

Educational Provision
for Pupils with
Autistic Spectrum Disorder

ASD



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Foreword

Autism has been the subject of much recent debate, particularly given the recent Judgement in the Sinnott Case, the establishment of the Task Force on Autism by the Minister for Education in 2001 and the growth in the number of pupils with autism in both mainstream and special schools. The Department of Education and Science has facilitated the establishment of special classes for children with autism in both mainstream and special schools and also funded a number of private schools providing an education based on the applied behavioural analysis approach. Parents, in some cases, have also insisted that their children with autism be fully integrated into mainstream classes, creating additional challenges for class teachers and principals in primary schools.

In the light of these developments, the Central Executive Committee of the INTO established a Sub-Committee on Autism to investigate all aspects of the subject. This report is the culmination of the work of the subcommittee. The organization would like to acknowledge the work of the subcommittee, whose members were as follows:

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The organization would also like to record its appreciation of the work of Ms. Tish Balfe, who was commissioned to write Chapters One, Two and Four of the report. Our thanks is also due to all the principals and teachers who completed the questionnaires which form the basis for Chapter Three of the report.

Teachers' openness and commitment to embracing the challenges emerging from the increasing numbers of pupils with autism presenting in their classrooms is a credit to the profession. Teachers have always fought on behalf of our most vulnerable pupils - particularly given the paucity of support services to assist them in their work - and will continue to give their energy and commitment to meeting the special educational needs of such pupils. This report, which calls for adequate resources, proper support services and continuous professional development opportunities, may be considered a valuable addition to the organization's publications in the area of special education policy.

John Carr

General Secretary

September 2002

Introduction

It has only been in recent years that children with Autism or Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have been recognised as a separate category for the purposes of providing special education. Though the needs of children with Autism were addressed to some extent in the Special Education Review Committee Report (SERC) (DES:1993), it appears that the prevalence of Autism was underestimated. It is also clear that there was little understanding of Autism at that time. Today, Autism is frequently referred to as a spectrum disorder because it can range from relatively mild to profoundly handicapping.

However, the SERC report recognised that no one type of educational provision would meet the needs of all children with Autism and that a continuum of provision should be available ranging from integration in mainstream school settings to enrolment in special schools. At the time of the SERC report, there were no special classes for children with Autism in mainstream schools. In the main, children with Autism attended special schools for pupils with emotional and behavioural disorders. In other special schools a teacher could be employed for every six pupils with Autism (SERC 1993:142). Special needs assistants could be appointed to schools and classes with children with Autism in accordance with the ratio recommended for pupils with severe and emotional and behavioural disorders i.e. on the basis of one per class. The allocation of special needs assistants has increased since. It was also recommended in the SERC report that additional teaching support could be provided to pupils with Autism enrolled in mainstream schools - a minimum of five hours per week. The Department of Education at the time was not in a position to quantify the number of pupils with Autism in the education system.

In addition to the Special Schools for pupils with emotional and behaviour disorders, which have always catered for pupils with Autism, there are now 80 special classes for children with Autism in mainstream national schools and 26 special schools with classes for pupils with Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorder. There are also many children who have been diagnosed with Autism who are fully integrated into mainstream classes, though the total number is unknown. The establishment of the special classes in recent years, in both mainstream and special schools, has mainly been in response to high

profile court cases taken by parents of children with Autism against the State, for failing to provide appropriate education for their children. The most famous case has been that taken by Kathleen Sinnott on behalf of her son James Sinnott. In his judgement in this case, Justice Barr appears to have taken the view that it is not sufficient for the State to discharge its constitutional obligations in a positive manner (by responding when approached). Rather the State must be proactive when providing education to the particular category of the children with disabilities. The State, as a result of the Judgement, has a duty, therefore, not alone to devise a coherent policy in respect of the provision of education to the children concerned, but equally importantly to ensure that the appropriate facilities and resources are made available to enable learning to take place. The findings of Justice Barr, who agreed with the findings of Justice O'Hanlon (1996), has led to discussions pertaining to the type of education provision which should be available to children with Autism, and the extent of provision during the school year. These issues are considered further in Chapters four and five.

The development of recent policy in the area of Special Education has been very much influenced by the SERC Report. However, the SERC Report did not adequately address the needs of children with ASD. It is no surprise, therefore, that in the context of this policy vacuum parents were initiating court cases to secure the educational rights of their children. Recognising the lack of expertise in the area of Autism, within the Department of Education and Science, the Minister set up a Task Force on Autism in October 2000, to report on current policy and practice. The Report of the Task Force was published in March 2002. The Department also commissioned the NFER (The National Foundation for Educational Research: UK) to carry out an evaluation of current educational provision for children with Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorder. This report has not yet been published. In the absence of clear policy regarding educational provision for children with Autism/ASD, the Department has continued to establish special classes in both mainstream and special schools to cater for the growing number of pupils diagnosed with ASD. However, the Department has also given some financial support to CABAS, which runs pre-school and primary programmes for pupils with ASD using the Applied Behaviour Analysis approach to intervention. It is currently funding five such schools. These schools are not part of the National School System. There is also an increasing number of pupils

with ASD fully integrated into mainstream primary schools, very often without adequate additional support. In order to determine national policy in relation to educational provision for children with ASD, it is essential, as a first step, that the report of the Task Force on Autism be given full consideration and that the evaluation report of the NFER be published. In light of the many developments in special education since the SERC report was published in 1993, consideration also needs to be given to re-constituting the Special Education Review Committee to review and advise on policy in special education in general.

Chapter one of this report gives an overview of Autism and seeks to explain the nature of Autism or Autistic Spectrum Disorder. **Chapter two** outlines various intervention approaches to teaching children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. **Chapter three** outlines the experiences of teachers in special classes for children with ASD in mainstream schools and special schools. This chapter is based on the collation of responses to a questionnaire issued to these classes in November 2001 and January 2002. A description of provision in special schools which have traditionally catered for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, is also included in this chapter. While questionnaires were not issued to teachers who had pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder fully integrated in their classes, many of the concerns and recommendations outlined in this report would be equally relevant in such situations. **Chapter four** gives a rationale for continuous educational provision for pupils with Autism/ASD. **Chapter five** outlines the challenges concerning continuous provision. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are included in **Chapter six**.

What is autism?

While it would seem that autism is a relatively new syndrome, history and folklore would suggest that it has existed for quite a long time. It may be that individuals with autism in the past were those described as witches, the village idiot, or indeed the village sage. However, it was not until 1943 when Leo Kanner, a psychiatrist from Boston U.S.A, found that a group of his young patients were presenting with remarkably similar symptoms that the distinctive features of the condition were labelled. The main defining features that led Kanner to coin the term "Early Infantile Autism" included:

- 1 a profound autistic withdrawal;
- 1 an obsessive desire for preservation of sameness;
- 1 a good rote memory;
- 1 an intelligent and pensive expression;
- 1 mutism, or language without real communicative intent;
- 1 over sensitivity to stimuli and;
- 1 a skilful relationship to objects.

Kanner's description led to much debate and research over the last sixty years and these in turn have led to modifications of his original description of the syndrome. In an intensive study carried out in southeast London, Lorna Wing and Judith Gould (1979) began with Kanner's description of autism and concluded that the difficulties associated with autism could be described as a "Triad of Impairments":

- 1 impairment of social interaction
- 1 impairment of social communication and
- 1 impairment of social imagination, flexible thinking and imagination.

It has been recognised that the triad of impairments will have varied effects on different individuals in different circumstances and even on the same individual over time. In other words autism pres-

ents itself differently between and even within individuals depending on their intellectual ability and age (Jordan 1999). It was these differences that led Wing (1988, 1996) to introduce the idea of a spectrum disorder, and to describe the syndrome as "Autistic Spectrum Disorder" (ASD).

Triad of Impairments

IMPAIRMENT OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

The literature indicates that individuals with autistic spectrum disorders may live in a world of their own, they may be aloof, distant, remote or withdrawn. This indicates that the individual with autism has difficulty relating to other people and is often uncomfortable with others coming into his/her space. When first meeting a child with an ASD, people often form the impression that the individual has a hearing problem because of the indifference shown. Individuals with an ASD do not seem to understand what others are thinking and may not be able to 'put themselves in others' shoes.' They seem to be unaware of social rules or conventions. An example of this is the typical inability of an individual with an ASD to realise that they must wait their turn.

Many children with ASDs may show no interest in making friends, while some of them will tolerate children around them but will not initiate interactions. Others will try to interact but may not have the necessary skills to conduct an interaction successfully. While these social skills can be learnt, the individual's behaviour is often mechanical and awkward. It takes a lot of effort on the part of the individual with an ASD to develop socialising skills in order to maintain a friendship.

IMPAIRMENT OF COMMUNICATION

Children with ASDs have difficulty with communication. Many are slow to develop language and some do not develop speech at all. Others do use speech but it may be limited to words or phrases recently heard e.g. an adult asks "Do you want a biscuit?" and the child replies "Do you want a biscuit." This is known as immediate echolalia. Some children with ASDs may also use words/phrases out of context, for example rather than using a greeting when an adult approaches her, a child may say something like "you asleep?"

Some will acquire fluent language but may speak in a flat tone lack-

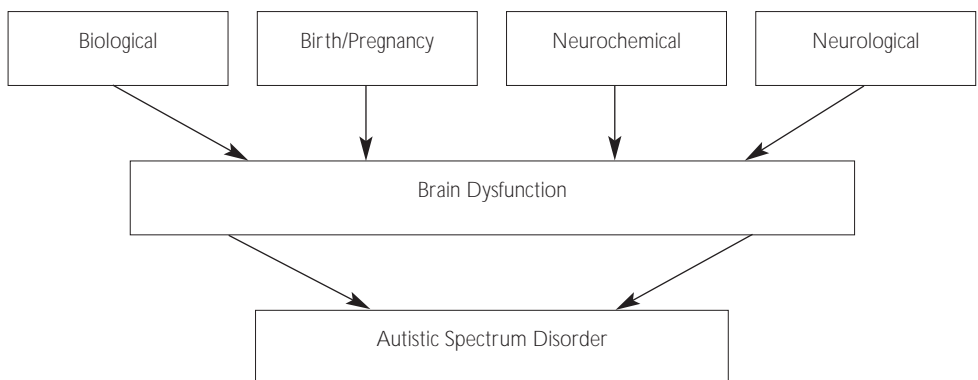
ing in intonation. They may also tend to talk at people rather than to them, as they do not comprehend the purpose of communication. Those who have fluent language may also miss non-verbal cues such as head nodding, facial expression, eye contact, which are often essential elements of conversation. Individuals with ASDs are often perceived as being very innocent as they unquestioningly accept what they hear and take what is said to them very literally. They may have an in-depth knowledge of certain subjects and very often will use this knowledge to hold a conversation with others whether the other individual is interested or not.

