

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SCHOOLS WORKING GROUP REPORT

Consultation Response Form

Launch date: 13 March 2003

The closing date for this consultation is: 3 July 2003

Your comments must reach us by that date.

An electronic version of this form can be accessed at
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/>

department for

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Note when completing Electronically Use: • **tab** key, **only** to access input boxes;
• **scroll** bar to navigate the form;
• **mouse** to access hyperlink.

The information you send to us may need to be passed to colleagues within the Department for Education and Skills and/or published in a summary of responses received in response to this consultation. We will assume that you are content for us to do this, and that if you are replying by e-mail, your consent overrides any confidentiality disclaimer that is generated by your organisation's IT system, unless you specifically include a request to the contrary in the main text of your submission to us.

The Department may, in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, make available on public request, individual consultation responses. This will extend to your comments unless you inform us that you wish them to remain confidential.

Please insert 'X' if you want us to keep your response confidential

Name

Organisation (if applicable)

Address

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact **Jane Houghton** at:

Telephone: **0207 925 6881**
Email: **jane.houghton@dfes.gsi.gov.uk**

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact:

Telephone: **01928 794888**
Fax: **01928 794 311**
Email: **consultation.unit@dfes.gsi.gov.uk**

Please insert 'X' in **one** of the following boxes that best describes you as a respondent.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maintained school | <input type="checkbox"/> Maintained special school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional organisation | <input type="checkbox"/> Local Education Authority (LEA) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health/social services | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Voluntary organisation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent | <input type="checkbox"/> Governor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non maintained/independent special school | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) ▶ | <input type="text"/> |

Question 1

What specific action could we take to embed strong leadership in all special schools?

Comments:

Strong leadership in special schools is shown by those heads and staff working towards well planned and appropriately resourced inclusion of their pupils in mainstream schools. The Department should therefore strongly encourage all special schools to draw up plans to increase the inclusion of their pupils in ordinary schools, and for these plans to envisage the gradual closure of all special schools within a reasonable time frame, for example, within ten years.

The existence of special schools remains as the key obstacle to the progress and development to inclusion. The Government and many other agencies such as LEAs, voluntary organisations etc, have declared a commitment to inclusion; since special schools are in contradiction to this philosophy, then strong leadership in special schools demands that heads, staff, governors, parents and pupils work clearly towards a phased programme of de-segregation, involving a restructuring of the mainstream sector as pupils, staff and resources move from special to ordinary schools.

Question 2

Do you agree that the Working Group's recommendations to introduce additional SEN related training modules for headteachers through the National College for School Leadership, and to develop virtual networks, will help promote better leadership?

Agree

Disagree

Not Sure

Comments:

We would agree if the NCSL was actively working towards the goals outlined in our answer to Question 1. However, if the NCSL training modules have the intention of supporting and enhancing the existence of the special school structure, then we strongly disagree with the Working Group's recommendations.

Question 3

Do you agree with the Working Group's proposal to promote the use and understanding of P scales?

Agree

Disagree

Not Sure

Comments:

We strongly disagree with the P scales as currently structured because they are based on a medical model of disability, which is now outdated, inappropriate and rejected by disabled people in favour of the social model. The recommendation does not acknowledge the controversial nature of the P scales themselves.

Question 4

Do you agree with the Working Group's proposal that special school teachers should take a leading role in the "Time for Standards" agenda which updates the policy framework in England on school workforce remodelling, and sets out a proposed new role for support staff?

Agree

Disagree

Not Sure

Comments:

In the move towards increasing inclusion and restructured, properly resourced mainstream schools, we feel strongly that the agenda has to be set by those committed to ending segregation, not by those defending the on-going existence of special schools. The skills and expertise among heads and staff of special schools varies greatly; there are examples of pioneering work done by special schools committed to ending the discriminatory segregation of pupils in these schools and to working with mainstream colleagues to achieve inclusion for all. However, there are also very many more special school heads and staff who reject the move towards inclusion, so we feel they should not take a leading role in the 'Time for Standards' agenda.

Any investment in special schools must be geared towards their eventual closure; investment in pupils in special schools must be geared towards their transfer to the mainstream; investment in special school staff must be geared towards their eventual role in supporting pupils in the mainstream.

Question 5

What do you think could be done to encourage more young teachers to enter the special schools sector?

Comments:

The only way that young teachers should enter the special school sector is on the understanding that they are taking part in a transition of special school pupils moving to the mainstream on an ever increasing basis. Young teachers must be alerted during their training that there will be a reducing number of posts in special schools and that dynamic and rewarding careers are on offer in the mainstream, but only on the clear basis that ahead of them is the gradual transfer of pupils, staff, resources, supporters etc from the special to mainstream sector.

All teachers in training must be alerted to the gradual reduction in numbers in special schools and to the growing responsibilities for all mainstream staff to be able to teach a widening diversity of pupils.

Question 6a

Do you agree that introducing a range of teacher training initiatives would be useful to help teachers teach children with SEN more effectively in both special and mainstream schools?

