

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Moving to mainstream

The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools

SUMMARY



Moving to mainstream

The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools

Prepared by Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General in partnership with HMIE

This report has been prepared by Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission for Scotland and the Auditor General. The study was managed by John Lincoln under the general direction of Lesley Bloomer, Director of Performance Audit (Education, Enterprise and Justice) and Ronnie Nicol, Portfolio Manager (Education & Children's Services). The project team also included Jane Kennedy and Janey Traquair. We would like to thank West Dunbartonshire Council for seconding Janey Traquair to the study team.

We have had the generous support of 7 participating councils (Aberdeen City Council, Dundee City Council, Glasgow City Council, Highland Council, North Lanarkshire Council, Orkney Islands Council and Stirling Council) and associated health providers (Grampian Primary Care Trust (PCT), Highland PCT, Tayside PCT, Forth Valley PCT, Lanarkshire PCT and Yorkhill NHS Trust), as well as the 275 headteachers who responded to the school survey and the 35 schools inspected by HMIE. In addition, we would like to thank professional bodies, voluntary organisations, and parents for their contributions.

We would also like to thank the study advisory group which comprised a range of experts from councils, the NHS and other bodies, for providing valuable advice and acting as a sounding-board for the project team throughout the study.

Finally, we express our thanks to HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) for their support throughout the study, for developing the school inspection methodology, for undertaking school inspections and for developing the case studies. In particular, we thank Margery Browning who led the team of HMIE inspectors involved in the study fieldwork, developed Section 3 of the report, and provided invaluable advice and assistance to the study team.

Summary

Special educational needs

1. Around 44,000 children and young people in Scotland have special educational needs (SEN), roughly 1 in 20¹ of the school population. They require additional support to access education; this may range from more time from their classroom teacher, to part-time or full-time attendance at a special school.
2. Expenditure on SEN in Scotland is around £388 million. The majority (£273 million²) is in education and represents around 9% of councils' total education spend. The remainder comes from social work, the NHS or is funded via specific grants from the Scottish Executive.
3. Recent legislation will have a substantial impact on councils' provision for children and young people with SEN:
 - Section 15 of the *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* introduces a 'presumption of mainstreaming' for children and young people with SEN, except under certain circumstances. It will come into effect in August 2003.
 - The *Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002* required councils to prepare accessibility strategies by April 2003 in order to improve, over time, access to education for pupils with disabilities.

The study

4. This study examines the inclusion of children and young people with SEN in mainstream schools. It has been carried out by Audit Scotland in partnership with HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE). Audit Scotland's work on this study is on behalf of both the Accounts Commission and the Auditor General.
5. The term SEN covers a very wide spectrum – from mild and temporary needs, to profound, permanent and multiple impairments. Because of this range, decisions on how best to meet the needs of children and young people with SEN must be made on an individual-

¹ School census 2001. Refers to the number of children and young people in publicly funded schools.

² Excludes £14 million paid by councils to the NHS for speech and language therapy services.

by-individual basis. For example, while many children with SEN reap great benefits by attending a mainstream school which can support their needs effectively, others can become socially isolated.

6. These individual decisions, hard enough on their own, have also to be made within the context of ensuring effective and affordable education for all children, both those with SEN, and those without.
7. Changes in legislation will result in cost pressures, eg from the need to provide effective support for more children with SEN in mainstream, and from losing special school economies of scale which are particularly important for NHS services. While some children with SEN currently educated in special schools could be educated effectively in mainstream schools at relatively small additional cost; others with more profound needs require substantial and costly support in mainstream schooling.
8. Councils, working with the NHS, have to balance these individual decisions with ensuring that their overall pattern of SEN provision allows them to satisfy their statutory duty that “*education is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential*”³, in respect of all their children.
9. This report aims to assist councils, and the NHS, to respond to these changes by including children and young people with SEN into mainstream schools, and by ensuring that their inclusion is effectively supported. It includes a number of case studies, and makes recommendations for schools, councils, the NHS and the Scottish Executive. In the future, Audit Scotland and HMIE will be following up progress, to review the extent to which recommendations have been actioned. To assist schools in developing their approach to mainstreaming, HMIE will prepare specific guidance based on ‘*How good is our school?*’⁴.
10. The primary focus of the work has been on mainstreaming in schools. Detailed information on both costs and waiting times for NHS primary care services to support pupils with SEN is not collected on a systematic basis, therefore most of the analysis draws on data from council education departments.