IMPAIRMENT OF IMAGINATION

Children with ASDs may often have very limited interests and a limited ability to play with toys. As a result they may spend a lot of time unoccupied. However some may develop unusual play patterns with objects e.g. spinning the wheels on a truck for long periods of time, opening and closing the lid of a box, or lining up objects in straight lines. Many children also like routine and can become quite stressed if routine is changed in any way e.g. if the furniture has been changed about in a room, the route to school has been changed due to road works or if swimming classes are cancelled. The need for sameness often leads to the child with an ASD having a restricted diet as s/he may refuse to try different foods. Many may refuse to wear new clothes/shoes.

It is important to note that a child with an ASD will have elements of these three key features of autism. The combination of elements

Figure 1 Triggers that could cause autism



will make for a very distinctive child and will place him/her on the autistic spectrum. However, each child will have a different profile and this profile will change depending on the environment, the educational facilities available, their experience and also their intellectual ability.

The child with an ASD will have peaks and troughs in his/her abilities. Within the population of children with ASDs, there is a wide range of cognitive ability, ranging from those with severe learning difficulties to those with average or above average abilities. It is also important to remember that autism can occur alongside other disabilities e.g. Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy.

The Causes

While some research has been done, as yet no one knows the cause(s) of autistic spectrum disorders. It is felt that there is no one single cause. Frith (1991) described autism as "a developmental disorder due to a specific brain abnormality with its origins in genetic fault, brain insult or brain disease." It has been suggested that there may be a set of triggers any of which could cause autism (see figure below) (Cumine, Leach, & Stevenson 2000).

Several studies completed in recent years have indicated that the incidence of autistic spectrum disorders is on the increase. There is no reliable study of prevalence in Ireland available as yet. Autistic Spectrum Disorder is more common in boys than in girls.

Spectrum Disorders

As already mentioned, autism is a spectrum disorder and the most common disorders on the spectrum are Autistic Disorders (AD), Asperger's Syndrome (AS), and Pervasive Developmental Disorders-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), Rhetts's Syndrome, and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD):

AUTISTIC DISORDER

Autistic Disorder (AD) is also known as "Kanner's Syndrome" and /or "Classic Autism." Before a child has reached 36 months evidence of the triad of impairments is usually noticed i.e. difficulty in communicating and relating to others, and an inability to play imaginatively or to think in abstract ways. In addition to the triad, repetitive behaviour

patterns are often common e.g. flicking fingers/objects/pieces of string, and/or insistence on following rituals and routines e.g. bedtime/bath time rituals following identical routes. There may also be a fascination with certain topics e.g. trains, washing machines, electricity, birds, timetables.

ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

The individual with asperger's syndrome (AS) will also present with some elements of the triad of impairments but these may be more subtle i.e. the individual with AS may be highly verbal but may have difficulties with gestures, intonation, interpreting facial expressions and body language.

It has been suggested that the main difference between an individual with AD and an individual with AS is that the individual with asperger's syndrome has no significant delay in intelligence or language development. However the individual with AS may have motor clumsiness i.e. s/he may be awkward in his/her movements, may have difficulty writing or drawing neatly and may often have difficulty completing written tasks. The individual may have organisational problems e.g. difficulty remembering what books to bring to school or class, what day the P.E. uniform should be worn or indeed s/he may have difficulty finding his/her way around the school/college for classes.

What is the difference between individuals with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) and those with Higher Functioning Autism (HFA)? Many believe that the individual with AS is more interested in people (although they may not always be successful in pursuing this) while individuals with HFA may show no interest in developing relationships with people and may be happiest on their own.

Wing (1996) noted that some very young children with "Classic/Kanner's" autism do go on to develop language and other skills and by their teenage years may have all the features of asperger's syndrome.

PDD-NOS

This condition is also known as "Atypical Autism." The label is usually given when the conditions of AD or AS are only partially met. It may be in terms of age of onset (where it is over 36 months) or where the range of symptoms are only partially present in two of the three areas required for a diagnosis of AD or AS i.e. the triad, but do pres-

ent with symptoms in one of the areas to a severe degree.

RHETT'S SYNDROME

This syndrome was first described by Rhett in 1966. It is a developmental disorder affecting girls and while it has similarities to autism which cause this syndrome to occur within the autistic spectrum, it is diagnosed as a separate condition. The child is seen to develop normally until twelve months. After this, there is a rapid regression and by eighteen months she will have lost voluntary movements of her mouth, arms and hands. There is also significant loss of social interaction. By the age of two years their understanding of language and their ability to speak is lost. Their cognitive ability is severely impaired.

CHILDHOOD DISINTEGRATIVE DISORDER (CDD)

This condition is also known as "Heller's Syndrome" after the psychologist who wrote about it in 1908. It is a rare condition where a child develops normally until three or four years of age, but then rapidly regresses, losing speech, the ability to socialise and play. Their cognitive ability and motor skills are also severely affected and the symptoms of autism are manifested. Very little is known about CDD.

It is evident that autism is a very complex disorder. Research into the causes and possible cures has been undertaken but it takes a long time to verify or discredit the results and an even longer time to implement the verified results. To date no cure has been developed for autism but Janzen (1996:111) states "A highly structured and specific educational programme that addresses the predictable deficits of autism remains the most effective treatment to date. The ability to learn new skills to compensate for deficits continues throughout life."

The Learning Style in Individuals with ASDs

The triad of impairments (Wing & Gould, 1979) which is central to autism will hinder the learning a child can derive from interactions, from communications, from play and from imagination. Many children with ASDs may also have additional learning difficulties (Rutter 1979) and these factors combined, make up a very distinctive child in the way s/he thinks and learns. There is evidence from able adults

with ASDs that their autism does indeed impact on their learning. Sinclair (1992 pg. 295) has this to say:

“Being autistic does not mean being unable to learn but it does mean there are differences in how learning happens...[what I think is most] frequently overlooked is that autism involves differences in what is known without learning.... Gaps between what is expected to be learned and what is already understood.”

Grandin (1995) and Williams (1996) also refer to the apparent differences in cognitive, perceptual and emotional process which constitute an “autistic style” of thinking and learning.

Powell & Jordan (1997) say there are four inter-connected features of autistic thinking:

- 1.The way in which the information is perceived;
- 2.The way in which the world is experienced;
- 3.The way in which information is coded stored and retrieved in memory; and
- 4.The role of emotion as a context in which these processes may or may not operate.

Powell & Jordan (1997) also identify three common difficulties in the learning styles of those with ASDs.

- 1 Difficulty in interacting;
- 1 Difficulties in transfer of learning; and
- 1 Bizarre behaviour - many individuals with ASDs have difficulty with establishing awareness and understanding of the intentions of others so they are often seen as being “odd” or “bizarre”.

Teachers need to understand this “style” of thinking and learning, as the child with an ASD will have problems with communication, socialisation, imitation, play, perception, memory, motivation, problem solving, and generalisation. As these are essential elements of the learning process, the teacher needs to ameliorate these difficulties allowing the child with an ASD more effective access to the curriculum while realising that “No two children with autism will think and behave in the same way. Each child is an individual and will respond to their autism in his/her own way” (Jordan & Powell 1995:4).

In order to teach these individuals effectively the teacher needs to make an assessment of their uneven profiles. This assessment will indicate and determine the focus of teaching needed in any of those areas. The teacher’s knowledge and understanding of how autism is affecting the student’s learning style, the child’s strengths, as well as

the cognitive level of the child will determine an appropriate curriculum for the child. Parents and members of a multidisciplinary team (psychologist, speech therapist and occupational therapist) may also add to the teacher's understanding of the learning style of the child.

Janzen (1996) points out that children with ASDs have predictable attributes which we also need to be aware of in order to predict the children's learning needs:

- 1 Generally children with autism are known for their innocence and guilelessness.
- 1 They are not good at deceiving or impressing people.
- 1 They find it difficult to defend themselves, even though their actions may be misunderstood.
- 1 They are often over compliant.
- 1 They are often perfectionists.

Children with ASDs also have strengths which should be utilised when developing an appropriate curriculum of work. They can take large amounts of information quickly and remember the information they take in for a long time. They understand and use information presented visually really well. They enjoy repeating routines which are familiar to them. They concentrate, enjoy and work well on topics which are of special interest to them. They understand and will adhere to rules.

In order to effectively teach children with ASDs, a structure is needed which ensures that the content and learning experiences cater for their individuality. The pervasive nature of autism has such a limiting effect on the individual that it is up to parents, mentors and teachers to give them the tools which will enable them to understand and learn in what is for them an alien and confusing world.

2

Intervention approaches

It is over half a century since Kanner (1943) wrote about “Early Infantile Autism.” Since then much has been written on the subject, increasing our knowledge and understanding of autism. This understanding has led professionals and parents to realise that their objective is not to turn the individual with autistic spectrum disorders into a “normal” individual but to appreciate that the individual is different and to provide a means by which s/he can function and manage to lead an appropriate life in a world which is alien to them. This realisation has led to a significant increase in the number and range of intervention approaches being developed to assist individuals with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) to achieve a reasonable level of independence.

Some of these approaches have been developed specifically for autism, while others have been used for children with other special needs but have been adapted for children with autistic spectrum disorders. Each approach has been developed from a particular understanding of autism and aims to teach the child with autistic spectrum disorders ways of understanding others, communicating with others and managing situations which cause them stress.

Educational Approaches

The following examples of the most common current approaches to teach children with ASD are dealt with under the headings Educational Approaches, Communication Approaches, and Interactive Approaches.

TEACCH

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communications handicapped Children) was developed in North

Carolina in the early 1970s by Eric Schopler. It is a lifetime approach to helping people with autism. Its main focus is to develop a programme to equip children using their skills, interests and needs, to lead a productive life in the community.

The aim of TEACCH is to “develop communication skills and to help individuals work and play independently of adults” (Jordan, Jones & Murray 1998:79). TEACCH does not address the autism directly but rather it endeavours to provide an environment where many of the difficulties can be circumvented thus removing a lot of undue stress and anxiety from the individual with ASD. A cure is not expected but considerable improvement is considered possible. The TEACCH Programme has developed ways to help children with autism function in an environment that they may find difficult to understand. It does this by providing information in visual format, by providing structure and predictability in order to help the individual understand what s/he has to do, where and when this should be done, and in what order. The programme also uses the individual’s strengths and interests to help them acquire the skills needed to function in the environment that surrounds them. It endeavours to teach the student that the environment does have meaning and that there are patterns in the environment. The student needs to learn to identify the patterns and be able to follow these patterns independently, not as a result of compliance. The TEACCH programme involves on going assessment and through this assessment of the individual’s approach to a variety of materials, directions and activities needs are prioritised and goals are set.

Advantages of the TEACCH programme:

- 1 It seems to be very successful in reducing challenging behaviours by giving the individual with ASD predictability in time and space through giving him/her a structure.
- 1 It uses visual strategies to increase comprehension thus helping to make the individual as independent as possible without adult interaction.
- 1 It relies on positive interactions between teacher and student.

