinary input for complex difficulties.
- Pupil involvement in IEP target setting and review.
- Support for homework and study skills.
- Strong and consistent pastoral support for pupils.
- Developing positive working relationships with the pupil's parents/carers.
- Developing positive working relationships with feeder schools or pre-school settings.

Part one of the survey discusses effective practice for SEN in 30 schools.

Part two of the survey has 30 case studies of the effective practice in the schools visited.

PART ONE

1. Context

The Northern Ireland Audit Office published a report in June 2017 on Special Educational Needs² (SEN) which focused on SEN provision in mainstream schools. Arising from recommendations eight and nine of the report, the Department of Education (DE) commissioned the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to carry out an evaluation of the impact of SEN provision in mainstream schools and support on pupil outcomes, with a particular focus on effective early intervention strategies. A full ETI evaluation of the quality of the provision for SEN was inhibited by action short of a strike by four of the teaching unions which make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) and which declared industrial action primarily in relation to a pay dispute. This action includes non-co-operation with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

As a consequence, twenty primary schools and ten post-primary schools which had been evaluated previously through ETI inspections and district visits as having highly effective provision for pupils with SEN were selected for an evaluation of the SEN provision with a particular focus in primary schools on the use of, and effectiveness of, early intervention strategies. The schools agreed to share with ETI their practice and outcomes for pupils with SEN. A member from a team of four specialist inspectors for SEN, and four associate assessors with extensive experience and knowledge of SEN conducted the visits to the schools during January to March 2018.

This survey is set within the context of current education policy within Northern Ireland, particularly 'Every School a Good School'³ which recognises the importance of the role of the teacher in meeting the wide range of needs of pupils in the classroom, and the 'Count, Read: Succeed' policy⁴ which indicates that a wide range of strategies can be used by the teacher to meet the particular individual needs of their pupils. It also places the school as the key, and first, body in identifying and addressing the educational needs of each child. The legislation related to SEN is the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, amended by The Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, and supported by the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations, (Northern Ireland) 2005. Under the 1996 Education Order, schools must also have regard to the provisions of the Code of Practice on the identification and assessment of SEN and the Supplement to the Code.

Schools report that they have more pupils with a wider range of SEN; within a classroom there can be an extensive variety of complex needs.

2. Focus of inspection

The survey focused on:

- the outcomes for the pupils with special educational needs in the schools selected;
- the range of provision for special educational needs; in particular, how the schools are providing effective early intervention; and
- the quality of leadership and management for special educational needs.

² Special Educational Needs, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) June 2017

³ Every School a Good School, Department of Education, Northern Ireland, 2009

⁴ Count, Read: Succeed, Department of Education, Northern Ireland, 2011

3. Overall findings of the survey

Key findings

4. Outcomes for learners

- It is evident from the survey that pupils have improved outcomes where schools have members of staff who have knowledge of the curriculum, are skilled in the assessment of individual needs, have insight into how the pupil learns and a range of appropriate interventions, along with the skills to provide effectively and individually tailor such interventions for the pupils.
- This survey report uses examples of individual progress made by pupils with SEN, and examples of effective practice by schools evidenced to improve the outcomes for cohorts of pupils with SEN in the associated case studies. There is no comparative data available regarding outcomes from early intervention for pupils in Foundation Stage. This is because most schools do not begin to assess cognitive skills until year (Yr) 4, when they accept that formal assessment is more reliable.
- A number of schools in this survey use a screening test for children aged five to six years to identify basic literacy concepts, and against which progress can be measured. The primary schools use a cognitive test alongside tests for English and mathematics. This enables schools to track, year on year, beginning usually in Yr 4, and analyse the individual progress made by pupils in relation to their assessed ability, and note any individual special educational need. One primary school in [case study 1](#) states that staff use Assessment Manager provided by C2k to analyse individual holistic progress through attendance, SEN stage and need, and to identify those making insufficient progress.
- For pupils experiencing difficulties with social, emotional and behaviour some schools, for example [case study 2](#), use a programme for positive thinking skills which helps the pupils to: establish positive relationships with peers, staff and parents; become more ready to learn in school; and can be used as a baseline to show and quantify progress. The school cites individual pupil improvement in concentration, self-esteem, social behaviour, organisational skills and school attendance.
- The primary schools in this survey all have extensive data to demonstrate the progression and attainments of their pupils in relation to their assessed ability and special educational need. They also have data to show the efficacy of a range of targeted interventions for individual and cohorts of pupils, for example a 71% improvement in PTE scores following the use of an individualised computer-based literacy support programme for a target group, see [case study 3](#). All of the schools are able to show year on year progression of pupils in stanine bands for English and mathematics. The schools also place importance on teacher insight and judgement in conjunction with data from assessments, for example [case study 4](#). One school involves all staff in a group analysis of individual pupil progress using test outcomes, assessments, observations and individual education plan targets. The results are disseminated formally and informally within the school, see [case study 5](#).

- All of the schools record interventions and support for pupils with SEN, for example in-class support for two 45 minute sessions each week for all numeracy activities, or individual support twice each week with a withdrawal teacher. Using the detailed assessments available, they are also able to target particular difficulties a child may have, for example retrieval, or simple inference in literacy. Schools analyse very well the efficacy of the interventions used, with adjustments, or changes made by teachers or SENCO where these are not sufficiently effective. Schools quantify the outcomes for pupils who have no, or little English as a spoken language when they enrol in the school. One school evidences that of this group of pupils receiving targeted support for literacy, 60% met all targets, and 36% met one or two targets; in numeracy 94% achieved all of their targets. Where the pupils do not achieve any of their targets, the school explores reasons for this lack of progress, seeking to establish whether or not the pupil has SEN, see [case study 6](#).
- Post-primary schools in this survey are able to demonstrate the overall progression of individual pupils through the profile and attainments of pupils at the beginning of KS3, end of year tests, and pupil attainments of GCSE and other accreditations including Essential Skills and the Prince's Trust when they leave the school. The post-primary schools use cognitive tests, usually in Yr 9 and baseline assessments for pupils aged 14 to 16 years in vocabulary, mathematics and non-verbal ability, usually in Yr 11. There is a trend for the post-primary schools to move to cognitive ability tests, reflecting the assessments used by primary schools. The post-primary schools in this survey demonstrate a holistic view of pupil progress using the schools information monitoring system (SIMS) to collate assessments, attendance and behaviour. These schools keep extensive and detailed tracking of interventions used and pupil progression. Examples of significant progression were evidenced, including one pupil with special educational needs attaining seven GCSE passes; other pupils are more settled in school and have improved attendance as a result of a wide range of school interventions, see [case study 7](#).

5. Quality of provision

- All of the schools in this survey follow the SEN Code of Practice, and have developed coherent school systems for SEN. They have developed effectively their use of individual education plans (IEP). They give detailed examples of listening to pupils about how they learn effectively, and focusing on the strategies that work for them. The schools have developed insightful pupil profiles for providing curricular and social support. The schools include pupil's contributions to their individual education plan (IEP) and reviews, and communicate and liaise well with parents and carers, see [case study 8](#).

Primary

- The schools in this survey identify SEN needs at a very early stage, through a combination of close liaison with nursery and other pre-school providers to identify and share information pertinent to learning, teacher observation and discussion with parents before and as the children transition into the school. The schools begin intervention in the first year of the pupil beginning school, usually in the second term, as one principal stated 'We catch them early before they fall.' Teachers have completed appropriate and extensive continuing professional development (CPD) in order to be able to provide early, skilled and targeted interventions through differentiation within the classroom or through individual or

small group withdrawal. They use their skills and experience very well, addressing effectively the severe and complex difficulties some pupils experience in learning to read, thereby preventing them from falling significantly behind their peers, see [case study 9](#).