³ *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000*, (s.2 (1)).

⁴ *How good is our school?: Self evaluation using quality indicators*, HMIE, 2002.

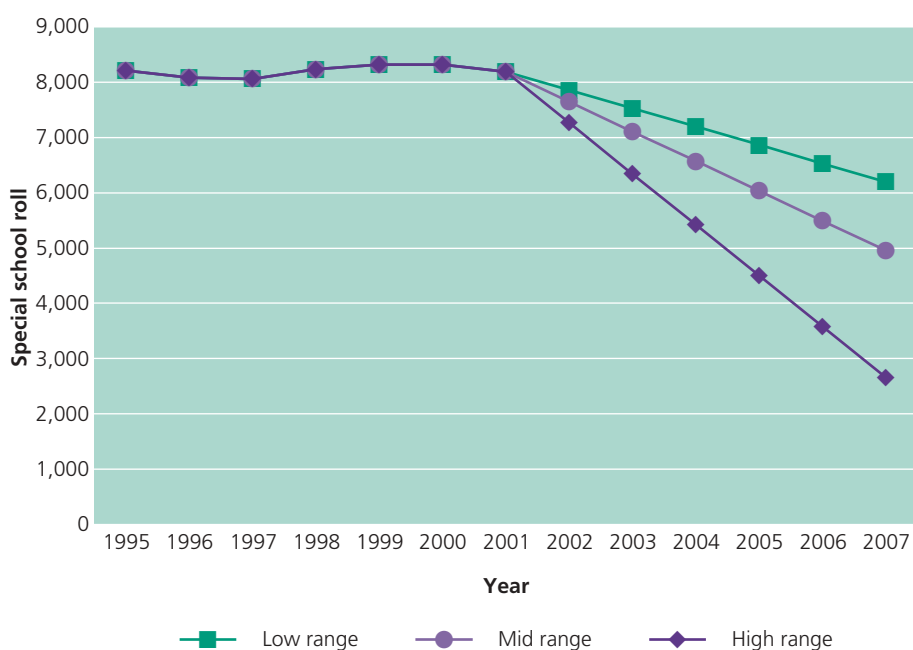
What will change as a result of the presumption of mainstreaming provision in the *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000*?

11. Section 15 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 introduced a '*presumption of mainstreaming*' for children and young people with SEN. This means that, where possible, they should be educated in mainstream schools alongside other pupils, rather than in special schools.

12. The actual change in the number of pupils with SEN educated in mainstream and special schools will depend largely on how the exclusions to the presumption of mainstreaming legislation are interpreted. We estimate that the number of children and young people educated in special schools is likely to fall from around 8,000 at present to between 3,000 and 6,000. These estimates are based on a survey of senior managers of SEN services in councils (Exhibit 1). This means an increase of between 2,000 and 5,000 pupils with SEN educated in a mainstream setting. This very roughly averages to around one additional pupil with SEN per primary school and four to five per secondary school. Given these averages, not all schools, especially small primaries, will see an increase in pupils with SEN in the short or medium term.

Exhibit 1: Potential changes in the roll of publicly funded special schools

Special school rolls have remained stable over the past few years but could fall significantly if the potential for mainstreaming is realised.