Disadvantages of the TEACCH programme:

- 1 There is an emphasis on “work first, play later” which does not seem to foster intrinsic enjoyment in work for its own sake.
- 1 The use of structure which improves direction-following skills, can reduce the opportunities for personal choice.
- 1 There may be an unintentional ceiling put on a child’s potential.
- 1 A high level of training and consistency is required to implement

the programme which may be difficult to achieve.

DAILY LIFE THERAPY (HIGASHI)

This approach was developed by Kiyo Kitahara who opened one school in Tokyo in 1964 and a second in Boston in 1987. The schools cater for children with autism. The aim of the schools is to develop independence by continually involving the children in activities which stabilise the emotions, improve physical strength and stimulate the intellect. These activities normally occur in groups.

The staff ratios vary from 1:5 to 1:3. Verbal instructions are kept short and clear, no alternative means of communications are used. The school places great emphasis on physical education to develop strength and increase concentration. Music and visual arts are used to improve communication and to develop daily living skills. Activities are all carried out in groups which are highly structured. Lessons progress at the rate of the least able child. The children are expected to learn through imitation.

Advantages:

- 1 Research has shown that the main strength of this approach is in controlling stereotypical and disruptive behaviour.
- 1 Parents have reported vast improvements in self-help skills.

Disadvantages:

- 1 Children are continually dissuaded from any individual spontaneous behaviour.
- 1 There seems to be no effort to support a child who has no speech or indeed those who have difficulty with receptive language.
- 1 Higashi has been criticised for its narrow curriculum and that much of the learning is mainly through rote learning.
- 1 There is a fear that children are not stretched to their full potential as the school caters for the group rather than for the individual.

BEHAVIOURAL APPROACH (APPLIED BEHAVIOURAL ANALYSIS)

A behavioural approach is based on the theory that all behaviour is learned and is influenced by its antecedents and consequences. The aim of ABA is to identify factors that encourage/strengthen or discourage/weaken behaviours. It also aims to analyse a skill into steps which are then used as a teaching programme. Each of these steps is presented with a clear goal and when each of these goals is achieved it

is followed by a reward.

Lovaas (1981) writes that children who do not have autistic spectrum disorders learn in all environments all the time while the child with autistic spectrum disorders does not. Therefore, instruction must be provided for the child for all his/her waking hours, in school home and community. The child's progress is carefully monitored and graphed so that it is known when to move on to the next step or to modify the methods used. There is a strong emphasis on imitation and the child's ability to imitate. It has been recommended to use ABA with children under the age of four but not exclusively.

Advantages:

- 1 It gives the child a good beginning in the skills needed to learn, i.e. attending, imitation, receptive and expressive language.
- 1 It provides a Functional Assessment which may lead to a better understanding of a behaviour or set of behaviours.
- 1 It enables professionals to use Task Analysis, which breaks down the skills that need to be learnt.
- 1 It provides a method to measure progress by scientific evaluation.

Disadvantages:

- 1 It fails to take into account the differences in social and communication functioning when creating a curriculum for a child with autistic disorders.
- 1 ABA emphasises the child's ability to respond on demand rather than encouraging the child to initiate communication spontaneously.
- 1 Teaching is usually 1:1 thus ignoring the need to develop social skills, which are best learnt through interactions with peers.
- 1 ABA approach tends to focus on achieving recovery and may ignore the underlying neurological aspects of autism.
- 1 There is such an emphasis on 1:1 teaching it may lead to a continuing dependence on prompts.

Communication Approaches

Communication approaches are designed specifically to encourage and develop communication skills. Two such approaches are described.

PICTURE EXCHANGE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM (PECS)

PECS was developed in the U.S.A. by Andrew Bondy and Lori Frost in 1994. It involves the use of pictures to request items. It requires interaction with others from the beginning thus encouraging the child to initiate communication rather than responding to a prompt. The aim of PECS is to develop communication skills, especially initiating communication in a social exchange (Bondy 1996). PECS teaches those who may not have any functional communication skills how to give a picture of a desired object to another person (communication partner) in exchange for that object.

Advantages:

- 1 The child is taught to develop real spontaneous communication rather than depending on someone to say, "What do you want?"
- 1 It introduces the child with autism to the notion of "choice." So now the child can choose but only from what is on offer.
- 1 It gives the child with autism a visual prompt in conjunction with the auditory label the communication partner uses.

FACILITATED COMMUNICATION

This is an approach used for children with autistic spectrum disorders since the early 1980s. The aim of this approach is to allow the child to communicate using the printed word, aided by a physical touch (hand over hand) from another person (facilitator) to type out their thoughts. Its goal would be to work towards minimum support or no support at all from the facilitator.

Disadvantages:

- 1 The communication may be influenced by the facilitator.

Interactive Approaches

Interactive approaches are used to develop and extend basic social and communication skills. They emphasise the importance of building relationships with caregiver and child. The following are some of this type of programme.

SON-RISE PROGRAM (OPTION APPROACH)

This is a programme designed by parents Barry and Samahria Kaufman whose son recovered from autism.

It is an intensive 1:1 home-based intervention where the child is in charge of the situation but is continually encouraged to participate in interactions with a parent or mentor. During these interactions the

child is accepted unconditionally by the parent or mentor. The child may spend months or years away from the outside world in his/her room/rooms, where parents/mentors come to interact and engage with the child throughout the day, seven days a week. The aim of the programme is to motivate the child to want to interact with others and to encourage the development of communication. The approach works with the parents to change their attitude towards the child which changes the way they behave with the child. This, in turn, should lead to a change in the way the child behaves.

Advantages:

- 1 The Option approach sees the child's stereotypical behaviour and social withdrawal as a response to the child's inability to make sense of the environment, so the approach makes the parents aware that the child needs to be accepted no matter what s/he does rather than conform to the expectations of others.
- 1 The quality and quantity of the child's social interactions improve.

Disadvantages:

- 1 The child is considered so sensitive that s/he is isolated from the outside world day and night for months and maybe even years.

HANEN PROGRAMME

This approach was developed by speech and language therapists in Canada and has been adapted for children with autistic spectrum disorders. Professionals use this approach to help parents and staff (caregivers) build and sustain early interactions with the child. A videotape is used to record the interactions between the child and the parent in the home. The video is then analysed to make the parent aware of communicative intent and positive interactions thus helping the parent gain confidence to build on those.

MUSICAL INTERACTION

This approach provides an environment to facilitate and reinforce communication between the child with autistic spectrum disorders and the music therapist. The aim is to help the child develop communicative intent. It focuses on what the child can do and develops from that. The adult responds to the child's spontaneous sounds and movements as if they were intentionally communicative which may, in turn, encourage the child to use them intentionally. The adult may

respond by joining in or imitating the child's sounds or actions. The adult uses songs, rhymes and play to encourage interaction, leaving pauses for the child to react. It is suggested that music may afford opportunities for expressing emotions and may open up channels of communication (Starr 1993).

Advantages:

- 1 Musical interaction is a non-invasive approach which emphasises the importance of building relationships between the child and the adult.
- 1 It encourages a more positive view of the child by the caregivers.
- 1 It encourages the caregiver to follow the child's lead at his/her developmental level rather than his/her age level.

Disadvantages:

- 1 Caregivers feel they need to be musical experts in order to implement this approach and as a result the approach is not widely used.

Conclusion

This Chapter has touched on the more common approaches or methods of intervention used to teach children with autism but there are many other approaches that have not been discussed. It is important for teachers to be aware of the variety of approaches in order to have informed discussions with parents. When teachers are considering which approaches may be appropriate for a particular child, they need to ask the following questions:

- 1 In what way does the approach address the deficits in autism?
- 1 What specific area(s) of autism does it address?
- 1 How long has the approach been in use for children with autistic spectrum disorders?
- 1 What are the aims of the approach?
- 1 Has the approach been evaluated?
- 1 What does this approach require the adults and children to do?
- 1 How realistic is implementing the approach in family/school/community life?

It is important to note that where some approaches have improved the progress of some individual children, there is no one approach which has been found to be effective with all children with autistic spectrum disorders. The teacher needs to be aware of how the child with autistic spectrum disorders thinks and learns in order to select

the most appropriate approach or approaches to meet the individual child's needs.

3

Current educational provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder

SECTION A: SPECIAL CLASSES IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

The educational needs of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) were not traditionally recognised by the provision of specialist education. Many such children, were either undiagnosed, or attended special schools for pupils with emotional disturbance. In recent years, however, the Department of Education and Science has established special classes for pupils with ASD in both special and mainstream schools. There are also a number of children with ASD fully integrated into mainstream classes. In addition, the Department of Education has funded specific programmes such as CABAS, which operates an Applied Behaviour Analysis approach to teaching the children. The INTO issued a questionnaire to all special classes for pupils with Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorder, in November 2001. The following is a summary of the responses, which were received from 24 schools.

The Establishment of Special Classes

The first special class in a mainstream school was established in 1995, with further classes being established each year, leading to a total of 41 special classes currently attached to mainstream schools. In most cases, it has been departmental policy to establish two special classes for pupils with ASD in the one setting. However, among the respondents, nine schools had two special classes for pupils with ASD, one had three special classes, while eleven had only

one special class. One teacher is allocated for every 6 children, though in most cases, there are less than 6 children in a class. The number of children with ASD enrolled in mainstream schools and attending special classes ranged from 2 to 19 in each school. In addition to the children in the special classes, eight schools stated that children with ASD were enrolled in the mainstream classes. Two Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are allocated per 6 children. In some cases, an additional SNA may be appointed specifically to work with one child. The number of Special Needs Assistants available to special classes ranged from 2 to 7.

Support Services

Prior to the establishment of the special classes in mainstream schools, the support of speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists and special needs assistants were promised to schools. For most schools these promises were made verbally, particularly in relation to the provision of support from health boards, though eleven schools received such promises in writing. However, the provision of support services has proven to be far from satisfactory. Eight schools stated that they had the services of a speech and language therapist, with another five stating they had a partial service. Nine schools had no speech and language therapy service. Four schools stated that they had the services of an occupational therapist, with one school stating they had a limited service. Fifteen schools had no such service. Six schools had the services of a social worker, with one school stating it had a limited service. Thirteen schools had no such service. Five schools had the support of a psychologist, two had access to a nurse, one had access to music therapy and two had the services of an autism therapist - though it is unclear what this service entails. Some schools have been given grants of £2,000 (later increased to £5,000) through the health board to provide therapy services, though, in this case, school boards of management must seek the services themselves.