- The primary schools emphasised the difficulties with communication, organisational skills, and social, emotional and behaviour exhibited by increasing numbers of children when beginning school in Yr 1. One school has 40% of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, see [case study 5](#). The pupils with this range of difficulties may be referred to by parents as hyperactive. The schools provide structure, clear boundaries, and positive behaviour strategies and rewards; at times additional nurture provision is also required for the pupils with associated support and development opportunities for parents. The schools demonstrate commitment to meeting the needs of those pupils and their families who experience extensive difficulties over long periods of time, see [case study 2](#).
- A number of schools emphasised the need to keep the number of pupils to 25 or below in the foundation stage (FS) classes so that teachers can observe, monitor, track and analyse each pupil's progress in detail during this early stage in school. Schools use a range of strategies and resources to support the pupils in early years, including a programme, to support communication and language skills, both as an intervention and for whole class use where the school has evidence that a robust approach to teaching communication for all the younger pupils is needed. The schools place great importance on effective differentiation within the classroom; this is evident in whole class and individual planning, with ongoing annotations and recording of pupils' responses by the staff, continually seeking to inform and adjust planning, as illustrated in the school in [case study 10](#).
- The schools use a wide range of assessment tools to provide baseline assessment alongside teacher judgement to inform planning for learning, see [case study 11](#). The teachers are skilled at selecting assessments directly related to the pupil's often complex needs and matched to their cognitive ability, for example literacy, numeracy, attitudes to learning and emotional wellbeing. The school in [case study 12](#) has customised a commercial emotional wellbeing assessment tool and programme to create a focused 12 week programme addressing the specific needs of the pupils in their school. For Irish medium education (IME), the schools also use assessments, devised by the Educational Research Centre in Dublin to provide assessments for literacy and mathematics in Irish.
- All of the schools in this survey track the progress of their pupils rigorously and holistically, by quantitative and qualitative measures, including teacher judgement. The schools use the electronic school information management system (SIMS) and generate a range of summative assessments which are shared and interrogated by staff. Schools are adept at linking the data from the yearly marksheets for cognitive assessments against literacy and numeracy assessments, and stanine review tracking sheets with teacher observations and pupil's work, to give a thorough overview of the pupil, their progression and outcomes. All of the schools measure the progress and outcomes of specific interventions for pupils; the results in turn inform well the tailoring of the schools' future provision.

- The schools use a range of models for intervention, including differentiation, individual and or group withdrawal, and in-class support depending on the needs of the pupils at that time. The consensus in the schools is that some pupils need intensive, short-term withdrawal intervention in order to understand key concepts and make progress; most schools provide both withdrawal and in-class support. The school in [case study 13](#) took an innovative approach to withdrawal which has had significant impact on pupil outcomes. The arrangements differ from school to school as they are organised to make best use of their staff for the particular needs of the pupils within each school. The school in [case study 14](#) has three teachers in the foundation stage accredited to support literacy difficulties. A number of schools provide one-to-one support for literacy before the school day begins, and as after-school provision. This is mainly provided by classroom assistants under the direction of a teacher or SENCO.
- The schools provide thorough, high quality training for the classroom assistants within the schools, with most schools including all the assistants in any training related to children's learning and barriers to learning, for example, Reading Partnership reading strategies, and numeracy catch-up programmes, for example in [case studies 14](#) and [15](#). The primary schools place importance on the range and depth of training provided for classroom assistants so that they can support the pupil's learning effectively under the direction of the teacher and SENCO, see [case study 6](#). In a minority of schools, classroom assistants take the lead for some specialist programmes, for example sensory integration programmes, with associated monitoring of pupil progress. In one school with a high proportion of pupils with English as an additional language, the classroom assistants are all trained in targeted development for communication, and support the pupils throughout the day as well as providing additional intervention for Yr 1 to Yr 3 pupils for one hour each day after school, see [case study 16](#).
- Eighty percent, 16 out of 20, primary schools in this survey have participated in the DE SEN CPD literacy project which provided development in teaching and supporting literacy for all staff in the participating schools, and in other high quality professional development programmes. In addition, some of the teachers have also achieved Associate Member of the British Dyslexia Association⁵ (AMBDA) or Approved Teacher Status⁶ (ATS). These professional development courses for teachers, which demand significant commitment and time by all teachers in the school are directly related to the complex nature of the pupil's barriers to learning literacy and have led to high quality, bespoke provision in the classroom. The professional competence and confidence of teachers is enhanced, embedded and impacts very positively on whole school provision and individual pupil outcomes, see [case study 9](#).
- The schools have developed a range of innovative practice, directly related to the learning needs and interests of their cohorts of pupils. One school uses thinking maps extensively, and evidences significant pupil progress in thinking skills. One school uses music and dance extensively to extend the pupil's learning, see [case study 17](#). The school in [case study 1](#) has two specialist teachers for SEN and one for communication and language to support pupils and staff. The school in [case study 4](#) has received training from the local Health and Social Care Trust's Language and Communication team.

⁵ Professional development qualification provided by the British Dyslexia Association

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- A number of schools cite a growing number of pupils presenting with poor co-ordination, concentration, and hand writing, along with inappropriate sensory responses. The Trusts provide the Regional Integrated Support for Education in Northern Ireland (RISE NI) service for schools, whereby a multi-disciplinary team of therapists provide training and resources for staff and or direct support for pupils in school. The schools greatly value the multi-disciplinary skills, information and support. The schools involved have evidence of better pupil engagement in learning and more settled behaviour as a result of daily sessions, see [case studies 7](#) and [11](#).
- A number of the schools have pupils who display very complex difficulties, some of which are not evident until the pupil reaches a higher level of development than when first assessed. The schools in this survey commit extensive amounts of time to school-based assessments, tracking, evaluations of progress and efficacy of interventions, devising highly individualised strategies and resources for these and for all their SEN pupils. The schools are not always supported in a timely manner by EA support services, with long delays for Educational Psychologist (EP) assessments, and again for support provision, as detailed by the schools in [case studies 6](#) and [20](#).
- All of the schools cited the close involvement of parents in their children's learning as crucial, and have developed a range of strategies to engage, inform and improve the skills of parents to support their children's learning, including workshops, inviting the parent to join lessons, and providing materials and equipment, as in the school cited in [case study 18](#). The schools involve parents in all discussions and planning regarding their child's barriers to learning from the early stages of concern. They establish effective working contact with parents, sharing regularly information and planning for learning, believing that the support of parents for their children at home is essential to sustained progress; [case studies 2](#) and [19](#) exemplify this particularly well. The school in [case study 5](#) is a Family Support Hub, and provides the Barnardo's 'Ready to Learn' programme and the Save the Children's Families Connect parental programme.

Post-primary

- In the post-primary schools, those that are non-selective have cohorts of pupils with low attainment in literacy; this difficulty inhibits their learning in most of the subjects in which they participate, and in homework and independent learning. The schools use a wide range of support materials, some of which are also used in primary schools. The schools provide in-house training for staff, usually provided by the SENCO, who may also observe and monitor the classroom provision. In some schools, teachers share and discuss regularly effective practice during directed time sessions, as in [case study 21](#).
- The schools monitor the progression of their pupils in detail and depth. Under the direction of the SENCO, classroom assistants in many of the schools write observations of the pupils' learning in class as evidence of meeting IEP targets, for example [case study 22](#). The schools use SIMS extensively to provide a holistic over-view of pupils, matching assessment, targets, attainments and attendance. The school in [case study 23](#) routinely uses action research, structured by the DE ASPIRE framework, whereby the targets, interventions and the progress of one pupil are interrogated and analysed by staff directly involved in the provision for the pupil; these are then shared with all colleagues in the school. The school in [case study 24](#) monitors the learning of pupils with SEN in every lesson; this school also includes a careers focus in every IEP meeting for each pupil.

- Post-primary schools have pupils with complex needs, including educational and social and emotional. Some pupils require multi-disciplinary provision, including education and welfare officers, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and education or clinical psychologists to address difficulties experienced both in school and in the community. Schools in the survey recognise that such difficulties cannot be addressed effectively in isolation, and they arrange multi-disciplinary meetings to organise and co-ordinate support, as in [case study 24](#). Where necessary, schools provide pupils with access to small support classes in separate rooms or in quiet rooms, for times that are particularly stressful to them. Pupils with complex difficulties may require on occasion more support than the school is able to provide from within their staff team. The school in [case study 9](#) employs a learning mentor to support pupils towards more independent learning and assignment writing. Schools in [case studies 25](#), [26](#) and [27](#) placed additional staff to work for a period of time with a pupil and to monitor their well-being and progress, and introduce highly personalised strategies to self-manage behaviours. As a result of periods of intensive support the pupils grew in confidence, and improved socially and academically.
- Pupils on the autistic spectrum (AS) have difficulties with social communication and social interaction and therefore may find the transition from primary to post-primary schools, and beyond, particularly problematic. Schools have built their knowledge and understanding of AS over time from a range of sources, including the EA and the Middletown Centre for Autism. However, the impact of AS on the pupil's development and on their wide range of personalities, interests and difficulties means that each pupil will have particular requirements. Schools address these difficulties and seek to provide sufficient support for each pupil to succeed. Forty percent of the post-primary schools in this survey cited in particular their extensive and effective support for pupils on the autistic spectrum; [case studies 8](#) and [22](#) illustrate support for AS in particular.
- The schools in this survey that have engaged in the whole school support from the Middletown Centre for Autism describe a highly effective and thorough service. The schools value in particular, the very detailed assessment of the pupils and their varied needs, the multi-disciplinary nature of the support, the associated support for the family, and the high quality training for all staff. Schools which had received support and had engaged thoroughly with the centre are able to demonstrate improved outcomes for pupils in behaviour and engagement in education, see [case study 27](#).
- Schools recognise that pupils may require additional support at times of transition, for example when beginning post-primary school. Schools facilitate visits for pupils and staff and exchange educational information. There is however, some uncertainty in schools over what information they may share with other schools and colleges. Accessing Colleges of Further Education by some pupils for vocational courses can be difficult. Schools evidence a wide-range of strategies and support for pupils at such times, and good working relationships between the schools and colleges. For example in [case study 22](#), school staff liaise closely with college staff to provide additional social skills training for pupils, and to facilitate any course work that can be completed in the familiar surroundings of the school if required.