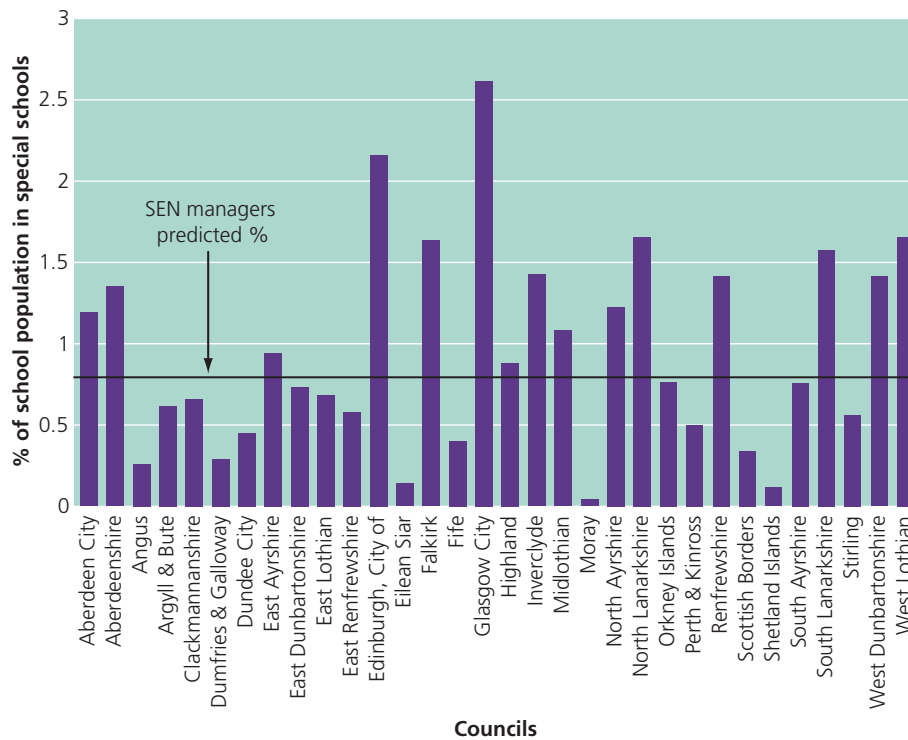


Source: Audit Scotland survey of council managers/Scottish Executive School census 2001

13. The mid range prediction by SEN managers is a 40% reduction in special school rolls. Because the majority of pupils with SEN are already educated in mainstream schools, this represents an increase of only 9% in the number of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools and less than 0.4% in overall pupil numbers.
14. More children with mild to moderate learning difficulties and with physical and sensory impairments are likely to be educated in mainstream schools in the future than is currently the case. It is likely that special schools will continue to cater for a small number of children, most of whom will have severe and complex needs.
15. Although the changes implied by this analysis appear significant, about half of the councils in Scotland already educate more pupils in mainstream schools than the numbers predicted by SEN managers. The extent of change required in individual councils will reflect their current position. There are substantial differences among councils, in the percentage of children and young people educated in special schools, from almost zero to 2.5% of pupils (Exhibit 2). In general, rural councils make less use of special schools than urban councils do, although this is not always the case, eg Dundee has a lower percentage of pupils educated in special schools than other city councils, whilst Aberdeenshire makes more use of special schools than some urban councils. The changes in service provision arising from the presumption of mainstream may therefore be greater in some, predominantly urban, councils than in others.

Exhibit 2: The percentage of children and young people in special schools by council

There is a significant variation in the percentage of pupils in special schools among councils.



Source: Audit Scotland survey of councils

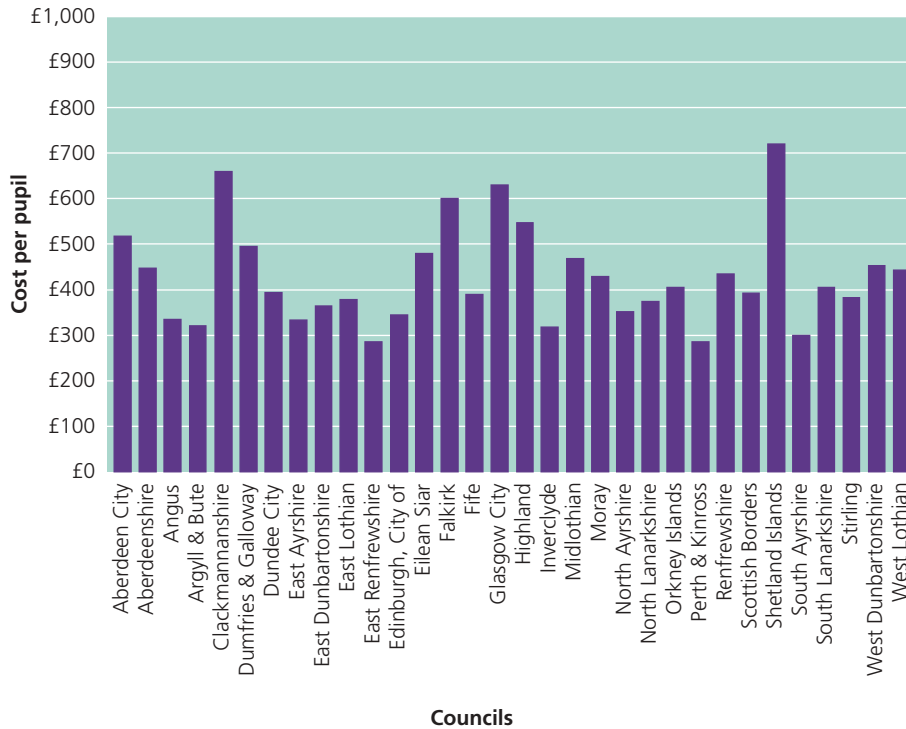
What will be the effect of the changes on services and costs?