The provision of support services is a matter for the health boards. Each health board area differs in terms of the support they make available to schools. One school outlined, that some of the pupils qualified for the support of a speech and language therapist, while others did not, on the basis that they lived in different health board areas. This is an unsatisfactory situation from a school's point of

view. There has also been a problem of lack of continuity in that there have been changes of personnel within the support services. There appears to be a shortage of qualified therapists in many health board areas, and a feeling among teachers that many are unwilling to work with pupils with autism. Teachers have expressed great frustration with the inadequate support available from the health board services.

Funding

A start-up grant of between £3,000 – £5,000 (€3,809 – €6,948) was made available to mainstream schools setting up special classes for pupils with autism – the amount depending on year of establishment. Some schools also received once-off grants towards the provision of furniture. Other schools received an ICT grant of £1,750 (€2,222). Annual capitation grants of £450 (€571) are the only source of funding since establishment. Schools were generally of the view that there should be an annual grant – ranging between £1,000 – £5,000 (€1,270 – €6,349) per year – in addition to capitation grants. In some schools, parents contributed towards the cost of additional activities such as swimming, pony-riding and transport to and from venues. However, the lack of funding was not considered as major a difficulty as the unavailability of adequate support services and the paucity of professional development for teachers. However, one school recommended that funding be provided to schools to enable teachers to participate in professional development, including conferences.

Referral and Enrolment Policies

In the greater Dublin area, six schools stated that pupils had been referred to the special classes through Beechpark Services, an organisation which provides for children with disabilities. Five schools stated that children had been referred following psychological assessment. Seven schools cited their health board as the main source of referrals. The remainder quoted word of mouth, the Inspectorate and individual approaches made to the school.

Fifteen schools stated that they have a specific policy regarding enrolment in the special classes for autism, which included psychological assessment and/or an enrolment committee. Three schools

are in the process of developing a policy. Those without a specific policy cite 'first come, first served', underdevelopment and capacity to deal with demands.

Continuum of Provision

In general, 50% of the pupils attended pre-school prior to their enrolment in the special classes for autism. However, three schools stated that none of their pupils had attended any form of pre-school provision prior to enrolment in the special classes. The majority of schools believed that early intervention was crucial and that specialist pre-school provision should be available to all pupils with ASD. According to the respondents, specific approaches such as TEACCH, PECS and ABA should also be available at pre-school level, where appropriate for the child. In addition, teachers were of the view that there should be earlier diagnosis of ASD and intervention from the appropriate therapists provided prior to enrolment in the special classes.

Many teachers expressed concern, however, regarding future provision for their pupils. Twelve respondents (54%) did not know where the pupils in their special classes for autism would go to continue their education. Only 3 of the schools knew where their pupils would be going, the remainder were unsure and suggested that possibly mainstream post-primary schools with support would take the pupils. Some thought that pupils may be catered for in special schools. Some hoped that pupils would attend mainstream post-primary or special classes in post-primary and some were actively discussing the issue with local post-primary schools. It is clear, however, that provision for pupils with ASD beyond their primary years should be planned well in advance as the primary schools did not wish to continue to provide a service to pupils of post-primary school age. As one teacher stated:

Secondary Education - we cannot and will not continue educating these children beyond primary school-going age.

The uncertainty surrounding future provision is clearly a matter of concern for the primary schools.

Curriculum

The special classes for pupils with ASD catered for a broad range of

ability. Five schools stated that they catered for pupils with average or higher functioning autism. Seven schools catered for the full spectrum with another six stating that they catered for pupils from average ability to severe general learning difficulties. Five schools stated that their pupils functioned in the mild and moderate general learning disability range or lower functioning. Some teachers were of the view that children with moderate or severe general learning disabilities were not appropriately placed in mainstream schools:

Only children with mild learning difficulties are suitably placed in mainstream. Only those at the upper end of ASD benefit. If they have severe learning difficulties, they need other support which can be provided in a central location. All primary schools cannot have pools, multi-sensory rooms, etc. If it is likely that a person will need a cradle to grave sheltered environment, they are better off in a special school. If they have a possibility of achieving independent living with some support, they benefit from staying in their local community with local support.

The majority of teachers stated that they adapted the mainstream curriculum as appropriate for their pupils. Some also stated that they used TEACCH and PECS. Two specified that they used ABA. Whereas all schools are aware of the ABA programme, without exception, all had reservations about the programme and only used certain elements of it as it was considered to be too rigid and intense. Teachers in the special classes preferred an eclectic approach, varying according to the needs of the child, though some were of the view that an ABA approach could be appropriate for some pupils as part of an overall programme.

Teachers recommended that a curriculum for pupils with ASD should be developed which would address their specific needs. A broad-based programme focussing particularly on social and communication skills was seen as hugely important. However, it was also suggested that it would be difficult to design a curriculum for pupils with ASD, as pupils vary considerably in their ability. Teachers felt very much alone in terms of curriculum planning for their classes and found it difficult to source material. Teachers would welcome more information on curricular approaches used elsewhere and more assistance with curriculum planning. Nineteen of the schools (79%) have drawn, or are in the process of drawing up Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for children in the special classes for autism. Where available, other professionals were involved in the preparation of individual plans and, in general, parents were also consulted. It was generally

considered that the preparation of IEPs was an important dimension of curriculum planning for pupils with ASD.

Integration

All schools had a very positive attitude to integration. Examples of integration, in practice, included integration during break times, speech and drama classes, art, music, PE, concerts and whole-school based activities. Three schools had a 'Buddy system' in place and some schools had a reverse integration policy where pupils from the mainstream classes spent time in the special classes. The following are some of the comments from teachers in relation to integration:

ASD children are educated separately, but go to the playground at the same time as the other children, with their own special needs assistants (1 assistant per 2 children). We hope integration will increase gradually, depending on children's individual needs. In addition to the children in the ASD class, 2 Asperger Syndrome children cope in mainstream classes with individual special needs assistants and help from resource teachers.

There is no point in children with autism attending a mainstream school if they cannot benefit from integration. We work with it in two ways. Pupils visit the special classes in a graded, time-tabled way and special class pupils visit age-appropriate classes for subjects to the extent of which they are capable.

Integrate where appropriate for each child. This includes inclusion in mainstream classes for certain subjects. Inclusion in general school activities e.g. concerts and visits from mainstream students for activities/lessons. Also, [we] run a 'Buddy' system where senior children befriend a pupil with ASD.

Professional Development

Laois Education Centre has been given responsibility for professional development for teachers and special needs assistants in the special classes for ASD. A copy of the professional development programme for the school year 2001-2002 is carried in Appendix 4. Many teachers took up their appointment in the special classes without previous experience in special education. The provision of professional support and development in relation to their roles as teachers in the special classes for ASD is therefore considered crucial. According to Balfe (2001) teachers with some experience in special education were in a

better position to respond to some of the challenges that arose in relation to teaching children with ASD, such as challenging behaviour, curriculum, motivating students and developing IEPs (2001:71). Some teachers have availed of training sessions in TEACCH, SPELL and PECS. Twenty five teachers were facilitated to obtain post-graduate qualifications in autism through Birmingham University in the UK, and an additional twenty five commenced this course in January 2002.

All respondents felt the need for more professional development. Areas where additional professional development was required included: TEACCH courses, Behaviour Management and Speech and Language. Practical, Irish-based inservice based on the resources available was emphasised by teachers. Opportunities to participate in distance learning would also be welcomed. Meeting, networking and exchanging information with other teachers in special classes for pupils with ASD was also considered by teachers as an essential dimension of continuous professional development. It was also necessary that teachers would become familiar with: theory of autism; assessment of autism; adaptation of learning environment; the curriculum and how to implement it with pupils with autism. Many schools also highlighted the importance of providing training for the special needs assistants.

The Provision of Summer Programmes

Over three quarters of schools (78%) agreed that children with ASD required continuous educational provision throughout the school year. The reasons for this view are that teachers felt that the children benefit from a continuous provision of structured education, that they benefit from routine, continuity and familiar surroundings, that they do not function in 'free' situations and that children may regress during the long breaks. The importance of respite for parents was also suggested though the need for teachers also to have a break was highlighted.

Seven schools suggested that a summer camp format be used to ensure continuity of provision. Five schools underlined the need for qualified and experienced personnel to be involved. Four respondents suggested that such programmes be provided through the schools, though seven schools did not see any role for the mainstream school in the provision of programmes in July. Some felt that the school could provide the venue and facilities, but not necessarily the staff. However,

nine schools were supportive of the idea of getting involved – but underlined the importance of choice for the staff involved. The provision of incentives such as extra remuneration and the granting of EPV days was welcomed. One suggested that an additional teacher be appointed to allow for a staggered year, with no teacher working more than 183 days, but allowing the class to continue for July. Another suggested that parents be given a grant to purchase private provision during vacations. There was a view that the role of schools in providing summer programmes should be negotiated between DES and INTO and, if courses are educational, they should be designed and delivered by properly trained teachers. Another teacher stated that schools should support the idea – that schools need to be part of the planning now, so that the programme can be agreed rather than be imposed. The following comments indicated the variety of views supporting the need for a continuum of provision:

The need for a continuum

The nature of autism is such that the continuous provision of structured education is most important.

These children need a structured routine but it does not necessarily mean a school one.

The importance of routine and familiar surroundings. Children regress during summer holidays. Parents cannot cope with educational demands.

They benefit from the routine and continuity and social emphasis which characterises the Summer School.

The majority supported the provision of Summer Camp type programmes though, for one, 'school was the optimum choice'

Through school– perhaps use Summer Camp format.

A mixture of an education programme and a holiday camp.

Summer programme in a different setting.

Summer provision should provide experiences that are social, include speech, movement, etc. e.g. horseriding that cannot be provided during school year. Programmes that involve siblings and peers work best.

Class teachers need breaks from the intensity of the teaching environment. Where appropriate, and by choice, significant and familiar others could provide a structured but play-based environment, or perhaps with emphasis on social life skills.

The support of qualified personnel was deemed essential:

Only qualified personnel should be involved.

Contract people with experience and knowledge.

It should be provided by teachers who are professionally trained.

However, one respondent was adamant it should be the school that became involved:

If it's an extension of the educational programme, most definitely the school should be involved. However, if it's a summer camp, I don't think it matters who runs it, as the children have to learn to adjust to the change in routine and environment. It would be easier for the pupils if they were dealing with personnel they were accustomed to.

Schools were willing to assist in a variety of ways:

We are prepared to follow the parents' wishes – the school will provide the premises.

Mainstream schools with special classes for autism should provide the same educational programme in July as schools for children with autism.

Schools should offer their buildings and facilities and teachers if they are willing to participate.

However, some reservations were expressed:

Children can become very confused – coming into a familiar environment, but no educational classes.

Will children be compelled to attend? Implications for integration. Would summer programme isolate the children further?

The teachers definitely need a break as their work is extremely demanding.

Schools made some further suggestions:

Programme must be more relaxed than it is for rest of year. Opportunity for hands on work experience for those interested in a career in the service.