Agree

Disagree

Not Sure

Comments:

We strongly endorse a new range of national teacher training initiatives to help all teachers teach pupils who experience barriers to learning and participation in both special and mainstream schools. However, there is a difference between the agendas in the two types of school; in Question 5 we outlined the broad approach to teaching that we strongly feel should take place in special schools, namely, an effective and appropriate education that is working towards the earliest possible transfer of all pupils to the mainstream.

For teachers heading towards ordinary schools the training agenda should be dominated by a philosophical commitment to ending segregation and increasing inclusion of all pupils, with appropriate changes and restructuring necessary to bring this about.

In addition to a commitment to reducing segregation and promoting inclusion, the teaching of teaching and learning techniques (differentiation, learning styles etc) should be based on the assumption that all pupils will be taught in the mainstream.

Question 6b

If so, what specific areas/types of training would you like to see?

Comments:

There is an urgent need for much greater input to initial and in-service teacher training about the philosophical principles underpinning the move towards inclusion of all pupils in the mainstream. We feel strongly that the development of inclusion and the goal of ending discriminatory segregation of young people in special schools, is based on human rights principles.

Teacher training institutions in the UK have been particularly reluctant to expose their students to this area of debate, instead continuing to train them in models of thinking that tolerate segregation of a minority group because of a disability or learning difficulty label.

Secondly, there is an equally strong need for all teacher training to embrace the social model of disability as a matter of urgency, and to reject the outdated medical model for sound, humanitarian reasons. This requires all teacher training institutions to build in modules on disability awareness training.

Question 7

Do you think that it would be useful for the Department to carry out an audit of provision and services across regions to identify needs which are not being met and any associated gaps in provision?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

An audit of the mainstream sector by the Department would be useful if it was part of a wider agenda of the firm commitment to phasing out special schools. However, we feel strongly that an audit of present-day special school provision which concluded that special schools required new capital or increased current expenditure, would be wholly inappropriate.

It is already well known that the vast majority of mainstream schools need help in the redistribution of resources, with the task of in-service training to meet a wider diversity of needs, with short and long-term inclusion plans, and this would all be confirmed by such an audit. So we would not want to see scarce national educational resources wasted on producing an audit report that told the nation what we already know about ordinary schools. However, a major benefit of an audit would be to confirm that very large sums of money are currently locked up in the special school sector which should be transferred across gradually.

Question 8

What specific action could be taken to encourage better regional planning?

Comments:

A coherent human rights approach to the development of inclusive schools should be demonstrated by those in charge of regional planning. Specifically the Department and its regional office should work strongly to eliminate the disparity shown by different LEAs and schools in their approaches towards inclusion and to reducing segregation.

It is unacceptable that in 2001 pupils in Lambeth were six times more likely to be educated in special school than those in Newham, ten miles away, and both LEAs in the same region. (See CSIE report, 'LEA inclusion trends 1997-2001'). There are many other examples of unacceptable differences between LEAs within regions, which should be addressed by action at regional planning level.

Question 9

Do you agree with the Working Group's proposal to establish regional centres of expertise that would aim to extend and improve educational practice for children with SEN across a particular area?

Agree

Disagree

Not Sure

Comments:

We are unclear as to the role of these centres. If they are dedicated to extending and improving inclusive education practice in mainstream schools, then we support them. We do not support centres that promote and extend the practice of separate education in special schools.

Question 10

Do you think that introducing inclusion indicators and inclusion marks for both mainstream and special schools is a good idea?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Inclusion within a special school is a contradiction of terms. Inclusion by definition takes place in the mainstream. It is a nonsense for special schools to describe themselves as 'inclusive' because for a child to be in a special school in the first place, exclusion has had to take place. That child has been excluded from the school or setting where he or she would have gone, had they not been categorised as having individual 'deficits' requiring separate provision in a special school.

The only inclusion indicators in a special school that we would accept are those that demonstrate the part or full participation of special school pupils in the mainstream. And if it was full membership of the mainstream, then the indicators are about the development of inclusion in that ordinary school. In this area, we strongly recommend the Department to see the 'Index for Inclusion', written by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow and published by CSIE.

Question 11

Do you agree with the Working Group's proposals to encourage special schools to play a full part in the Department's diversity agenda, to promote more collaborative working?

Agree

Disagree

Not Sure

Comments:

It is mainstream schools, not special schools, that need to lead with the Department on a diversity agenda to promote more collaborative working. Special schools are not diverse; they are highly selective and segregationist by their nature and are inappropriate institutions to play a full part in such an agenda.

Question 12

Which category of specialism within the specialist schools programme do you think should be created specifically for SEN provision?

Comments:

All schools, including those in the specialist schools programme, must develop their knowledge and understanding of inclusive education philosophy and practice.

Question 13

Do you think that the Working Group's recommendation to promote the use of more resourced provision in mainstream classes, and SEN units on mainstream sites is a good way of promoting inclusion?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

We welcome the expansion of more resourced provision in mainstream provision as a way of developing inclusion. However, we express strong opposition to the development of units for pupils on mainstream sites, and feel they are only a temporary stepping stone on the way to fully inclusive, restructured classrooms and schools.