6. Leadership and management

- The evidence indicates that in all of the schools in this survey, there is highly effective leadership for SEN with attention to detail and continuing improvement. The leadership has knowledge, understanding and interest in SEN, and have in place a team of similarly dedicated and skilled senior management. The leadership of the schools inspire their staff and demonstrate a strong commitment to all the pupils in their schools, particularly for the most vulnerable, and to the wider communities in which the schools are located; [case study 21](#) exemplified this view particularly strongly. A number of principals stated their belief that the school principal must have a detailed overview of the provision for SEN throughout the school.
- All of the schools have a positive and supportive ethos, believing that their pupils are the responsibility of the school. They do their utmost to support each pupil's holistic development from within the school resources. The school leaders and staff demonstrate empathy and commitment to supporting all the educational and emotional needs of the pupils. Pastoral support linked to a planned programme is very strong for all pupils, as can be seen in [case study 28](#). The schools embrace their accountability for the pupil's progress and attainments. The school in [case study 4](#) cited a pupil self-confidence and attitude to school assessment as extremely useful in identifying and addressing negative attitudes to learning and self-esteem by pupils, and developing in them more positive attitudes.
- The schools demonstrate extensive professional development completed by the SENCO. The SENCO lead their areas of responsibility with expertise and enthusiasm, support skilfully new staff and disseminate successfully effective practice within, and beyond, the school. The school in case study 9 describes in-depth learning conversations with staff to identify how well individual pupils are progressing, and how they could do better, and open-door clinics for staff with the SENCO. A number of principals in the survey have previously held the post of SENCO and have considerable insight, knowledge and experience of pupils' learning difficulties; they understand which interventions are effective, and why they impact on the pupils' learning.
- The school leadership teams have significant trust in the judgement and skill of their teachers, and speak of their high-level competence in the assessment and subsequent provision for the pupils with SEN. They also value the contributions of all their staff members, with one school including a classroom assistant on their senior leadership team. They promote the value of withdrawal sessions for pupils where required and demonstrate a willingness to provide a wide-ranging and multi-disciplinary approach to support pupils with significant educational, physical and social needs. They advocate positive and pre-emptive strategies for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- The principals and leadership teams have developed a comprehensive system for monitoring and evaluating the progression of pupils with SEN within key curriculum areas. The teachers' planning for SEN is monitored regularly by co-ordinators, heads of year, heads of department and the leadership team, according to the nature and size of the school. All of the schools were able to show thorough evaluations of the effectiveness of learning strategies and resources used to inform future development planning for the school, as can be seen in [case study 29](#).

- A small number of schools in conjunction with the EA have appointed teachers instead of classroom assistant posts; schools report satisfaction with this system because they have closer control of the provision, matching it effectively to pupil needs. In one area, the EA has a pilot system of providing the budget for peripatetic support directly to a number of schools and the schools appoint a teacher to provide additional support for pupils who meet the peripatetic criteria as in [case study 8](#). The school in [case study 26](#) has appointed a youth worker whose focus is pupil anger management and, as a result no pupils have been referred to Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) provision in the last year.
- The schools participate in dissemination of good practice for SEN, usually through local SENCO cluster groups. The school in [case study 10](#) states that the principal has joined with three other local schools, with similarly high quality provision for SEN, to facilitate the sharing and further expansion of their practice and provision for SEN. The school in [case study 1](#) finds that clustering sessions are becoming financially difficult to continue.
- Most of the primary schools spoke of the rising number of pupils beginning school with speech and language difficulties; the schools use a range of support packages and staff expertise to address effectively these needs early in the FS so that the pupils do not fall significantly behind their peers, as in [case studies 1](#) and [29](#).

7. Challenges for schools

- The writing and review of IEPs for pupils in post-primary schools can be a challenge, given the complexity of some pupil's learning difficulties, and the number of teachers who may teach the pupil during the week. Some schools use a team of staff to set the individual education plans (IEP) core targets, for example the SENCO, literacy and numeracy teachers, form teacher, classroom assistant, and the pupil.
- There is an EA time-allocation model for schools in operation whereby a school is allocated a set number of hours for educational psychology time and the schools have to prioritise the pupils for assessment. A number of schools state that the time allocated to them is inadequate given the rising numbers of pupils with complex SEN in their schools.
- Almost all of the schools commented on the lengthy periods of time and considerable paperwork required before they are able to access additional support for pupils with SEN. Whilst the schools recognise that they have the responsibility in the first instance to provide for each pupil, a small number of pupils are extremely complex and challenging, and schools do not have the professional skills of psychologists, or therapists, as in [case study 30](#). As the needs of such complex pupils go unmet by additional input from services outside the school, the impact on other pupils can be considerable. In some areas, schools do not receive support from the EA for pupils with behavioural difficulties without a report from the educational psychology service. There are considerable waiting times for appointments.

- Most of the schools commented on current pressures they are experiencing on school budgets. Four principals stated that SEN withdrawal support was often cut by schools within their locality, but that they placed great emphasis on its value and were determined to continue with it for as long as possible given the proven value of improved outcomes for the pupils. As a consequence, the principals believe that there are notable numbers of pupils with SEN whose parents prefer to transfer their children to schools where withdrawal provision is available for those pupils in need. Most of the schools in the survey report increased enrolments as a result of transfers from other schools which is often based on the receiving schools' positive reputation for working effectively with pupils with SEN. Consequently these schools have a large and growing proportion of pupils on their SEN register; in the schools visited, considerable evidence was provided that their numbers of pupils with SEN are accurate. The schools report that whilst their ethos demands that they accept willingly all pupils, this gives them considerable organisational problems at times, where large numbers of pupils seek to transfer to their school, see [case study 8](#).
- The larger post-primary schools take Yr 8 pupils from a large number of primary schools; the school in [case study 8](#) takes pupils from 60 primary schools, and has put an effective system in place for the senior leadership team members to link with assigned primary schools from year to year to establish and develop trust, confidence and dialogue with them, thus providing detailed insight into the needs of their new pupils.
- There is a need to review the opportunities for continued professional development opportunities for SEN, and for literacy in post-primary schools in particular. It is imperative that pupils gain adequate skills in literacy for their post-primary education and for life. It is a reasonable assumption that most pupils with literacy difficulties in post-primary schools have had literacy support in their primary schools yet these difficulties have not been resolved; therefore their literacy difficulties are likely to be difficult to address. Whilst the schools in this survey use a variety of approaches and interventions for literacy, not all of them are specifically for pupils of post-primary age, whose needs and learning styles vary from those of primary school age.

8. Conclusion

The available data from school admissions shows a continuing rise in the numbers of pupils with SEN. In addition, the evidence from schools is that the needs of pupils in mainstream schools are more complex, with an increasing number of children beginning school with under-developed communication, social and self-help skills. It is evident, and understandable, that schools who have proven reputations for effective support for pupils with SEN experience increased enrolments arising from pupil transfers from other schools.

The schools in this survey vary in geographical location, size and management type, but all have pupils with a wide range of complex SEN. Some of the schools in this survey are in areas of high levels of social deprivation and are able to draw on additional funding, however others are not and are experiencing very significant challenges to managing their budgets, particularly with regard to SEN. The schools in this survey have developed a comprehensive variety of systems and strategies to provide competently for these pupils. The strategies and resources used vary depending on the particular needs of the pupils, the school's resources and the professional development opportunities for SEN available to them. It is possible, however, to identify common factors which have proven to ensure a high quality mainstream school provision for pupils with SEN.

Of particular note is the characteristic of highly effective leadership, by the principal, and at all levels within the school, common to all the schools in this survey. In addition, all of the staff have high expectations for the pupils to achieve the best possible individual attainments and outcomes. The schools provide from a wide range of effective interventions and are able to quantify the progress and achievements for each pupil with SEN. The schools determine skilfully which interventions are most effective for the various SEN of their pupils.