Needs to be structured and very similar to school. Perhaps use one administrator/co-ordinator to work full-time for a cluster of schools. Cannot, under any circumstances, be imposed on schools or staff. Must be properly funded and staffed.

The difficulty of finding suitable staff with the appropriate training,

or of securing support from the Health Boards to provide summer programmes was not underestimated. The extra work involved for school principals and the possible disruption of the permanent teacher's routine were also noted. Schools indicated their frustration at the lack of adequate support during the existing school year, and were of the view that this matter should be addressed prior to any consideration of provision for an additional month. However, on a positive note, four schools offered the following comments:

Our school provided a very successful month-long summer camp for our children this year. All the parents were delighted with it and the children loved it.

It was a success story 'ó thús deireadh.' Children gained both from the more flexible programme with off-site events and from the different atmosphere in the empty school. Staff were very positive and would do it again.

It was very successful in this school.

The model, as established, was very successful in this school. The principal or staff of the Summer School may opt out in future and the BOM is happy to appoint a Summer School organiser and staff.

Challenges for the School

There was a unanimous view that the workload of the principal teacher had increased enormously arising from the establishment of the special classes for ASD in the school. This was due to extra administration, dealing with outside services, extra supervision, curriculum preparation, handling grants, lobbying, monitoring and staff management. The following comments give an indication of the increased workload of principal teachers:

Children with ASD account for 4 % of our school population and 20 % of the principal's workload.

The setting up, enrolling, conferring, provision of proper furniture, equipment, monitoring, inservice, lobbying Dept., frustration at lack of concern on part of Dept., reluctance of Dept. Inspectors to get involved – my workload has trebled!

Constant enquiries and visits from schools who have been approached by DES to set up classes. They are given very little information and depend on those of us who have classes to provide the "training" – very time consuming.

Onus of contracting clinical services now responsibility of BOM / Principal.

On the other hand, respondents were of the view that the inclusion of the special classes for children with ASD had contributed positively to the school. Many positive contributions to school were listed, among them increased awareness of difference and diversity for staff and pupils and improved parent/teacher and community relations. As some teachers stated:

A real living experience of inclusion, tolerance, fostering care for the less well off has genuinely brought out a lovely side in the good nature of children.

It has been good for the other children to mix with them and to recognise that they need care, attention and kindness. It has helped to show tolerance of difference. It is wonderful to see the improvement in the children – it's very slow but very rewarding.

Better understanding of special needs among pupils and staff. Encouraged children to make allowances and to accommodate children with different needs. Established the idea among the community that our school cares. Pupils and their parents have benefited from the Autistic Class.

The main challenges for schools arising from the establishment of the special classes include: integration, supervision, dealing with behavioural difficulties, lack of support and training for both teachers and SNAs, providing a suitable curriculum and seeking back-up from outside agencies. In terms of assisting with integration, one school suggested that mainstream teachers should be offered some form of incentive to become involved in integration of the pupils with autism for part of the week. The increase in the amount of administration and the lack of curriculum guidelines were considered to be major factors contributing to the challenges and difficulties faced by schools. For most schools, the challenge is much more demanding than originally thought. However, many of the challenges and difficulties experienced by schools relate to the lack of support services and lack of planning by the Department of Education and Science regarding the establishment of such classes. Schools were of the view that they should not have to lobby for basic support services from therapists, from health boards and for basic facilities. Schools felt very much left on their own, with many of them citing lack of support as a main concern. The following comments show the frustration of many schools in relation to the special classes for ASD:

Schools are left very much to own devices – set up and off we go – no direction, no inspection, no educational advice. We don't know what the future holds – no provi-

sion in sight for second level. Concern that whatever is done won't be "good enough." Other concern is that there is no professional advice on curriculum –all work done in classes for autism is down to individual teachers.

There are huge demands from parents who have high expectations, often unrealistic, for their children. There are few programmes available and little guidelines.

Clinical facilities, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, music therapy, psychological services are non-existent.

It looks like the more active your parents are in litigation, the better the services to the school. This is grossly unfair.

Too many issues left to the principal to sort out.

Integration has been one of the most difficult things to manage as the timetable in the mainstream class has to be strictly adhered to, otherwise the Asperger's Child becomes agitated and disappointed. This creates difficulty for some teachers. School policies in all areas must take into account the needs of the autistic child e.g. homework, discipline, admissions. As the difficulties of Asperger's Children are not always readily apparent, training is needed for all the school community.

To conclude on a positive note, however, one school stated:

We believe we can meet the challenges.

SECTION B: PROVISION FOR PUPILS WITH AUTISM IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS

There are 49 special classes for children with ASD in special schools. Questionnaires were issued to these special schools in January 2002. Responses from twelve schools are included in the following analysis. The number of special classes for pupils with ASD in each school varied from one to six classes, with the majority having one or two classes. The number of pupils in the classes varied between three and six, with some schools providing for up to 22 children with autism in total. However, nine schools stated that there were pupils with ASD enrolled in the school who were not enrolled in the special classes, and one school stated that three pupils were awaiting diagnosis.

The pupils in the special classes for autism, had a wide range of intellectual ability, though the majority of the pupils were functioning in the moderate and severe range of general learning disabilities. The age range of pupils varied from four years of age to eighteen years of age. The majority of the special classes for pupils with autism were established since 2000, with some having been established prior to 1999.

Resources

Schools were promised many additional resources in order to establish special classes for pupils with ASD. These resources ranged from access to multidisciplinary teams, permanent classrooms, additional accommodation, home support for parents, additional funding, special needs assistants, additional teaching time for specialist subjects (Home economics, PE, Woodwork, Music), staff training, and a teacher for every six pupils. In three cases, such resources were promised in writing. In some cases, the resources promised were made available, though in other cases not all resources promised were received. Currently six schools have access to speech and language therapy, five have access to occupational therapy, five have access to a social worker, and some also have access to nurses, movement therapists, psychologists and physiotherapists. In some cases additional classrooms or building refurbishment were promised but did not materialise. Set up grants available to the schools varied from £2,000 – £5,000 (£2,539 to €6,349) in addition to capitation

funding. The majority of schools indicated that they would like an annual grant of £5,000 (£6,349) per class in order to allow for annual expenses such as school trips, breakages, hygiene products etc.

Referral

The majority of pupils were referred to the special classes for pupils with ASD following psychological assessments. In one case pupils were referred from a pre-school. Many children had already been attending the special school before they were diagnosed with ASD. Schools generally enrol pupils that request admission, though some insist the pupils' general learning disabilities are within the categories already provided for by the school.

Pre-school Provision

In one case all children with ASD had attended a pre-school service. In another case three quarters of the children had attended a pre-school service. In most cases only some children had attended a pre-school service and in two cases none had. All schools supported the concept of early intervention and recommended that home support programmes and pre-school provision specifically for children with ASD should be made available for all children diagnosed with ASD prior to their enrolment in the special schools. Schools also recommended that pre-school children should also have access to the various clinical services depending on their needs.

Curriculum

Most schools modify the curriculum in use with the general pupil population of the school. Individual programmes are used by the majority of schools, often based on the TEACCH method, PECS and on the triad of impairment. Other approaches in use include ABA, Hanen, and the Derbyshire Language Scheme. A number of schools believed the ABA approach was suitable for some pupils – particularly younger pupils – and incorporated ABA techniques within a more eclectic approach to teaching curriculum. However, most schools stated that they would not be in a position to implement such an intensive programme for any length of time.

In general, teachers were of the view that curriculum for children

with ASD needs to be individualised. All schools had some form of IEP (Individual Education Plan) but stated that they were limited as in most cases schools did not have access to the multidisciplinary support required. Children with ASD require more emphasis on sensory needs and social skills and teachers would welcome guidelines on adapting existing curriculum guidelines for pupils with ASD. The challenges in providing suitable curriculum are illustrated in the following comments:

Staff would like more knowledge on the 13 interventions used with children with ASD. Staff also need guidelines on developing an appropriate curriculum for children with ASD as their needs are so different from those with learning disabilities. Too much emphasis is placed on academic work. In curriculum areas such as sensory integration, music therapy and communication staff have little or no training. Teachers are increasingly finding themselves filling in for lack of specialised staff – OT's [Occupational Therapists], SLT's [Speech and Language Therapists].

A sensory curriculum in conjunction with curricula already in use would be of great benefit. Awaiting with interest the launch of new curriculum for special education.

There is no specific curriculum. However, a curriculum for children with ASD should cater for the short term and long term needs of the child. It should be based on the child's overall development and independence. Skills taught should be functional for life based on the SPHE programme and occupational skills needed by each individual child.

Integration

The integration of pupils with ASD with other pupils in the school poses its own challenges. The majority of schools encouraged the integration of pupils with ASD with the other children in the school as appropriate – for example for school outings, playtime, swimming and assembly. One school had a 'buddy' system in place. In another school children with ASD were integrated all the time with their peers, as the range of their chronological ages did not allow for a separate class for pupils with ASD. The following comments illustrate the variety of practices concerning integration:

Most pupils with autism are in age appropriate rather than autistic classes. Sometimes it is impossible to have two children with autism in the same class i.e.

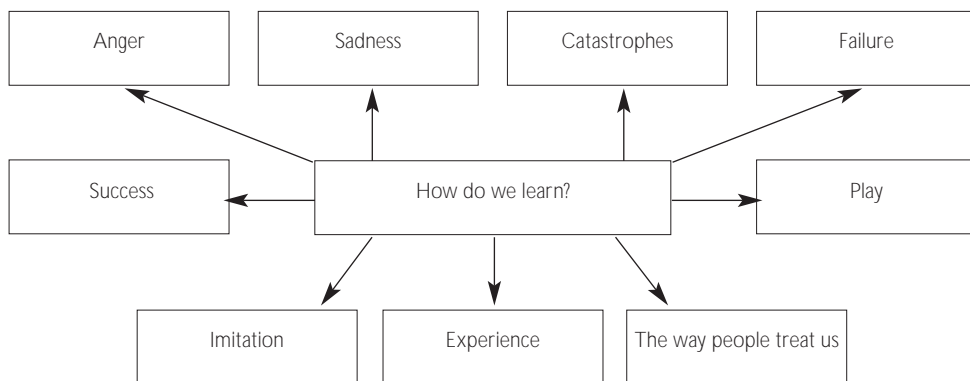
where one sets the other one off.

Long term aim – to integrate pupils with ASD back into the main body of our special school i.e. our moderate learning difficulties classes.

As most of the pupils in the school have autism, there are no opportunities for integration available.