16. Currently, around £388 million is spent on SEN in Scotland. Around three-quarters comes from council education budgets, with the remainder coming from social work, the NHS and specific grants from the Scottish Executive.
17. Councils vary in how much they spend on SEN, (Exhibit 3). Costs are from the education budget and are shown per pupil (all pupils, not just those assessed as having SEN)⁵. They include the cost of special schools, educational psychology, transportation and specialist support teams. There is no correlation between these costs and levels of deprivation, rural settlement pattern, or the percentage of school population in special schools. This may be because of variation in types of provision or the numbers of pupils assessed as having SEN among councils.

⁵ It is difficult to compare the cost per pupil with SEN because of differences in the definitions of SEN used by councils, combined with differences in the processes involved in assessments.

Exhibit 3: Education expenditure on children and young people with special educational needs

There is considerable variation among councils in SEN expenditure.

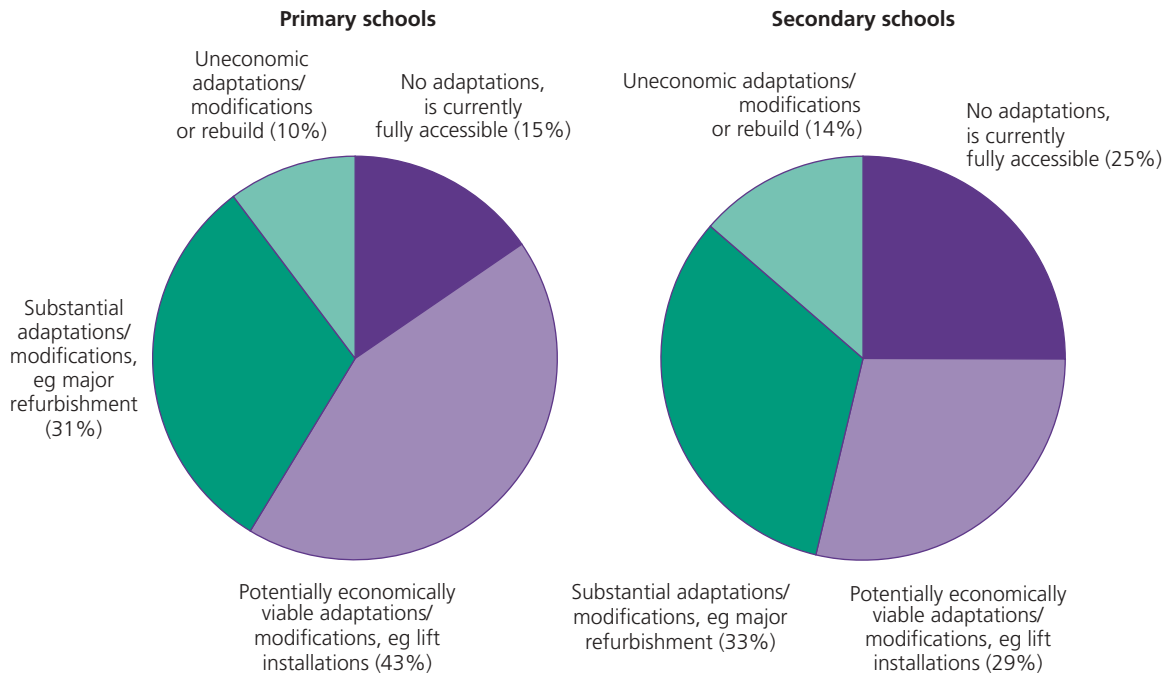


Source: Audit Scotland survey

18. The increase in the number of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools will lead to increased expenditure, due to:
- the capital cost of making schools more accessible
 - the transitional costs of rationalisation of the school estate (sometimes offset by capital receipts)
 - the revenue costs (largely staffing and training) of more pupils with SEN in mainstream schools
 - providing NHS therapy services to a greater number of schools.
19. Education managers reported that, currently, about 85% of primary schools and 75% of secondary schools are not accessible to pupils with physical disabilities and that around 42% of schools will require extensive refurbishment (Exhibit 4). Of equal importance, but not yet quantified, is the extent to which facilities for pupils with sensory impairment need to be improved, eg the need for noise reduction mechanisms for pupils with hearing impairments.

Exhibit 4: Level of adaptations required to meet accessibility legislation

A large number of schools may require adaptations to make them accessible.



Note: Information represents 2,047 (90%) primary schools and 359 (92%) secondary schools.

Source: Audit Scotland survey of councils

20. The overall cost to a council of its accessibility and inclusion strategies will depend on its current provision and its policy on placements. The options and associated costs for one case study council, with generally older schools, are set out below. They enable a secondary school:
- and all its feeder primary schools to be accessible to all potential pupils (£8.1 million)
 - and only one feeder primary school to be accessible to all potential pupils (£4.7 million)
 - to be accessible to all potential pupils and each feeder primary school to specialise in the inclusion of children and young people with a particular type of impairment (£5.2 million).