In order for the staff to become skilled practitioners for SEN, the school leadership in this survey have invested significant resources and effort into identifying appropriate professional development opportunities and enabling staff to attend and disseminate their learning. The schools in this survey, ensure that their SENCO hold leadership posts, where the size and budget of the schools allow. It is significant that all the schools in the survey regard SEN as a whole school matter, with every teacher and assistant well informed and skilled in providing appropriately for the wide range of SEN within the school. Whole staff discussions on a broad range of SEN issues are held, for example: individual pupil progress, effective customised interventions within the school, or new research impacting on learning.

A minority of schools have been enabled by the EA to appoint additional teachers to provide supplementary support for SEN instead of extra classroom assistants for the pupils. The schools are pleased with the additional control it gives them over early intervention and duration of the support. A minority of schools in this survey have been able to appoint additional members of staff for specific roles, for example a youth worker to address pupil anger management issues, or learning mentors to support pupils towards more independent management of learning. In some geographical areas schools are able to avail of training and direct support for pupils by skilled therapists from RISE NI which has had a significantly positive impact on pupil engagement and learning. Schools that are able to obtain a multi-disciplinary approach to SEN report a significant enhancement of staff skills and a wider range of effective approaches which impact positively on pupil learning.

The majority of schools in this survey disseminate their experiences regarding SEN both within the school, and within the wider geographical area through SENCO clustering. Some clusters share the most effective practice for SEN in order to improve the practice within all the schools in the cluster. One group involved the clustering of the most effective SENCO in the area in order to strive for even greater success for their pupils.

A common feature of all the schools in this survey was their frequent contact with parents in order to involve them in their child's learning, and to share the interventions which prove effective. The schools encouraged the parents to involve themselves in their child's homework, and provided parental workshops, resources and support groups where necessary. Similarly, the discussions with pupils regarding how they learned best, and what they enjoyed in school, along with involvement in the setting of educational targets proved to be highly effective and improved pupil engagement in learning. The schools evidenced strong and consistent pastoral support for their pupils throughout their time at the school, in addition the schools had developed positive working relationships with feeder schools or pre-school settings.

Characteristics of effective practice for SEN

- Highly effective leadership throughout the school.
- Well informed, confident leadership from the principal.
- Whole senior leadership team involvement.
- Whole school ethos for the inclusion of all pupils.
- High expectations of staff for all pupils.
- Skilled and motivated teaching and support staff.
- Specialist skill and knowledge of the SENCO and learning support/SEN team, who are able to provide in-house individual support for pupils and continuing professional development for staff.
- Seeking out relevant development opportunities.
- Dissemination of effective practice within the school.
- Willingness and ability to customise strategies to meet individual needs.
- Detailed tracking of progress by pupil and by intervention.
- Multi-disciplinary input for complex difficulties.
- Pupil involvement in IEP target setting and review.
- Support for homework and study skills.
- Strong and consistent pastoral support for pupils.
- Developing positive working relationships with the pupil's parents/carers.
- Developing positive working relationships with feeder schools or pre-school settings.

PART TWO

1. Primary School Case Study

This large primary school is situated on the outskirts of a town; one-fifth of the pupils are on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register and one-third avail of free school meals.

The school uses Assessment Manager to collate all pupil information, including attendance, SEN need and stage, and to identify those pupils making insufficient progress. A pupil was identified in Yr 2 as having challenges with aspects of literacy. Upon raising the concern with the SENCO an 'Initial Concern Form' was completed and the parents were contacted; whilst they were happy for their child to receive additional in-school support, there was limited support available from home.

The pupil benefited from small group work with a trained classroom assistant for the specific literacy difficulties experienced. The pupil's key word scores were recorded at the beginning and end of interventions to measure progress. An analysis of progress revealed that whilst the pupil made progress in these groups, it tended to be short term and it proved challenging to make any sustained progress. The pupil was kept on the SEN register with IEPs focusing on specific targets; all IEP's were shared and reviewed with parents. The standardised scores of the pupil were analysed from Yr 3 onwards to determine if these would qualify for referral for EA literacy support. In Yr 5 the discrepancy between IQ and standardised score merited literacy screening. Having met the criteria, the pupil was advanced from Stage 2 to Stage 3 and received support from the EA Specific Literacy Support Service for one year.

Following this support programme, the pupil continued to be monitored in class and remained on an IEP.

Progress was sustained over a period of time and by Yr 7 standardised scores and end of KS attainment were in line with the national average, as a result the pupil was removed from the SEN Register. The school clusters with other schools in the region to discuss and share effective practice for SEN, however the cost involved is a cause for concern for the school leadership, and the sustainability of the cluster is in question.

2. Primary School Case Study

This primary school has one-fifth of pupils on the Special Educational Needs register and two-thirds avail of free school meals.

A Yr 1 pupil, who had not attended nursery provision, presented with issues relating to acquisition of language skills, behaviour, social skills, organisational skills, concentration and attendance. Difficult home circumstances were also evidenced.

Following a record of concern being completed, the pupil moved from Stage 1 to Stage 2 on the SEN register. A classroom assistant was provided to support the pupil who was also referred to the school counsellor. An educational psychologist assessment resulted in the pupil being given a Statement of Special Educational Need due to medical and physical difficulties; medication for ADHD was prescribed. The support given to the child included: access to a nurture centre, EA behaviour support and part-time placement at the EA primary support centre partnership programme. In school, the pupil began the Lexia talk programme and the SENCO and classroom assistant worked with the pupil within small groups. All staff

in the school were trained in attachment theory and associated support strategies. Relevant staff were trained in: behaviour management, emotional support and the Relax Kids programme. Strategies employed included: encouragement to participate in after school activities; raising the pupil's self-esteem by focusing on achievements and success, promoting the pupil's strengths, providing choices, clear boundaries and structures, and a reviewed class reward system including notes sent to the parents highlighting and praising the pupil's appropriate behaviour. A prioritised focus was made by the school on establishing an effective working relationship with parents.

The pupil's attendance improved significantly to over 90% attendance and levels of literacy showed steady improvement each year. The pupil's behaviour improved, helped by a positive skills programme, and became more settled, with improved levels of concentration. The pupil's relationships with peers improved significantly whilst attitude to work remained varied. The pupil's parents have reported better relationships at home and fewer incidents regarding behaviour.

3. Primary School Case Study

The primary school is situated on the outskirts of a town and 18% of the pupils experience difficulties with their learning.

The school uses a wide range of interventions targeted to address the precise needs of the pupils, as identified by the SENCO and class teachers. The interventions used include those for communication, literacy, numeracy, and the use of Occupational Therapy sensory motor programmes to address the needs presented by a growing number of pupils. These needs included: disorganisation, inappropriate sensory responses, behavioural issues, gross and fine motor difficulties including poor handwriting skills, and poor working memory. Classroom assistants were trained by a Senior Occupational Therapist from the RISE NI⁷ team provided by the Health Trust to deliver a school-based programme, which is quality assured by the therapist on an ongoing basis. Daily sessions were delivered for 18 pupils using a wide variety of resources and individualised programmes to develop specific aspects for each pupil; parents were fully aware and supportive of the project. After one year, school staff and parents reported progress and improvements made in the pupil's behaviour, social and emotional maturity, motor skills, attention and readiness to learn.

The school evidences an improvement of 71% improvement in literacy scores following the use of an individualised computer-based literacy support programme for a target group. An example of the corresponding impact on the pupils' academic outcomes following sensory motor group intervention includes improvements in literacy skills for Yr 6 pupils. The pupils involved with the programmes are included in an audit of the intervention and report that they enjoy and value the sessions, and they are aware of the purpose and positive outcomes attained.

⁷ Regional Integrated Support for Education in Northern Ireland

4. Primary School Case Study

This large primary school is situated in an area of high unemployment and social deprivation. Almost three-quarters of the pupil's avail of free school meals, and one-third are on the Special Educational Needs register.

The school values highly teacher insight and judgement when considering the range of evidence for pupil engagement in learning, educational and social strengths and needs. A programme to address negative attitudes to school has been part of the school assessment programme since 2015, acknowledging a strong belief that pupil's educational experiences are heavily influenced by the attitudes they bring to their learning, including their sense of aspiration, their personal roles in their learning and the feelings they have about themselves. Whole-staff training in the approach was completed with the programme being delivered to the pupils by classroom assistants under the direction of the SENCO.

Pupils are prioritised for support programmes based on a combination of scores highlighting need in both literacy and maths along with attitudes to learning, and teacher judgement. The support provision generally involves 2 or 3 sessions per week for 12 weeks. One session focuses totally on the programme with additional sessions combining this with maths and/or literacy support. There is close liaison between support and classroom staff. Regular assessment of learning and progress is undertaken by the staff throughout, including English and mathematics, and an early intervention literacy programme was introduced recently for Yr 3 to Yr 7. There is ongoing evaluation of the programme with appropriate modifications made to promote effectiveness.