Professional Development

Teachers in most of the schools had availed of some in-career development pertaining to ASD ranging from the Distance Education course organised by Birmingham University, to courses on TEACCH, PECS and ABA organised by a variety of providers including Laois Education Centre. Laois Education Centre has been given responsibility by the Department of Education and Science for co-ordinating professional development courses in the area of ASD for both special schools and mainstream schools. Schools, however, would welcome professional development opportunities that are locally based, as it is not always convenient for teachers to travel. Schools recommended that substitute cover be available when teachers attend inservice courses and that more opportunities for professional development be available for special needs assistants. Whereas courses for individual teachers on the various methodologies are welcome, it was recommended that professional development should also be provided on a whole school basis. While welcoming the increased provision in recent years, teachers are of the view that it is not yet adequate, with training in managing behavioural difficulties being one of the key areas mentioned as not



adequately dealt with to date.

Summer Provision

There wasn't a general consensus regarding the necessity for summer educational provision for pupils with ASD – six respondents were of the view that children with ASD require continued educational provision throughout the school year with five respondents disagreeing. Those who supported such provision were of the view that pupils with ASD required consistent structure and routine and could regress during a long summer break creating challenges for teachers at the beginning of the new term. This is evident from the following comments:

Children with ASD need consistent structure and routine. They have problems handling free time – a break in provision of services means a child can be set back for the first few weeks of a new school year. If behaviours are not consistently addressed, they re-emerge and are harder to deal with second time round.

Students/families require structure, routine to minimize abnormal behavioural patterns.

Some children with autism would benefit from summer programmes as structure and consistency are vital to them.

There was a consensus among those who supported continuous provision that such provision should be provided by experienced and properly trained teachers and special needs assistants. Some were of the view that summer provision should be provided by agencies other than schools and need not consist of a continuum of classroom provision.

Summer provision should contain an element of social outings where children can be given an opportunity to practice skills learned during the school year. It should provide opportunities for children to go places that they would be going if they were on their school holidays for that month. It should contain an element of parental involvement so that the contact the child is missing out at holiday time is being provided by the parents.

Summer provision does not mean classroom teaching. Nor should it be child minding. There should be a way to provide a programme that would facilitate the meeting of the children's needs.

All children need a break from education in the summer months. An alternative programme run by the health board may be appropriate for some children e.g. leisure.

There were reservations, however, regarding the involvement of different staff with the pupils during summer provision, if it were to be a continuation of the classroom programme.

[We] have huge concerns re Health and Safety issues in connection with proposed summer provision. How ethical is it to have strangers working with our pupils? Would outside staff be familiar enough with TEACCH, PECs to continue to provide consistent approaches required. Change does not work well with many children on the autistic spectrum.

It was recognised, however, that consultation would be necessary in order to reach agreement on summer provision. It was also considered necessary that involvement in summer provision should be voluntary. There was concern that current remuneration did not provide an adequate incentive for teachers to participate.

Provision can only succeed by agreement with all parties concerned on a voluntary/optional basis.

Pay is not satisfactory. After tax teachers feel it's not worth the effort.

School Administration

There is no doubt that the establishment of additional classes for pupils with ASD has created additional administrative work for principals in special schools. The challenges pertain to the organisation of increased number of staff, liaison with a variety of agencies, curriculum planning and paperwork. The following comments indicate the increased workload in schools with classes for children with ASD:

Organising teachers, SNAs, substitute cover, arranging courses, liaising with psychologist and support team, dealing with parents, potential court cases, ordering materials, planning and discussing integration with all those involved; facilitating students and teachers who wish to expand their knowledge of autism; facilitating play, group leaders and nursing staff, liaising with DES and facilitating the summer opening.

Increased planning, administration, human resource management, interaction with voluntary/state bodies, financial management, crisis intervention re behavioural patterns, transport management, payroll processing ...

It is a huge workload imposed on the principal with little or no support or remuneration.

On a positive note, the fact that pupils with ASD are being catered for in classes which have been established to address their particular needs has been seen to benefit the whole school.

Students previously on general register as a consequence of dedicated class now posing relatively few management problems.

[We have] always catered for children with autism. Now, however, we are providing autistic specific provision for these children with staff that have autistic specific training.

One respondent, however, saw the addition of special classes for pupils with ASD as having a negative effect on the school.

No positive contribution. Negative – more workload and stress.

Future Challenges

It is clear that the establishment of special classes for pupils with ASD in special schools has created additional challenges for the school staff. These challenges are greater, given that many schools do not have access to a multidisciplinary team, which is considered essential for pupils with ASD if they are to benefit from educational provision. Some schools also find themselves in situations where they are trying to provide appropriate educational programmes in school buildings and classrooms that are totally inadequate. Children with ASD can also be demanding, requiring attention more often than other children in the school. Schools would welcome more training and professional development opportunities on a whole school basis and more support from the Department of Education and Science in dealing with the challenges presented by pupils with ASD.

We definitely feel that a multidisciplinary team is crucial for these classes – we do not have that.

We have to make sure that other pupils do not suffer as a result i.e. some pupils with autism demand a lot of attention, can be dangerous, disruptive etc. We feel that at times staff are taken up with particular individuals with autism who are in crisis/nearly in crisis. This staff time is taken from others.

Children with autism have always been enrolled in special schools for children with

a moderate level of functioning. The challenge was to create an environment/structure suitable to meet their needs.

Challenging behaviour – constant change of personnel in the multi-disciplinary team – lack of adequate home support for parents and families – issue of July education.

Teachers are concerned about burnout as it is considered a particular challenge to teach children with ASD. This also has implications for teacher absences, when it is necessary to employ a substitute, as the substitute should also have training to teach children with ASD. Many schools find it difficult to recruit staff, and believe bonuses and sabbatical leave should be available for teachers who work with children with ASD.

We feel that extra relief staff need to be available i.e. if the teacher is absent it is not acceptable to just put in a “sub” for these pupils, without consistency these pupils suffer enormously.

Problems recruiting and retaining staff due to severe nature of children’s behavioural problems.

The real possibility of ‘burn out’ for autism and the necessity for measures to be available to avoid the same. I consider regular sabbatical leave for both teaching and SNA staff to be vital for the continuance of a quality service.

Schools are also concerned about proposals to establish alternative provision which focus inclusively on one method such as ABA.

The school is very concerned re proposals to set up CABAS classes side by side with existing classes.

In summary, the following comment synthesises the particular challenges faced by teachers in trying to provide appropriate education for pupils with ASD.

It would be much better if individual pupils could be observed/their needs assessed and met than for any one person or approach to be appointed/applied. Too often approaches work effectively for a short time but unless there is understanding of the child and the nature of autism the flexibility, imagination and development of the programme cannot be developed.

4

The rationale for continuous educational provision

What is it children do during summer holidays from school? They play, they interact with other children, they explore, in fact they engage in many of the activities listed in Maddock's (1990) diagram of factors associated with learning. However, for a child with autism, the nature of their disorder is likely to have a negative impact on the learning value of many of these activities. The summer holiday is a period of learning for the "normal" child and indeed for many special needs children such as the child with Downs Syndrome or the child with mild/moderate learning difficulties whose development may be delayed but whose capacity to learn from different situations is, in essence, no different to others. The summer holidays offer a different classroom to these children, it is a classroom which offers learning from everyday experiences. However, the child with ASD may not learn from these happy unstructured days of freedom from the classroom as the majority of children with ASD not only have delayed development but also have autism which will have an effect on how the individual thinks and learns.

(Maddock 1990)

Thinking and Learning

Powell and Jordan (1998) say there are four interconnected features of autistic thinking:

- 1 The way in which the information is perceived;
- 1 The way in which the world is experienced;
- 1 The way in which information is coded, stored and retrieved in memory and
- 1 The role of emotion as a context in which these processes may, or

may not, operate.

These features will hinder the way children with autism will learn if left to their own devices. During the holidays, children without autism will learn through various different channels, as mentioned by Maddock; however, the child with autism may not.

Powell and Jordan (1998) identify three common difficulties in the learning styles of those with autism;

- 1 Difficulties in interacting,
- 1 Difficulties in transfer of learning and
- 1 Bizarre behaviour - many individuals with autism have difficulty with establishing awareness and understanding of the intentions of others so they are often seen as being 'odd' or bizarre.

Many children with autism will have problems with communication, socialisation, imitation, play, perception, memory, sense of self and generalisation. Thus while other children may learn through these channels, the child with autism may not. Examples of what the child without autism learns through these channels are too numerous to list here and very often are regarded as too trivial to be noted. However, Marc Segar, an able adult with autism tells us "A person with autism must learn scientifically what others learn instinctively". Thus the long summer holidays each year may be of little benefit to the child with autism.

Children with autism have a *resistance to change due to their impairment of imagination*. While they are not always averse to new experiences, there may be some fear or confusion if established routines are disrupted. Parents may find this difficult to cope with during the summer months as their child struggles to deal with their disrupted routine.

It has been highlighted that children with autism remain calm in a *well-organised class* for autism. Two months at home where family life may not mirror the highly organised classroom does not seem to be the most productive option for these children's education.

Children with autism have great difficulty with *transfer of knowledge* (Grandin 1995). When they have learned a skill they learn it within that context only. Thus, a child may be taught to play with Lego/sticklebricks, etc. but for the child to transfer it to home and holidays may cause difficulty for her/him. They may have learnt to begin conversations in the school yard but may not be able to transfer that skill to social situations outside school.

The child with autism will have *difficulty with social scenarios* arising out of their inability to identify the intentions of others. Holidays are seen

as times for social interaction, but this can pose great difficulty for the child with autism, due to his/her impairment in communication and socialisation.

Conclusion

In summary, the nature of autism and its impact on the capacity of children with autism to develop and learn would seem to indicate that routine and highly structured learning environments are more likely to facilitate development and learning than are situations where routines, settings and personnel change from day to day. Thus the provision of traditional summer time activities may not be as beneficial for children with ASD as the continuation of classroom provision through at least some of the summer period.

Continuous provision – the challenges

The issue of the Summer Programmes arose, in the first instance, in the Judgement in Paul O'Donoghue's legal case. Paul was a child with severe and profound general learning difficulties, who, through his mother, sued the State for not providing appropriate education. Justice Rory O'Hanlon, in his Judgement on the Paul O'Donoghue case, stated the following:

“the lengthy holiday breaks which take place in the life of the ordinary school appear likely to cause serious loss of ground which may never be recovered in the case of children with severe or profound handicap. Accordingly, to deal adequately with their needs, appears to require that the teaching process should, so far as is practicable, be continuous throughout the school year.”

He also stated that:

“The evidence given in the case also gives rise to a strong conviction that primary education for this category, if it is to meet their special needs, requires a new approach in respect of:

(ii) *Age of commencement;*

“early intervention and assessment” is necessary.

(iii) *Duration of primary education – continue as long as the ability for further development is discernible;*

“age 18 may not be unrealistic in this context”.

(iv) *Continuity of Education;*

“The lengthy holiday breaks which takes place in the life of the ordinary primary school appear likely to cause serious loss of ground which may never be recovered in the case of children with severe and profound handicap. Accordingly, to deal adequately with their needs appears to require that the teaching process should, so far as practicable, be continuous throughout the entire year.”