Membership of the mainstream is the key issue in thinking about inclusion; special school pupils have no membership, or only part-time membership; pupils in units on mainstream sites have part-time membership; pupils in mainstream schools have full membership. All pupils, as well as staff, parents, governors and the wider local community are fully aware of the negative educational and social implications of no membership or part-time membership of the mainstream.

'Quiet areas' and 'time out' should be made available when needed for all pupils.

Question 14

What steps could be taken to encourage greater partnership working between special and mainstream schools, including staff and pupil movement?

Comments:

There are many examples of good practice and partnership between special and ordinary schools in developing inclusion and these need to be built on. The key step that must be taken by the Department and Ministers is to state that there must be no cut-off point to the progress of inclusion and gradual reduction, nationally, of the special school population.

Central Government must take responsibility for stating that the long-term goal is a de-segregated education system, that is, the phasing out of all special schools and the building of a restructured, appropriately resourced inclusive mainstream.

Where effective collaboration between the two sectors exists, the question has to be asked: 'What is the desired outcome in the long-term? A cut-off point to progress with inclusion, or a gradual move to total inclusion and the end of a segregated sector. Greater partnership between mainstream and special schools means openly stating at the outset that everyone is working towards the goal of phasing out of all special schools.

There is no devaluing of pupils, staff, governors or parents in or connected with special schools; all have a role to play in the development of an inclusive mainstream.

Question 15

What specific action could we take to ensure that health and social services join up more effectively with education providers, to meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs?

Comments:

It is vital that health and social service authorities also undertake training in the philosophy and practice of inclusion in order to influence their services. A joint commitment by all three services that they are working towards the common goal of inclusion for all would be a positive specific action.

Question 16

Do you agree with the Working Group's proposal to encourage special schools to participate in the Extended Schools Programme?

Agree

Disagree

Not Sure

Comments:

Pupils who attend special full time are segregated from their peers for the whole day and to encourage them to take part in extended activities in the absence of an inclusive context is only to lengthen their daily experience of segregation.

Pupils and staff from special schools should be encouraged to take part in the extended schools programme in mainstream so they can share activities with their peers.

As mainstream schools develop the capacity to deliver health and community services, as well as extended educational opportunities, both in and outside of official school hours, this will naturally increase their ability to accommodate a more diverse population of students and should work towards inclusion. It would be against the spirit and ideals of inclusion to develop the same such provision in special schools. Rather, special schools could be encouraged to share their resources with mainstream schools in order to enhance their capacity to provide for all children in the mainstream setting.

General comments

Please make any General comments here.

Comments:

The central message from the report and from the Department and Ministers is that special schools should continue and that their role should be enhanced through a variety of changes. We strongly disagree with this position and reject entirely the idea that there will always be a need for special schools for some pupils.

There is nothing taking place in special schools that isn't also taking place in ordinary schools, somewhere. Special schools no longer have the monopoly on educating pupils who experience barriers to learning and participation, including those categorised as having complex and severe needs.

Statistics show a slow, but gradual trend towards a reducing special school population nationally; we feel this must be speeded up through Government help and intervention, in order for the country to move to a de-segregated system of education.

The message from this report is that the role of special schools is secured in perpetuity, something we reject most forcefully. If special schools remain, then the benefits of inclusive education through the curriculum, through play, through social interaction, through relationships etc, continue to be denied to a small proportion of pupils, and this discrimination contradicts fundamental childrens' rights to belong to the mainstream.

There is no body of research that says special schools should continue and that their continuation is

based on sound educational and social criteria, yet there is ample evidence of good practice of inclusion involving pupils with the full range of disabilities, learning difficulties or those who experience challenging behaviour. There are now many well documented examples of effective inclusion of pupils who a few years ago would never have been considered for placement in the mainstream and future generations will continue to be included because of changes made in those parts of the country. The benefits to those with and those without disabilities, difficulties or challenging behaviour have been enormous, and are a credit to the efforts of all those involved in these local changes.

We feel strongly that there is no cut-off point for inclusion or a minimum percentage of pupils who can be included. Separate, special schools do not have a permanent role to play in a fully inclusive education system.

The Government's response to this report must include the setting of targets for the carefully planned and phased closure of all special schools, ensuring at the same time an appropriately resourced and restructured mainstream sector.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you tick the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply

Here at the Department for Education and Skills we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

Yes

No

Code of Practice on written consultation

The following seven standards from the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on written consultation should be reproduced in all consultation documents. This is binding on Departments. Ministers' reasons for any departures should be explained.

All UK national public consultations are required to conform to the following standards:

1. Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left at each stage.
2. It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.
3. A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.
4. Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.

5. Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.
6. Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and the reasons for decisions finally taken.
7. Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation co-ordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this consultation.

Completed questionnaires and other responses, should be sent to the address shown below by **3 July 2003**

Send by post to: **Consultation Unit, Department for Education and Skills, Level 1b, Castle View House, Runcorn, WA7 2GJ.**

Responses and comments can be sent via e-mail to: **sswg.report@dfes.gsi.gov.uk**