The outcomes included increased pupil confidence; improved pupil attitude to self, school and learning; long-term improvements have been noted in overall attitudes to school and there are improved maths and English standardised scores for many pupils. There has been enhanced professional development of classroom assistants; positive relationship building with staff and very positive reflections and evaluations of programme from both pupils and parents.

5. Primary School Case Study

The school is in an area of social deprivation and 40% of the pupils have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Just over three-quarters of the pupils avail of free school meals, and two-thirds of the pupils are on the Special Educational Needs register.

Traditionally, there have been low expectations of parents for their children in this school. The principal has worked to change the attitudes of parents by holding meetings and inviting past pupils who have completed their GCSE exams to come back and talk about their educational experiences and aspirations. The school is a family support hub, where families referred to, for example, the Child and Parent Support project (CAPS), provided by the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO), can be supported within the school. The school also runs parenting programmes, for example Families Connect, Getting Ready to Learn, Stay and Play, and a Save the Children programme.

The school provides a wide range of support programmes for the pupils from Y 1 onwards, including the COMET⁸ programme for speech and language, counselling, music therapy, and a nurture room for seven pupils where Boxall profiling and strategies are used. The efficacy of the interventions is analysed collectively by all the staff, and the information and outcomes of the pupils are discussed in detail. All the resulting outcomes are disseminated informally and formally throughout the school, to inform further the practice of teachers and assistants.

Parental and pupil expectations have risen significantly and approximately 9 pupils now aspire to attain places in a grammar school.

6. Primary School Case Study

The school is situated in an area of social deprivation with one-third of pupils receiving free school meals. In addition one-quarter of pupils are on the Special Educational Needs register, and one quarter of the pupils have English as an additional language.

The school identify the difficulties experienced by a pupil beginning the school through close liaison with the feeder nursery and pre-schools, through discussions with parents, and teacher observations. The school has a notable proportion of pupils with English as an additional language with varying understanding and use of the English language. Where a child does not make progress in meeting their individual targets, the staff explore the reasons for this, led by the well-trained, experienced and skilful SENCO. Strategies from a wide range of interventions are used, and progress monitored closely. The efficacy of interventions used are analysed for each individual pupil.

A pupil beginning the school in Yr 1 presented as having difficulties with gross and fine motor skills, general attention and concentration, and inappropriate anti-social behaviours. The pupil had difficulties retaining high frequency words and phoneme and grapheme knowledge. A Record of Concern was raised in Yr 1 and a referral was made to RISE NI. In Yr 2, both physiotherapy and occupational therapy became involved with the pupil, and following one year of intensive individual support alongside a whole-class attention and listening programme, the pupil's gross and fine motor skills were assessed as being within the expected limits. The pupil's inappropriate behaviours were simultaneously addressed with the assistance of the EA Behaviour Support Team, and following an individualised programme of ignoring negative behaviours and praising and rewarding when the pupil behaved appropriately and achieved the behaviour targets set by staff. Newly acquired orthoscopic lenses are reported by the pupil as being helpful when reading, and there are also early indicators of improvements in automaticity in reading. The school continue to implement RISE NI sensory strategies whilst a referral has been made to the Specific Literacy Support Service.

The school and the pupil's parents have noted significant improvements in behaviour and engagement in learning. The pupil has improved in literacy, from a reading baseline of Yr 1.0 to Yr 1.2, and has also improved in spelling.

⁸ Communication and Education Together, Belfast Education and Library Board, 2003

7. Post-Primary School Case Study

This school is a large all-ability school, with one-fifth of the pupils on the Special Education Needs register, and one quarter of the pupils receive free school meals.

The school facilitated transition meetings for a transferring Yr 7 pupil with particularly poor communication, attention and social skills. The EA Autism Advisory Intervention Service provided support for the pupil as part of a group and one week's transition support during summer. As the pupil settled into Yr 8, the staff understood the importance of modelling good communication and social skills by speaking to the pupil around the school. The staff were also guided to converse slowly and wait longer for a response from the pupil, to affirm the pupil's achievements, and to have realistic but high expectations of the pupil. Pupils were informed how to respond appropriately when this pupil needed to pace around the playground.

Additional supportive strategies used included the use of a parent school communication book to facilitate the timely communication of key information to the school each Monday, for example, issues that might have arisen over the weekend. In addition the use of non-verbal discreet prompts to quietly bring the pupil back on track when agitated, and the identification of a quiet place for the pupil to go to in school if stressed proved to be very helpful for the pupil. Training for all staff by EA Behaviour Support Team and the educational psychologist was prioritised. The school also focused on matching the curriculum to the needs of the pupil, with special guidance for the pupil when choosing a blend of vocational subjects and academic subjects. The parents used the parent school communication book consistently and communicated effectively with the school. Home work was communicated to the parents and a dedicated classroom assistant helped with recording the home work in Yr 8-10. In Yr 11 the pupil was encouraged and supported to become more independent.

The pupil's progress was monitored formally each month through the use of the whole school assessment system and the school maintained close links with the parents. The pupil successfully completed the GCSE examinations and now attends an Inspire to Work course in an FE college.

8. Post-Primary School Case Study

The school is a large all-ability school on the outskirts of a city, a third of pupils on the special educational need register, and a quarter receive free school meals.

The school leadership and staff demonstrate a strong and dedicated commitment to meeting the needs of all their pupils. There is careful organisation for the senior members of staff to have on-going liaison with the 60 feeder primary schools, so that the staff are aware of any difficulties and strengths each pupil may have before they begin the post-primary school.

The school has extensive and detailed organisation of a wide range of support programmes used to support the pupils. The EA provide the school with funding to provide additional support within the school, rather than from EA peripatetic services. The school employs a learning mentor to guide those pupils struggling with the organisation of their independent learning; the pupils value this support. The school believes this arrangement enables them to support their pupils in a more timely and efficient manner. The school staff enable the pupils to contribute to, and review meaningfully their individual education plans.

The progress made by pupils is tracked meticulously, and each intervention used is analysed regularly to ensure it is effective for each cohort of pupils. The staff share good practice and effective strategies through an open door system for the SENCO, and planned in-depth learning conversations amongst staff.

The pupils benefit from the extensive provision for the extremely wide range of pupil needs and, as a consequence, the school attracts large numbers of pupils with special educational needs, presenting the school with extensive organisational challenges.

9. Primary School Case Study

This large primary school is situated in a residential area of a city; one-fifth of the pupils receive free school meals, and one-sixth are on the Special Educational Needs register.

The literacy and numeracy needs of a pupil were initially highlighted by the class teacher in Yr 1. The pupil was placed on the SEN register at Stage 2 in Yr 2.

The pupil's parents were consulted and an individual education plan (IEP) was drawn by the SENCO and teacher. The pupil joined both the Yr 2 literacy and numeracy groups withdrawal support provided by the school, as well as receiving differentiated classwork. In Yr 3, the pupil continued at Stage 2 and made good progress in both areas, particularly literacy. In Yr 4, the pupil had additional support from a designated classroom assistant whose responsibility was to support literacy and numeracy. The pupil started an in-house literacy support programme and made good progress.

In term two of Yr 5, the pupil was assessed as no longer requiring additional support for literacy or numeracy due to the significant progress made, the SENCO continues to monitor the pupil's progress.

10. Primary School Case Study

The school is situated in a large town with significant social difficulties; over one-half of the pupils receive free school meals, and a quarter of its pupils are on the Special Educational Needs register.

The teacher identified literacy skills as an area for development for a pupil in the foundation stage. Meetings were arranged with the pupil's parents to explain the difficulties, the intended interventions, and how they could support and help their child with literacy.

Literacy intervention commenced and the pupil's needs were formally assessed using materials from a literacy support programme. Initial data was used by the support teacher for literacy for a baseline assessment and to create targets which were shared with parents, the class teacher, and the pupil. Staff used literacy support strategies and followed a phonics programme, together with a prioritised focus on high frequency words. Literacy support for this pupil followed the format of reading a familiar book, phonic work, reading and spelling high frequency words, writing, and reading a new book at the end of the session. Homework was also a key feature of the support programme, with suitable reading and practical materials sent home each evening to embed further the effective strategies. The child's self-confidence grew appreciably.

The classroom provision and support programme has resulted in the pupil progressing in all prioritised areas.

11. Primary School Case Study

This primary school is situated in a small town, one-quarter of the pupils receive free school meals, and just under one-quarter are on the Special Educational Needs register.