21. Although these costs may be at the high end of the scale, they illustrate the policy choices which councils have to make, and the possible levels of associated expenditure. These choices may not be appropriate in some rural areas where distances between feeder primaries make specialisation impractical. In these cases, adaptations to small rural schools are more likely to be made as and when an

individual pupil requires them. In some councils there may be transitional costs associated with reducing special school provision; in one case study example the transitional costs amounted to £0.35 million (about £5,000 per pupil moving to mainstream).

22. Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) offer an opportunity to provide up-to-date facilities to support inclusion. Three councils' PPP projects, covering 15 schools, were reviewed. Overall, consultation with stakeholders with an expertise in SEN was poor, although it varied among councils. There was no consultation with any disability support groups as part of the PPP process in any of the projects examined. The degree of involvement of educational professionals who were specialists in SEN varied, while health service managers were rarely consulted and therapists were not consulted at all, despite their role in providing advice on the facilities required to support a range of disabilities. There were no dedicated therapy rooms in the four schools visited. Medical rooms were provided in all new-build projects but they are not generally suitable for therapy services. Future projects should take greater account of the needs of support for pupils with SEN.
23. The revenue consequences of the '*presumption of mainstreaming*' will depend on how inclusive mainstream schools become, eg whether resources are made available to enable pupils with severe, profound and complex needs to be included in mainstream schools. Case study examples show that the additional revenue costs of including a pupil with moderate learning difficulties in a mainstream school (compared to special provision) could be as low as £1,000 per annum, but that the additional cost of including a pupil with profound learning difficulties could be £30,000 per annum. For some pupils the cost may be substantially higher.
24. Revenue costs are also likely to arise because of the requirement for increased staff development and training, and the increased use of ICT and other measures to improve access to the curriculum for pupils with SEN.
25. There will also be an increased cost in the provision of health services to support the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. The requirement of a greater number of schools to provide therapy services will increase staff costs as will the requirement to provide additional accommodation and equipment for therapy.
26. Depending on the number of pupils that are included in mainstream schools, it is estimated that the overall cost increase to councils may be from £38 million to £121 million per year (Exhibit 5). This is

equivalent to an annual increase of between 15% and 40% in the education budget for SEN. The changes may require considerable investment in some councils, but in some instances these costs may be partially offset by capital receipts and savings in maintenance costs where it is possible to rationalise special school provision. These costs do not include additional NHS costs.