The Judgement set a legally binding precedent that places the onus on the State to automatically provide opportunities for education for all children. The judgement not alone directed that Paul O'Donoghue be given an education, but also specified in precise detail:

- 1 The form that this education should take in terms of pupil/teacher ratio;
- 1 Early intervention;
- 1 Continuity of education.

The State, however, sought to appeal on the basis that the Government reserved the right to determine these matters but later withdrew.

Justice O'Hanlon's judgement was reaffirmed by Justice Barr in the Sinnott case - a case taken by Kathleen Sinnott on behalf of her son James who had been diagnosed with autism and had been denied appropriate education by the State. Judgement in the Sinnott case was delivered by Justice Barr on 4 October, 2000. Justice Barr adopted, "with respect, the learned Justice O'Hanlon's definition of education" and "his foregoing findings, including that relating to the right of the severely or profoundly mentally handicapped to primary education, provided for by the State under Article 42 of the Constitution, the pupil/teacher ratio and care assistant ratio per group of six pupils."

Implications of Court Judgements

Sadly, the State's response to both the O'Donoghue and the Sinnott cases has been one of major reaction. Therein, however, lies the dilemma for the INTO. Any legal consideration of the O'Hanlon and Barr Judgements would indicate that:

1. There is nothing ambiguous about the language;
2. The likelihood is that teaching does mean teaching in the orthodox sense;
3. There are a variety of other Judgements (eg. Best case) which adopt a similar approach;
4. The phrase "scholastic education" was used in some of the other judgements;
5. Barron and Geoghegan, in the Supreme Court, also cited O'Hanlon and apparently nobody has taken issue with the aspects of the O'Hanlon Judgement that refer to:

- * *Age of Commencement*
- * *Duration of Primary Education*
- * *Continuity of Education.*

The above judgements refer only to pupils with severe and profound general learning disabilities and children with ASD. The questions which must therefore be addressed are as follows:

6. How is the continuation of education to be provided for and by whom?
7. What type of Programmes would best suit the needs of the children concerned? For example:
 - * *Summer Projects/Camps?*
 - * *Summer Schools?*
 - * *Extension of existing Programmes?*
8. What should the level of teacher involvement (if any) be?
9. How best to address the conditions of employment issues?
10. Should all children with autism be entitled to Summer Programme provision? Significant questions surround the rights of the children concerned, particularly those children in the mild to moderate autistic range, to enjoy similar summer holidays to their peers. There is also an issue regarding provision for pupils who are fully integrated into a mainstream school, where there may only be one or two pupils entitled to such provision.
11. How to determine the capacity of the school to provide appropriate programmes? Major questions surround the ability of the school to provide Summer Programmes, particularly in relation to:
 - * *The levels of clinical support available;*
 - * *The pupil/teacher ratio;*
 - * *The special needs assistant ratio;*
 - * *The pressure to teach in July;*
 - * *The referral procedures;*
 - * *The qualifications, development and training of appropriate staff;*
 - * *The provision of adequate transport;*
 - * *The expansion of the role of principal;*
 - * *The availability of appropriate Programmes;*
 - * *The appropriate level of remuneration and conditions of employment which should be negotiated in advance of the establishment of any Summer Programme;*
 - * *The level of grant aid available for the provision of out of school/summer camp activities.*

The professional response would appear to be supportive of continuity of some form of education, particularly for children with autism

who learn best in structured environments, whether at play or in class. While it is accepted that some children would benefit from a continuation of education, the significance of the number involved has, as yet, to be determined. Whereas the Department of Education and Science are adamant that teacher involvement in any such Programmes must always be on a voluntary basis, concerns have been expressed by teachers in special schools and special classes that subtle, covert or overt pressure could be exerted in order to "encourage" teachers to engage in the provision of Summer Programmes.

The Emergence of Summer Programmes

The INTO met a delegation of teachers of children with severe and profound general learning disabilities in 1998 to discuss the issue of summer facilities in relation to the COPE Foundation (where Paul O'Donoghue attended school) which had emerged at that time. Classes for children with ASD in mainstream schools were also being established at this time. In 1999/2000, the INTO requested the Department of Education and Science to set up a Working Group to discuss the issues surrounding the provision of Summer Programmes in schools, arising from the O'Hanlon judgement. The Central Executive Committee of the INTO also set up a Subcommittee to consider the issue. This subcommittee recommended that:

- 1 Children should be entitled to vacation periods similar to their peers;
- 1 Summer Programmes/respite should be provided by others, mainly caring personnel;
- 1 There should be no education involvement in these Programmes.

By the year 2000, individual principal teachers were writing to the INTO in relation to the provision of Summer Programmes in schools. A group of principal teachers representing the schools concerned wrote to the General Secretary in November 2000 seeking a meeting to discuss the emerging issues. A meeting was arranged with the principal teachers concerned in December 2000. The principal teachers stated that Summer Camp/services had historically been provided and funded, by the majority of Health Boards by way of Childcare Centres, but that:

- 1 These Programmes were provided on an *ad hoc* basis;
- 1 Pressure was being exerted on boards of management to provide

summer type Programmes;

- 1 Negotiations should be conducted in respect of principal teachers, transport facilities, funding for July Programmes and issues such as multidisciplinary teams.

The principal teachers requested a review of INTO policy on this matter. Following further meetings and discussions at Central Executive meetings, the INTO submitted a claim to the Conciliation and Arbitration Council seeking the provision of proper conditions of employment for any teacher who would voluntarily take part in Summer Programmes. Agreement was reached in respect of special schools for children with autism and special schools for children with severe and profound learning disabilities. No discussions took place with the Department of Education and Science in relation to the provision of Programmes for children with autism in mainstream schools.

Following debates and the passing of resolutions at Annual Congress 2001, (See Appendix 6) a consultative meeting was held in May 2001 with representatives from special schools. A further consultative meeting with representatives of special schools and special classes in mainstream schools was held in December 2001. Diverse views on the issue of summer provision emerged at both these consultative meetings. Further motions have been submitted for discussion at Congress 2002. The consultation process regarding this matter is continuing.

The INTO wrote to the Department of Education and Science seeking a major review of special education, and in particular the reconvening of the Special Education Review Committee with a view to the development, planning and implementation of Summer Programmes for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and severe and profound general learning disabilities.

6

Conclusions and recommendations

Educational provision for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder is far from satisfactory. Whereas improvements have been made in recent years, both in the amount of provision and in the support provided, there are many issues which need to be addressed if children with ASD are to receive an education which more adequately meets their needs.

National Policy

Educational provision for children with special needs has suffered from a lack of strategic planning at national level. In particular, provision for children with ASD has grown on an *ad hoc* basis. In this policy vacuum, the Department of Education and Science has found itself responding, often as a result of court cases or pressure from parents to provide education for their autistic children. The Department has provided funding for CABAS, though has not formally endorsed the ABA approach and has commissioned independent evaluation of current provision. It also established a Task Force which recently reported on current policy and practice. The Minister for Education and Science has given a commitment to establish a National Council for Special Education, which will have a research and policy function in addition to a role in the co-ordination of delivery. When established, this Council may address the lacuna in strategic planning of provision and support services for children with ASD and all children with special education needs. The lack of national policy in relation to education provision for pupils with ASD has led to a situation where practices relating to identification, referrals, reviews and the provision of support services has varied. In this context, the report of the Task Force on Autism is welcome. This report has identified many areas of policy and practice which need to be addressed. Given the current emphasis on establishing special class provision either in mainstream or special schools, there is also a concern that the needs

of the teachers and pupils in schools where children with ASD are fully integrated may be ignored.

The INTO recommends

- 1 That the National Council for Special Education be established without delay;
- 1 That a second Review Committee on Special Education be established to review, consider and advise on current policy and practice in the area of special education;
- 1 That appropriate structures be put in place to ensure high quality educational provision for all pupils with ASD regardless of their setting.

Identification and Referral

The Report of the Task Force on Autism has highlighted many of the inadequacies in relation to early diagnosis and early intervention. It is quite clear that many children with ASD could have benefited from earlier intervention had they been diagnosed. Autism is a life-long condition but, with appropriate education, many children can progress significantly over time. The degree of improvement that can be expected and the level of functioning which may eventually be reached will depend on the age of the child, the level of language development and the level of assessed intelligence at the time intervention commences. Autism is a broad spectrum disorder. It is found at all IQ levels, the number of areas of functioning which are affected can vary and the degree to which they are affected varies hugely from one individual to another. Therefore, when decisions are being made about the most suitable pre-school facility or school enrolment, it is absolutely necessary that various factors such as the pervasiveness and degree of severity of the autistic symptoms, the level of intelligence and the level of language development is taken into account.

Prior to enrolment in any school, the child with ASD should be assessed by a multidisciplinary team in order to determine the most appropriate placement. Such multidisciplinary teams need to include a teacher in addition to a psychologist, speech and language therapist, and other professionals as considered appropriate. There may also be a role for a visiting teacher in the referral process. Placements also need to be regularly reviewed, in order to ensure that the child remains in the most appropriate setting, in terms of progress and development. Teachers need to be central to such review processes.

Teachers also need to be facilitated to participate in case confer-

ences and multidisciplinary team meetings. Formal time must be made available to enable teachers to fulfil their responsibilities as core members of multidisciplinary teams. This will require structured time for such meetings with substitute cover as appropriate.

The INTO recommends

- 1 That all children be diagnosed at the earliest possible opportunity and an appropriate education intervention programme be put in place;
- 1 That assessment teams be multidisciplinary;
- 1 That teachers be part of multidisciplinary teams and, therefore, involved in the referral process prior to a child's enrolment in school;
- 1 That placements be regularly reviewed by multidisciplinary teams which include both the relevant class teacher and the principal teacher;
- 1 That teachers be enabled to participate as members of multidisciplinary teams and to attend case conferences through structured time allocation with substitute cover as appropriate.

A Continuum of Provision

As the needs and abilities of children with ASD vary considerably, there can be no one model of educational provision which would suit all children. The INTO has always supported the concept of a continuum of provision ranging from full time enrolment in special schools to fulltime supported enrolment in mainstream schools. Where a child is placed initially along this continuum will depend on needs and abilities as assessed by a multidisciplinary team. However, a child should be able to move along the continuum as a child's needs develop and change over time. For example, a child placed in a special class in a mainstream school following initial diagnosis may be able to progress to full time enrolment in a mainstream classroom at a later stage or, alternatively, a child may transfer to fulltime enrolment in a special school. Movement along the continuum, where appropriate, should follow regular reviews of the child's progress. Such reviews should be carried out by multidisciplinary teams which include teachers.