The school, along with its formal Shared Education partner school, planned to dedicate joint funding to addressing the literacy needs of their Yr 3 and Yr 4 pupils. A team of classroom assistants were trained in literacy and mathematics support programmes, and in the area of supporting pupils with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). A weekly format was agreed for the programme which involved three days specialist support for the identified pupils in their own schools, one joint teaching day and one planning day when one assistant from each school would meet to review pupils outcomes and plan for the week ahead. The support given in the host school involved daily 30 minute one-to-one or small group sessions. Planning days were also earmarked for teachers to work together and monthly reviews of the project were built in for the SENCO of both schools. The core literacy and numeracy resources and teaching strategies were shared between the schools, and they agreed on how the pupils would be tested pre, during and post their involvement in the programme.

All pupils demonstrated progress as a result of taking part in the programme, with 95% making considerable progress over a period of two years. The school has benefitted particularly well from the professional development opportunities expanding its professional capacity to meet more effectively the needs of pupils with SEN, particularly for literacy, and from collaboration between the two schools. Excellent working relationships have developed amongst the members of staff in both schools.

12. Primary School Case Study

This primary school is situated in a small village, one-quarter of the pupils receive free school meals, and one-quarter are on the Special Educational Needs register.

A pupil joined the school in Yr 4 presenting as very shy with low self-esteem; the school added the pupil to stage 1 on the SEN register. In discussions with the school, the pupil's parents expressed concerns that their child's needs had not been met in the previous school. The school assessed the pupil in cognitive, literacy, mathematics alongside attitudes to school and self-confidence, which indicated low ability in both maths and literacy and issues with both academic competence and engagement in learning.

A decision was made by the school to focus initially on building the pupil's confidence and self-esteem in order to develop positive attitudes to learning. The pupil was placed on "The Infinity Programme", for twelve weeks. This programme has been devised by school to motivate engagement and enjoyment in learning. There was specific focus addressing the pupil's three lowest scoring areas: feelings about school, learner confidence, and attitude to attendance. The pupil's interests and strengths, including sports, were used extensively throughout the programme to motivate and engage. Practical activities were suggested to the parents and intensive one-to-one intervention and mentoring was provided by trained staff.

The pupil made significant holistic progress. The pupil evaluation of the programme was highly positive and stated that they now feel good about school and learning and likes being involved in discussing the future. The impact of the programme was also very apparent in the classroom with the pupil engaging confidently, being able to read more high frequency words and making good progress in maths. The parents reported that their child has a more positive frame of mind and completes homework more readily. There was significant progress made, including engagement in learning and self-esteem. The pupil's assessment in literacy score moved from 84 to 89, and mathematics assessment moved from 80 to 98.

13. Primary School Case Study

This large primary school is situated in a town; one tenth of the pupils receive free school meals and just under one tenth are on the Special Educational Needs register. The school is full to capacity and has few dedicated staff for SEN due to budget constraints.

This school targeted in-class support for a group of pupils with low attainment. This approach is part of a whole-school focus on teamwork and shared accountability for meeting the needs of all the pupils, including those with SEN. Classroom assistants are trained in delivering literacy support strategies which are used from Yr 2 onwards.

A strategic decision was taken that the class teacher would personally work with the children needing support in a withdrawal group, whilst the withdrawal teacher would simultaneously teach the rest of the class. Consequently, the pupils feel highly secure and comfortable with their class teacher, and in addition, the class teacher knows the particular difficulties each pupil experiences, along with their interests and strengths.

The changes have resulted in the pupils being very receptive to learning and attaining improved outcomes.

The pupils in the focus group cited have made significant gains in both literacy and numeracy.

14. Primary School Case Study

This large school is situated in a town surrounded by countryside. Just under one-sixth of pupils are on the Special Educational Needs register, and just under one-sixth receive free school meals.

The school leadership has skilfully built the expertise of its staff in literacy and literacy difficulties, and three foundation stage teachers have been trained in literacy support strategies.

A pupil in this school was highlighted in Yr 3 as having specific literacy difficulties based on the close observation of the class teacher and subsequent liaison with the SENCO. The pupil was placed on Stage 1 of the SEN register. By term 3 of that same year, an application for placement at Stage 3 had been made by the school to the EA, and, as a result of EA assessments, the pupil received two specialist lessons per week with the EA Specific Literacy Difficulties Service for a period of one year. As the support progressed, the pupil made clear progress and the school eventually moved them down to Stage 2 on the SEN register.

The in-school support was consciously maintained on a twice-weekly basis, and by the time the pupil reached Yr 6, the school's data, along with professional teacher judgement, confirmed that the pupil was making good and sustained progress. The pupil was taken off the SEN register completely in Yr 7.

15. Primary School Case Study

The school is an Irish Medium school on the outskirts of a city. One-quarter of the pupils are on the school SEN register, and almost two-thirds receive free school meals. The school's overarching focus in addressing the needs of pupils with SEN is that it is the whole-school team responsibility as opposed to that of an individual teacher.

The school encourages and monitors closely each pupil's attendance. The senior management and leadership in the school are actively involved in supporting the identification of need and in monitoring the pupils' progress and their outcomes. Classroom assistants are trained alongside the teaching staff in a wide variety of strategies to support learning. Literacy and numeracy support programmes are delivered by classroom assistants, overseen by the SENCO. The pupils are involved, where appropriate, in evaluating their own work and are aware of their targets.

The school has robust evidence through tracking and assessment data that almost all of the pupils' progress well as a result of the school support programmes. The school is able to demonstrate clear evidence of the link between attendance and the progress made by pupils.

16. Primary School Case Study

This primary school is situated in a large town; three-quarters of the pupils have English as an additional language, and just over one-quarter of the pupils have a special educational need.

The leadership and staff show a dedicated commitment to their pupils and provide a caring and supportive learning environment. The staff are skilled in identifying pupils with special educational needs at an early stage, and provide highly effective support for these pupils, alongside support for English language. Key to this comprehensive support are the highly trained and experienced teachers and classroom assistants, some of whom are able to talk to the pupils in their own languages. The school values the use of a talking and listening programme and individual reading support in particular, provided both in the classroom and through withdrawal sessions. The pupils are provided with frequent withdrawal sessions, and additional support in the classroom which impacts significantly on their pace of learning. The pupils' progress is monitored closely and evaluated regularly. The school provides extensive support for parents, through workshops and regular meetings, developing highly positive working relationships.

The outcomes of the pupils are very positive, and by the time the pupils reach Yr 7, all can read fluently, and achieve well in mathematics.

17. Primary School Case Study

This school is situated in a small town; just over one-quarter of the pupils receive free school meals, and just under one-quarter are on the Special Educational Needs register.

A pupil began the school in Yr 1, difficulties had been highlighted during the transition work undertaken with the pupil's former playgroup including managing transitions, taking part in group work, play and following directions. By the end of term 1 in the school, the pupil was exhibiting aggressive behaviours. Following referral to the EA, a Statement of Special Educational Needs was issued in Yr 1, on account of the severity of the pupil's needs. The pupil was diagnosed with ADHD.

The school requested immediate consultation with Educational Psychology and made referrals to appropriate outside agencies, including the Behaviour Support Service. The school requested support from the Multi Agency Support Team (MAST, now replaced by RISE NI). A total of six meetings were held in the first year for the pupil. Detailed observations of behaviours were kept to inform a risk management plan, positive behaviour plan and future planning and support.

Whole-school training was completed in attachment issues, nurture skills, risk management, and positive behaviour strategies with a focus on early years, with Team Teach training for positive handling strategies. Music and dance are used extensively for all the pupils in the school, including the pupils experiencing difficulties with their learning. The school evidences the increased engagement of pupils as a result. In addition for the pupil in this case study, a nurture and play space was created within the school and the pupil enjoyed the provision of play therapy. The pupil's IEP was amended regularly in response to risk assessments and ongoing evaluations of progress. Strong links were developed by the school with the parents.

18. Primary School Case Study

This large primary school is situated in a country town and has one-quarter of pupils on the Special Educational Needs register; just under one-third receive free school meals.

The principal and Senco are particularly skilled and experienced in working with the pupils with SEN, and sustain a strong focus on this area in all whole school development planning. The school revised their whole provision for SEN, led by the new principal and SENCO, with active engagement and participation by the rest of the staff. They reviewed and changed a system for large group withdrawal sessions for pupils from several classes at the same time, to small group withdrawal for specific, targeted difficulties.

A wide range of professional development courses for SEN have been arranged, or accessed, by the school, for example autism, sensory regulation, numeracy support, literacy for pupils with SEN, and positive behaviour strategies. The staff are well-trained and experienced in teaching pupils with a wide range of complex learning difficulties. In addition, there is team-teaching in a small number of classes by a specialist SEN teacher and the class teacher which is particularly effective in supporting the pupils with SEN within the classroom. Parents are involved thoroughly in the support provided for their child by the school, with workshops and equipment provided for them to use in the home with their children.

The pupils make very good progress; this is thoroughly tracked and analysed by the senior management team, and shared with all staff. The efficacy of the support approaches used is monitored and analysed for each pupil and as a whole, to inform future provision and planning.