Exhibit 5: Estimates of annual additional costs to councils resulting from including more pupils with SEN in mainstream

The biggest cost is likely to be that of additional staff to support pupils in mainstream schools.

Cost driver	Time period of investment	Cost range (£m per year)	
		High	Low
On-going revenue costs associated with the need for additional staff to support the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.	Annual	£68.7	£12.4
Capital costs, or revenue funding for PPP schemes, required to improve the accessibility of schools to pupils with SEN and disabilities.	20 Years	£25.9	£13.4
Training and continuous professional development for teachers and other school staff to support inclusion.	5 Years	£14.8	£8.4
Curriculum development and information technology to support children with SEN in mainstream schools.	Annual	£6.5	£1.4
Transitional costs of changing SEN provision.	5 Years	£5.5	£2.0
Total		£121	£38

Source: Audit Scotland

Parliamentary consideration of costs

27. All Bills introduced to the Scottish Parliament are required by the Parliament’s standing orders to be accompanied by a financial memorandum setting out the best estimates of the costs to which the Bill would give rise. The financial memorandum to the *Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act 2000* states ‘*In general... there will be few additional costs that arise as a direct result of the Bill. Those that do arise will tend to fall on local authorities.*’
28. Once a Bill is introduced, it goes through a three-stage process during which (stages 2 and 3) MSPs can lodge amendments. There is, however, no requirement for a revision of the financial memorandum

to take account of cost bearing amendments. Section 15 (mainstreaming presumption) of the *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* was inserted into the Bill by amendment at Stage 2. The financial memorandum, which accompanied the Bill, was not subsequently updated to take account of the costs.

29. If Parliament is not made aware of the financial implications of amendments to Bills the consequences could be considerable. For example, the analysis in this report shows that there may be significant financial consequences for councils and the NHS associated with the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.
30. The potential financial consequences of proposed legislation, including amendments introduced during consideration of a Bill, should be robustly analysed and then considered carefully by Parliament. This is essential for effective democratic scrutiny. Standing Orders now (as of May 2001) oblige the lead committee to consider and report on financial memoranda at Stage 1. The Finance Committee has begun⁶ to review these memoranda in more detail than in the past, to ensure that they are robust. This will help consideration of costs, but will not deal with the problem of later amendments that carry costs.

Are councils and other agencies in a position to deliver the changes required by the mainstreaming presumption?

31. Planning for mainstreaming was patchy among councils and minimal among health service providers. Few councils were able to provide evidence of strategies to meet the requirements of mainstreaming (or Best Value reviews of SEN). Councils have different approaches to the inclusion of children and young people with SEN, depending on their current provision, their current policy on mainstreaming, and their long-term view of provision.
32. From the point of view of the NHS, there was little or no planning for the presumption of mainstreaming. Many managers within the health service were waiting to take the lead from councils. The lack of coterminous boundaries between the NHS and local government, and within councils themselves, presents challenges in some areas. For example, speech and language therapy services for children and young people with SEN are provided by the NHS but are funded to differing extents by councils; this can lead to a different level of service depending on where a pupil lives.
33. The degree of change required varies greatly among councils. For some the changes will be substantial; these councils will have to develop a

⁶ Finance Committee, *Draft Report on the Financial Scrutiny Review*, February 2003.

programme of sustained investment in the provision of buildings and facilities, and train, or recruit, sufficient staff with the appropriate skills. Councils and the NHS should look together at the services required to meet the needs of children and young people in a holistic way (Exhibit 6). Community planning provides a mechanism for councils to take the lead in working with the NHS to provide integrated services for children and young people with SEN.

Exhibit 6: What needs to be done

Some key issues need to be addressed.

A strategic framework that sets out policy and proposed actions to address the mainstreaming presumption should be drawn up. Councils should take the lead and work pro-actively with health service providers and other agencies, eg the voluntary sector, within the overall context of community planning. The accessibility strategies that are currently being drawn up by each council should assist in the development of this framework.

Joined-up working between councils and health service providers is required to support the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.