19. Primary School Case Study

This primary school is located in a small village, one-quarter of the pupils receive free school meals and one-sixth are on the Special Educational Needs register.

A pupil joined the school in the second term of Yr 1, the parents felt that the previous school had not met their child's needs. The pupil presented with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), possible attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and autism. The pupil was very unsettled in class with frequent emotional outbursts and conflicts with pupils in class and the wider school. The pupil's behaviour inhibited greatly his ability to learn.

The school requested and received an educational psychology assessment; in addition the EA provided an advisory support programme for the pupil for two years. The pupil received the school's own intensive individual literacy withdrawal support of four 30 minute sessions per week over a seven week programme resulting in increased standardised score from 84 to 93. A referral was made to the EA for Stage 3 literacy support which provided Specific Literacy Support for seven months. The pupil was provided with sensory motor movement sessions for three years. In addition, an individualised transition programme was informed well by an occupational therapist from the HealthTrust.

The pupil developed very well in attention, listening, balance, gross and fine motor skills. The pupil settled appropriately into KS2, remaining well motivated towards learning; standardised scores from Yr 3-Yr 7 outline very good progress. The pupil transferred to a local grammar school for Yr 8.

20. Primary School Case Study

This small primary school is situated in a village; just under one-half of the pupils are on the Special Educational Needs register and just over one-third avail of free school meals.

The overall small number of enrolled pupils, and high numbers of pupils with special education needs has put considerable pressure on the school regarding prioritising pupils to see the Educational Psychologist for assessment. For example, last year the school prioritised eight pupils, however, under the time allocation model for Educational Psychologist time, only two pupils were assessed. One pupil received a Statement for Special Educational Needs and one pupil received a Stage 3 report.

The school uses a wide range of early interventions to address attention and listening skills, motor processing difficulties, and speech and language difficulties. The school provides dyslexia screening, reading support and a reading and spelling ICT programme for those pupils who require additional support for SEN. The leadership of the school monitor and evaluate extensively, consequently the school is rich in data which they use well to inform and improve further their practice.

In the year 2016/17 16 pupils required withdrawal support for literacy, 68.75% of these pupils made progress; 14 pupils received withdrawal support for numeracy, and 72% made progress.

21. Post Primary School Case Study

This school is a large, all ability school situated outside a large town; just over one-quarter of the pupils are on the Special Educational Needs register, and approximately one-third receive free school meals.

The school have been enabled by the EA to employ a teacher instead of two classroom assistants for SEN. The school value this flexibility and believe that it enhances their provision. The SENCO is out of the classroom in a full-time administrative role, focusing on tracking and monitoring pupil progress, and managing the deployment of the classroom assistants who focus on supporting pupils to develop resilience and independence skills.

The school leadership and staff exhibit an extremely strong commitment and determination to include and provide very well for all the children and young people in their community. They demonstrate a determination to help their pupils overcome any barriers to learning they may have. In particular, the school has investigated the precise nature of the cohort of pupils in KS3 who struggle with literacy skills. The school believes that the pupils need better language and comprehension skills; whilst they may be able to read passages and books, they are not always able to comprehend or draw inference from their reading.

The school has invested in providing classroom assistant support for literacy and numeracy before school, from 8am, for blocks of six to eight weeks. The school provides a Sunday evening session from 5-8 pm for pupils to prepare for the week, and a Thursday evening session from 4-7 pm for pupils to consolidate their learning; around 140 pupils attend each session. The school also holds sessions for pupils on how to learn effectively.

The progress of the pupils is tracked and analysed in detail; the pupil numbers on the SEN Register have reduced from 37.5% to 25.8% this year. The school cites an upward trend of 36% in achievement of five grades at A*-C at GCSE, and a 27% upward trend in achievement of five grades at A*-C including English and mathematics for 2016.

22. Post Primary School Case Study

This post-primary school is situated in a large town; one-third of the pupils receive free school meals, and one-third are on the Special Educational Needs register.

The school had a pupil with autism, obsessive compulsive disorder and severe anxiety. By the end of the pupil's time in the school, the pupil attained seven GCSE passes. On taking up a vocational course at the local college, the pupil found it extremely difficult to complete the practical, technical drawing element of the course. The school leadership decided to continue to support the pupil for the duration of the college course.

A team was developed to support the pupil from both college and school staff. The school SENCO liaised closely with the school-based teacher, form tutor, year head, tutor in the vocational college and a clinical psychologist. Arrangements were made for the pupil to complete the drawing element of the course on school premises. The school staff were able to communicate effectively with the pupil who did not like raised voices and preferred talking on a one-to-one basis. The school provided a classroom assistant who was trained as a social-skills tutor and provided a social skills group that the pupil could attend. The school staff were able to brief the relevant staff on how to support effectively the pupil within the college. The teachers discussed lesson plans in detail with the classroom assistant and visual aids and practical examples were also used well.

The SENCO developed good working relationships with the Community and Adolescents Mental Health Service (CAMHS) team; as a result the pupil was able to access the clinical psychologist to discuss strategies and issues pertaining to school and college. In addition, the EA services were highly supportive of the pupil and staff.

The school was successful in maintaining the systems of support for the pupil for the duration of his education, enabling the pupil to complete the college course. The school's in-house SEN support has developed further to include the SENCO training for the teachers in supporting individual pupil's needs, and observing and monitoring SEN provision. The teachers share effective practice in weekly 'teach-meet' sessions. Classroom assistants provide the SENCO with weekly records of support in relation to pupil progress to enable close monitoring of progress.

23. Post-Primary School Case Study

This school is a selective post-primary school for boys located in a large town; just under one-sixth of the pupils receive free school meals, and six per cent of pupils are on the Special Educational Needs register.

The school uses action research in a two year cycle. The research is based on choosing one of its pupils who has experienced difficulties with an aspect of learning. A small team of staff carry out the research activity before presenting their findings to the rest of the school staff. The school team use the DE ASPIRE self-evaluation framework.

The staff focus on one of the pupil's targets, following analysis of the precise difficulty they plan, carry out and observe a specific learning and teaching strategy with the pupil over a period of four to six weeks. During this period, the staff gather evidence; this includes classroom assistants writing observations in classes. All planning, pro-forma and evidence are up-loaded onto the C2K network for staff to read. At the end of the time period, the staff evaluate the pupil outcome.

There is formal dissemination of the action research projects within the school in order to share good practice and learning points. Two cycles of using this strategy have been completed, with different staff taking the lead each time. The school intends to continue to use such action research regularly as a means to evaluate thoroughly their practice in a range of areas, and to share the subsequent learning points.

24. Primary School Case Study

This large primary school is located in a large town and almost one-third of pupils receive free school meals, whilst just under one-fifth are on the Special Educational Needs register.

This school focused on meeting the evolving needs of a pupil with Down Syndrome as the pupil moved from having primarily physical needs in their Nursery, to the highly supported and successful current placement in Yr 4. The key factor, as prioritised by the principal and SENCO, was raising staff awareness and professional competencies in the various areas associated with Down Syndrome and developmental delay. The school staff have knowledge of a range of learning styles, strategies for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, sensory education, communication through Makaton, and Team Teach positive handling strategies.

The principal also prioritised the formation of a school “team around the child” which included the teacher, SEN classroom assistant, SENCO and principal. Regular meetings were held to discuss and evaluate progress and to explore timely solutions to potential learning barriers for the pupil. Liaison with all relevant multidisciplinary agencies was also prioritised, as was communication with parents. With an effective support team in place, the pupil moved successfully through Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1, with necessary adjustments to learning strategies and/or resources being made promptly, for example, an individual work station, a visual daily schedule, sand timers, a daily home-school communication book, and the refurbishment of a sensory space. Staff also had a key focus on the pupil working towards independence in a highly inclusive environment.

Addressing a key emerging difficulty with behaviour remains a focus for the school. The consistent use of agreed strategies including the use of scripts and visual cues, along with praise and distraction have proved successful. The pupil is meaningfully included in all aspects of school life including performances, assemblies, sporting activities, and is making steady progress with literacy and numeracy.

25. Post-Primary School Case Study

This non-selective post-primary school for girls is located in a city and almost a quarter of the pupils are on the Special Educational Needs register; over a half receive free school meals.

The school have developed a whole-school, holistic approach to monitoring the progress of individual pupils by creating a section on SIMS⁹ which links the pastoral and the academic teams, making non-confidential data easily accessible to every teacher in the school. As a result all staff are better informed about any difficulties individual pupils have. They are fully informed about the strategies that have already been used and those that are planned for the future. They are also aware of other agencies that are involved with pupils, this enables the school and individual class teachers to meet pupils’ individual needs more effectively.

Each teacher uses a lesson monitor, usually a classroom assistant, to note comments relevant to the individual pupil’s behaviour and application to learning. Appropriate rewards and sanctions are applied and this is followed up by relevant senior staff for example the Head of Department or Year Head. This system enables careful monitoring of punctuality and attendance, behaviour, preparation for school, and homework concerns, pastoral issues and parental concerns. The various additional documents linked to SIMS which are used relate to outside agency information, school reports, individual education plans, and care plans. The information from assessment data is used to monitor pupil progress and learning pathways.

At each pupil’s annual review of progress, careers advice and discussion are included, to build and sustain career planning and positive aspirations and engagement with school.

⁹ School information management system

26. Post-Primary School Case Study

This non-selective post-primary school is located on the outskirts of a city; just under a half of the pupils are on the Special Educational Needs register, and just under a half receive free school meals.

In this case study, the expertise of a particular form teacher was used to enhance the support given to a pupil who, along with dyslexia and general literacy difficulties, presented with poor confidence and very low self-esteem.

The form teacher is a member of the school's SEN team and the team provided an extra layer of knowledge and support for the pupil. A range of withdrawal and in-class literacy and numeracy support was organised and provided by the form teacher, the literacy support teacher and a classroom assistant. An individualised timetable enabled the pupil to have one period per week to proof read and draft pieces of work prior to submission. The literacy support teacher liaised effectively with the English teacher, ensuring that work was co-ordinated and well-targeted for the pupil, and appropriate support was provided during controlled assessments for English. In KS4 and sixth form, literacy support continued and became highly focused on the pupil's need. The support teacher met regularly with the subject specialists to facilitate support for the pupil in the literacy based elements of coursework and examinations. The pupil attained very well at A level and is presently studying for a foundation degree.

The school appointed a youth worker to support pupils with difficulties in managing their own anger and subsequent behaviour. This strategy has proved to be particularly successful as there have been no pupil referrals to Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) since the appointment.

27. Post-Primary School Case Study

This non-selective post-primary school is located on the outskirts of a city. Forty per cent of the pupils receive free school meals, and forty-five percent are on the Special Educational Needs register.

A Yr 10 pupil transferred to the school from another post-primary school, resulting from difficulties settling in the former school; attendance had been poor. The pupil had autism and presented as anxious. The parents were very supportive of the new school and worked proactively with the school and the Education Welfare Officer from the onset.

The SENCO developed high levels of understanding and support through whole school support from the Middletown Centre for Autism, and by working very closely with the pupil. A reduced timetable was agreed when the pupil started at the school. The SENCO met the pupil each morning to assess their readiness for learning. The pupil worked in a small classroom in the ASD unit with a small number of pupils. On occasions, when the SENCO felt that the pupil was ready, they joined the mainstream class for lessons. A classroom assistant was always available in the small teaching room to support the pupil and to de-escalate problems quickly should they arise.

A quiet room is also available for use when the pupil is anxious and needs a quiet environment. The SENCO and form tutor have developed strong working relationships with the parents and they remain supportive of the school. A flexible approach to the needs of the pupil is shown by all involved, for example difficulties going to the school dining hall for lunch. The SENCO, arranged for the pupil along with another pupil to have lunch at a table near to the dining hall. Gradually the pupil felt confident enough to join a small group of pupils to have lunch in the dining hall with support and supervision from assistants.

Gradually the pupil felt confident enough to increase the hours of attendance and is currently in KS4. The pupil is now settled and happy in the school and attendance is good. The pupil's parents report that their child is more content and calmer.

28. Post-Primary School Case Study

This non-selective post-primary school for girls is located in a large town. Almost one-half of the pupils avail of free school meals, and one-fifth of the pupils are on the Special Educational Needs register.

The staff for SEN, mathematics and English work closely together to identify pupils who are having difficulties with their learning. Pupils who are dis-applied from French lessons have additional English and maths classes. The school staff have completed extensive training for differentiation within the classroom. The school runs a Count, Read: Succeed numeracy group for KS3 pupils. In addition, the school extensive support for literacy and numeracy through withdrawal targeted support groups, and an after-school literacy support group. The school involves parents, sharing the programmes used by the school.

Data is tracked rigorously by staff, and is used to inform future school planning. From 2014 to 2017, the outcomes for pupils completing the Count, Read: Succeed numeracy programme evidences in detail very substantial improvements; in two of the three years completed every pupil made progress.

29. Primary Case Study

This large primary school is situated in a residential area of a city. Just over a half of the pupils receive free school meals, and just under a quarter are on the Special Educational Needs register.

A pupil enrolled at the school in Yr 2. The pupil presented as very shy with little or no confidence, speech was very underdeveloped with no sight vocabulary or phonic recognition. The school explained the Code of Practice to the parents, and following discussions and consideration, the pupil was placed on the SEN register at Stage 2. The SENCO supported the pupil for 15 minutes each day, working on literacy skills and letter recognition in particular.

The staff were keen to get the parents actively involved and asked them to work each night with their child on sight vocabulary as set for homework. The school used a multi-sensory approach, carefully differentiated classwork, and a computer based literacy programme to support the pupil. After two terms, no sustained progress was evident, and the school contacted the EA Educational Psychology. This assessment resulted in weekly social, emotional and behaviour difficulties (SEBD) outreach support from the EA for one year.

As a result of this combination of support structures, the pupil attained a sight vocabulary of 250 words. The pupil is currently in Yr 6 and reading skills are progressing well.

30. Post-Primary School Case Study

This post-primary school is located in a small town. Just under a half of the pupils receive free school meals, and one-quarter are on the Special Educational Needs register.

A Yr 9 pupil transferred to the school from another post-primary. The pupil presented as highly anxious with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and dyslexia. The pupil's parents approached the school with serious concerns regarding welfare and education.

The SENCO arranged a multi-disciplinary meeting to discuss the range of the pupil's difficulties and strategies that could be used by teachers in the school. As a consequence, the pupil was able to access Cognitive Behavioural Therapy through the EA. Access to counselling within the school was arranged, and additional counselling was provided in the community. The pupil was given a personalised 'tool box' of strategies to help manage behaviours and daily routines. A mentoring programme was provided by the school to meet the precise needs and preferences of the pupil. In addition, a quiet, easily accessible space was created within school where the pupil could relax whenever anxious or agitated. The school extended the mentoring support by funding a very experienced retired teacher to work with the pupil and to monitor well-being and progress.

By Yr 11, the pupil had grown steadily in confidence, and is now considerably more socially integrated. The pupil was awarded the school KS3 Endeavour Award at a public prize night. The pupil's academic profile has strengthened considerably and they are on track to achieve 6 GCSE passes at grades A-C.

Inspection method and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework which guides inspection and self-evaluation within special schools is available on the ETI website. [The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework \(ISEF\): Special Education | Education Training Inspectorate](#)

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting held by one of the inspection team with each participating school;
- a discussion of the school's provision for special educational needs, the use of interventions and the resulting outcomes;
- scrutiny of associated documentation; and
- a discussion of the practice in the range of schools visited amongst members of the inspection team.

Quantitative terms

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on Outcomes for learners, on the Quality of provision and on Leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Inspection Outcome

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when indicating what will happen after the inspection:

The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. ETI will continue to monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. ETI will continue to monitor how the organisation sustains improvement
The organisation needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement which include the need to... There will be a formal follow-up inspection in...
The organisation needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the need to... There will be a formal follow-up inspection in...

Participating Schools

Abbey Grammar School - Newry
Ballyoran Primary School - Portadown
Bunscoile an tSleibhe Dhuibh - Belfast
Carrick Primary School - Warrenpoint
Cumran Primary School - Clough
Currie Primary School - Belfast
Gibson Primary School - Omagh
Holy Trinity Primary School - Belfast
Lagan College - Belfast
Lisneal College - Londonderry
Longtower Primary School - Londonderry
Pond Park Primary School - Lisburn
Portadown Integrated Primary School - Portadown
Presentation Primary School - Craigavon
Priory College - Holywood
Seagoe Primary School - Portadown
Slemish Integrated College - Ballymena
St Clare's Abbey Primary School - Newry
St Columbanus College - Bangor
St Conor's Primary School - Omagh
St Dympna's Primary School - Omagh
St Eithna's Primary School - Londonderry
St Genevieve's High School - Belfast
St Joseph's High School - Crossmaglen
St Malachy's Primary School - Castlewellan
St Malachy's Primary School - Newry
St Mary's Primary School - Killyleagh
St Mary's High School - Newry
St Patrick's and St Bridgid's Primary School - Ballycastle
St Paul's High School - Bessbrook

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Report of a survey of Special
Educational Needs in mainstream
schools

February 2019