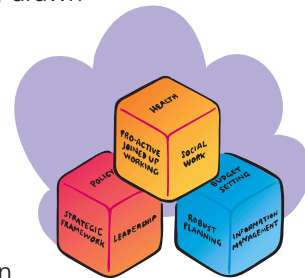
Robust planning systems based on good management information on SEN requirements; effective budget setting and monitoring procedures are fundamental building-blocks of planning for SEN.

Option appraisal should be used to establish the best way of achieving the inclusion of pupils in mainstream schools. Councils and the NHS should reflect on the current position and involve stakeholders in considering options for the future looking at:

- number of pupils with SEN in each type of provision (and in joint placements)
- the staff (both NHS and council) required to support these placements
- the accessibility of schools to pupils with SEN
- curriculum and ICT development to support inclusion.

Effective staff development and training to ensure that all teachers and other staff are given appropriate training to support inclusion strategies.

Accessible school buildings should ensure that the needs of pupils with SEN and disabilities are met. This will mean consulting with stakeholders with experience in SEN when designing new or refurbished schools.



Source: Audit Scotland

How well can the needs of pupils with SEN be met in mainstream schools?

34. HMIE looked at 35 schools to assess how well they were able to meet the needs of all their pupils, including those with SEN. The schools were nominated by councils as having good practice in place. This allowed inspectors to identify what works. The schools visited are therefore not representative of current practice in all schools. HMIE also drew on evidence from the inspections of schools in other areas.
35. HMIE found that these schools are meeting the needs of pupils in inclusive and mainstream settings to varying extents. The best practice was found in schools that had been working on inclusion for a number of years. These developments were the result of work in individual schools, rather than a reflection of systematic, authority-wide approaches.
36. Almost all of the schools reported that all pupils benefited from mainstreaming pupils with SEN. Pupils with and without SEN explained that learning together had broadened their understanding of differences among people. In the most effective schools, staff were open in explaining to pupils the nature of their fellow pupils' special needs. Pupils reported that learning how to communicate with each other had dispelled fears. Staff in some schools taught the pupils how to relate to each other together. For example, primary pupils had learned to play with pupils with severe forms of autism, ignoring hand flapping and other repeated behaviours. Pupils in a number of schools were acquiring rudimentary skills in sign languages and symbol systems to enable them to communicate. This important social learning requires a sustained approach by school staff with the support of parents and visiting staff.
37. The leaders of these schools had been rigorous in evaluating their schools' capacity to respond to the learning needs of pupils with special educational needs. In the interests of providing a high-quality service to all their pupils and developing staff expertise, some had restricted the range of needs for which they made provision.
38. Headteachers and staff in almost all of the successful schools visited had found, on occasions, that they had not been able to include a child or young person, because they were not equipped to meet their SEN effectively or because the child or young person's presence was having a detrimental effect on the learning of others. The needs of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and those with complex SEN presented the greatest challenge to schools.

39. A few pupils with moderate, severe and complex learning difficulties were socially isolated in mainstream schools, usually because they did not have the social skills, levels of understanding or interests which were essential to being accepted as a full member of a friendship group. Some parents, who gave priority to the social benefits gained by their children by being in mainstream schooling, arranged for them to attend special clubs in the evening and weekends. A number of parents, however, reported feeling upset by their child's social isolation at school and, as a result, had changed their opinion about the merits of mainstreaming.
40. The most effective schools had strong leadership at all levels of the school, and a core of staff who were both committed to inclusion and confident that they could meet pupils' needs. The schools which met pupils' needs most fully had very good classroom practitioners, together with specialist teachers and other professionals with a high degree of expertise, notably in sensory impairment, and language and communication disorders. These schools were also committed to inter-agency working.
41. Many therapists reported however that mainstream schools did not always appreciate the direct contribution that health professionals could make to pupils' education. Common obstacles to partnership working included:
- school staff did not understand the roles and responsibilities of health professionals (speech and language therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists)
 - headteachers did not make suitable arrangements for health professionals to work with pupils and consult with staff
 - responsibility for providing, using and maintaining specialist equipment was often disputed.
42. In the best schools, staff were committed to meeting the needs of each pupil through a well-planned curriculum. Access to the mainstream curriculum was based on national guidance and then tailored to individual needs. Individual responses varied greatly depending on each pupil's personal circumstances, the stage of education and the quality of the mainstream programmes and assessment.
43. The good practice features found in the best schools are summarised below:

Summary of good practice features

- Sufficient management capacity to lead and manage inclusion, including strong leadership at all levels in the school and a core of staff with a long-term commitment to inclusion.
- Staff development and training to support inclusion and a commitment from all in the school to respond positively to the personal, social and academic needs of each pupil, combined with high-quality team work among staff in the school and with visiting professionals.
- A realistic appraisal of the capacity of schools to support inclusion with specialisation, in particular disabilities at a school level where appropriate.
- Appropriate curricular programmes which meet the educational and personal needs of pupils.
- Good communication with parents.

44. In schools with large numbers of pupils whose special educational needs are related to delays or difficulties in learning, the overall levels of attainment are reduced. The published attainment information for some highly inclusive and effective schools can give the impression of lower achievement against national standards when, in fact, all pupils were performing well relative to their abilities. Some parents had formed negative views of these schools' levels of academic achievement from this 'league table' information. In some instances, parents had decided to send their children to schools where they thought standards would be higher.

Main recommendations

45. Councils, schools and the NHS should take account of the good practice outlined in the full report as they include more pupils with SEN in mainstream schools and classes. This will require commitment from councillors, headteachers and senior management in councils, in the NHS and in other agencies.

Planning for inclusion of pupils with SEN

- **Councils and NHS bodies** should jointly develop a strategy for inclusion that sets out their policy and proposed actions to meet the mainstreaming presumption. This should reflect a careful appraisal of likely effectiveness of different mainstreaming options and the costs, and should be subject to consultation with parents, headteachers and the voluntary sector. **NHS bodies** should take a proactive role with councils in the joint planning of provision for pupils with SEN.

- **Councils** should provide strategic guidance to schools on their expectations of them over the long term in respect of inclusion and mainstreaming.
- **Councils, schools and the NHS** should consider ways of improving arrangements to ease the transition of pupils particularly from the primary stage to the secondary stage, including ensuring continuity of therapy and other support services.

Building capacity for inclusion

- **Councils** should ensure that the needs of pupils with a wide range of SEN and disabilities are considered when designing new or refurbished schools.
- **Councils** should ensure that schools' physical environments are adapted to meet the needs of pupils with SEN, and that essential adaptations are made before pupils are admitted.
- **Councils** should ensure that senior managers in schools have sufficient time for leading and managing provision for pupils with SEN.
- **Councils** should keep under review the demands on each school and ensure that it has the capacity to function effectively without excessive demands on the headteacher and other members of staff.
- **The NHS** should review the capacity of services (in particular therapy services, child and adolescent mental health and the school nursing service), to ensure that they are able to meet the needs of pupils with SEN in the light of the presumption of mainstreaming.
- **The Scottish Executive** should examine ways of improving the co-ordination of initiatives between departments, with clear links being made between the various funding streams supporting the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.

Staff development and training

- **The Scottish Executive, councils, the teacher education institutions and the General Teaching Council–Scotland** should consider how best to ensure that all teachers are equipped to teach children with SEN.

- **Councils and schools** should ensure that there is training on inclusion for class and subject teachers and special needs auxiliaries (SNAs), and, in particular, that there is effective development and training to meet the needs of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- **The NHS** should review the number of training places for therapy staff to ensure that there is an adequate number of paediatric therapy staff to meet demand.

Quality and Attainment

- **The Scottish Executive and councils** should consider how to assist schools to fulfil the requirement to publish information on attainment in relation to 5-14 level, and SQA awards in ways which give full credit to the high standards of all pupils and to the school in general.
- **Councils and schools** should ensure that they have rigorous approaches to monitoring and evaluating the quality of inclusive provision for pupils with SEN.

Parliamentary consideration of costs

- **Parliament** must have a robust analysis of the potential financial consequences when they are considering Bills and amendments.
- **Parliament** should consider how best to ensure that there is full consideration of relevant costs when Bills and amendments are scrutinised.



110 GEORGE STREET EDINBURGH EH2 4LH

T. 0131 477 1234 F. 0131 477 4567

www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

ISBN 1 904651 01 1