The continuum of provision should also range from pre-school provision to third level. As many children are diagnosed with ASD - particularly lower functioning ASD - between their second and third birthday, all such children should be enabled to avail of an appropriate pre-school intervention programme. This may involve attendance at a regular pre-school for some children, to individual one-to-one intervention with others. Such provision should be funded by the

State at no cost to the parents. The organisation of a range of pre-school provision for pupils with special needs would need to be co-ordinated by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, recently established in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. The Government White Paper on Early Childhood Education stated that priority would be given to funding pre-school provision for children with special needs and disadvantaged pupils in the context of State policy on early childhood education.

Special schools and special classes for pupils with ASD at primary level cater for a wide variety of abilities. The special classes in some mainstream schools cater for pupils with low functioning ASD, while others cater for pupils with average or above average levels of functioning or Aspergers Syndrome. The existence of a special class for pupils with ASD in a particular geographical area is therefore, no guarantee that an appropriate provision is available for each child diagnosed with ASD. There is a need for a strategic approach to planning a variety of provision, ranging from special schools to supported integration including special classes for pupils with low functioning ASD and classes for pupils with high functioning ASD in specific catchment areas. This may become a function of the yet to be established National Council for Special Education. Children should be able to avail of school transport to the nearest, most suitable, educational provision. Where pupils are fully integrated in mainstream classes - in the absence of special class or special school provision or where it's the most appropriate placement for a particular child - appropriate additional support also needs to be provided according to the child's needs. Such additional support may involve the appointment of an additional class teachers and/or special needs assistants. Pupils with ASD cannot be expected to cope in mainstream classes of 25 to 35 pupils with additional fulltime teaching support.

The provision of post primary education for pupils with ASD also needs to be included in a strategic plan for comprehensive provision. As stated in an earlier Chapter, it is unclear where the majority of pupils attending the special classes for pupils with ASD will go when they reach post-primary school age. As these classes have only been established in recent years, this issue has not yet become a major problem. However, based on the variety of abilities and needs which exist among the pupils attending the special classes at primary level, it could be assumed that a variety of provision may continue to be required at post-primary level. It will, of course, depend on the

progress made by the pupils at primary level. Some may be able to benefit from mainstream enrolment at post-primary level, whereas others may require enrolment in a special school. There are a number of pupils of post-primary school age with ASD already attending special schools, some of whom have attended special schools from an early age.

Some pupils with ASD may be able to progress to third level education. Additional support, if required, should be provided to enable such pupils to benefit from third level education. Additional support for pupils with hearing or visual impairment are negotiated with the relevant authorities by the Visiting Teacher Service. A similar model of ensuring appropriate support could be established for pupils with ASD.

The concept of a continuum of provision could be further supported by a Visiting Teacher Service – similar to the support service provided by visiting teachers to the hearing impaired and the visually impaired. A visiting teacher could be allocated to work with a family once a child has been diagnosed with autism. The visiting teacher would continue to liaise with the family as the child progresses through school, advising on the various educational options available. The visiting teachers could also provide support to the teachers in schools on matters pertaining to autism in general and on matters pertaining to particular individual children as required.

The INTO recommends

- 1 That a continuum of educational provision be available for pupils with ASD to cater for all levels of ability within the spectrum;
- 1 That such a continuum be available at pre-school, primary and post-primary levels;
- 1 That additional support for pupils with ASD who wish to attend third level be provided where required;
- 1 That each child with ASD should be able to avail of appropriate educational provision within a reasonable geographical area;
- 1 That school transport should be provided to pupils with ASD who need to travel to avail of appropriate provision;
- 1 That consideration be given to appointing visiting teachers with expertise in the area of autism to the Visiting Teacher Service for Pupils with Special Needs.

Continuous Educational Provision

Much debate is currently taking place on the issue of organising

educational provision for children with ASD and children with severe and profound general learning disabilities beyond the standard school year. Where schools have become involved in the provision of summer programmes, such programmes are considered to have been successful. However, many teachers fear that they may be coerced into teaching during their summer vacation period, or that the right to a summer programme taught by teachers may be extended to other categories of pupils. Many teachers support the children's right to have continuous provision through July. However, there is no overwhelming consensus on whether this should be a continuation of the school programme, or a separate summer camp type programme. According to consultative meetings held with members to date, there is a broad spectrum of views among teachers on this matter. These views range from members who consider that the provision of July Programmes should be entirely separate from the work of the teachers. Such members are of the view that whatever arrangements are made for the month of July, that they should be provided by a separate agency – health board or the board of management – and be of a summer camp/recreational type activity. At the other end of the spectrum, some are already involved in such programmes and welcome the current developments as an improvement and argue that only teachers – as the professional educators – could provide the continuity of provision required. Others hold the view that the extension into July is inevitable in the context of the court judgements and are of the opinion that the Organisation should focus its energy on securing adequate remuneration and conditions for participating teachers, particularly a provision that participation would remain on a voluntary basis.

The INTO recommends

- 1 That participation in summer provision for children with ASD continue to be voluntary for teachers;
- 1 That where teachers and principal teachers opt to participate, that they be remunerated adequately, at agreed overtime rates.

Pupil/Teacher Ratio

Currently, the Department of Education and Science allocates one teacher for every six pupils with ASD. However, many pupils with ASD require one-to-one teaching or teaching in smaller groups, particu-

larly in the early years following diagnosis. A rigid pupil/teacher ratio may not be appropriate for this category, as their needs and abilities vary so much. Therefore, teachers should be allocated according to need. In addition, where children with special needs are fully integrated, overall class size would need to be reduced in recognition of the fact such children generally require more attention and time from the class teacher. In many cases it would be necessary to appoint additional teachers specifically for children with ASD who are fully integrated. The concept of team teaching would need to be explored in this context.

The INTO recommends

- 1 That one-to-one teacher/pupil ratio be allocated where such provision is deemed necessary in a child's assessment report;
- 1 That the ratio to be applied in any particular class be determined by the needs of the particular children in the class;
- 1 That a maximum teacher pupil ratio of 4:1 apply to classes for pupils with ASD;
- 1 That mainstream classes where children with special needs are fully integrated be reduced in size;
- 1 That an additional class teacher be appointed where pupils with ASD are fully integrated.

Funding

Many schools expressed frustration at the lack of clear and precise information available regarding funding for special classes for pupils with ASD. There also appears to be a lack of recognition that a once-off-grant for the purchase of furniture is insufficient as the children grow out of the furniture initially purchased. Additional funding for resources and equipment is also required on an annual basis over and above the capitation funding. As children with ASD are primarily visual learners, consideration needs to be given to funding the provision of a laptop computer for each pupil which would facilitate their learning both in school and at home.

The INTO recommends

- 1 That schools be made aware of all sources of funding available to special classes for pupils with ASD both in mainstream and special school settings;
- 1 That the initial set-up grant for new special classes be increased to £10,000;
- 1 That furniture grants be available periodically as children outgrow existing furniture;
- 1 That an annual grant of £1,000 be available for the purchase of materials and resources;

- 1 That similar grants also be made available to schools where pupils with ASD are fully integrated into mainstream classes;
- 1 That laptop computers be provided for all pupils with ASD with appropriate hard and software.

Support Services

Many special classes for pupils with ASD were established in the mainstream schools on the basis that support services -- speech therapy, occupational therapy, psychological services, etc -- would be provided. However, the majority of schools were left without an adequate provision of such support services. Such support services are also rarely available to mainstream schools where children with ASD are fully integrated. The Department of Education and Science which approached schools requesting them to establish the special classes, followed through with their commitment to provide the teaching staff and the special needs assistants. However, the Department of Education and Science did not have control over the provision of support services which were the responsibility of the Department of Health and Children. In many cases, the health boards did not have the personnel to provide the support services for the special classes. It has emerged in the last year that grants have been made available to schools - initially £2,000 per term, recently raised to £5,000 - to purchase the services of therapists. However welcome though the grant may be, this process of securing support services transfers responsibility for the provision of support services to the boards of management of the schools concerned, and in reality, the burden falls on the principal teacher. The grant is also inadequate as very little can be purchased in terms of providing comprehensive therapeutic support for pupils with ASD. This arrangement of providing grants for schools to purchase the services of therapists should be considered solely as an interim measure. Consideration needs to be given to the respective roles of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Health and Children in relation to the provision of therapeutic services for children in all special education settings. The shortage of therapists also needs to be urgently addressed through appropriate recruitment and retention policies.

The unsatisfactory provision of support services has led to many difficulties for teachers. Teachers are acutely aware that the potential benefit of the education they provide - whether in mainstream or special education settings - is limited when the support services from

therapists are not available. In some cases, therapists may give guidance to teachers and/or parents in relation to speech and language therapy or occupational therapy exercises which could be carried out by them. Whereas the guidance may be welcome, teachers, special needs assistants or parents are not given any specific training in the area of providing therapeutic support services for children and they cannot be expected to replace the expertise of the professional therapists. If pupils with ASD are to benefit fully from their participation in education, the provision of appropriate support from therapists is essential.

The INTO recommends

- 1 That the Department of Education and Science employ therapists – speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists etc – directly in order to provide support services for children with special needs attending mainstream and special schools;
- 1 That arrangements be put in place to ensure the training of additional therapists in order to address the shortage of qualified therapists;
- 1 That the provision of grants to schools to purchase the services of therapists as required be considered solely as an interim arrangement and that the grant be increased.

Professional Development

The special classes for pupils with ASD are staffed by qualified primary school teachers. Whereas teachers can draw on their expertise and experience as primary teachers, additional training and opportunities for professional development are required to assist teachers in understanding the nature of pupils with ASD and to enable them to meet their particular educational needs. According to Balfe (2001) teachers who had a background in special education were in a better position to cope with the challenges of teaching children with ASD, such as challenging behaviour, curriculum, motivating students and developing IEPs (2001:71). She also found that teachers in general felt poorly prepared for their role in teaching children with ASD, and that teachers in schools where there was only one class for pupils with ASD felt more isolated than their colleagues in schools where there were more classes. An induction or orientation course would therefore, be of great assistance to teachers who are allocated to teach in the special classes for children with ASD, or who have children with ASD integrated into their classrooms on a fulltime basis.

The delegation of responsibility for the co-ordination of professional

development provision for both teachers and special needs assistants to one Education Centre (Laois Education Centre) is welcome. However, the current level of provision is not sufficient. What is required is a strategic approach to identifying the professional development needs of both the teachers and the special needs assistants working with pupils with ASD and devising a comprehensive and systematic approach to planning to meet those needs. The strategic plan would need to address the training and professional development of teachers and special needs assistants when they are first appointed to the special classes. This should then be followed by a programme of ongoing support and development. The facilitation of two groups of 25 teachers to pursue post-graduate studies in the area of autism through Birmingham University has to be welcomed. Ongoing support for postgraduate studies of this kind would need to continue if the expertise within the teaching profession on matters pertaining to ASD is to be enhanced. Teachers' willingness to pursue postgraduate studies in the area of ASD is to be commended. Teachers who wish to pursue such studies should continue to be facilitated.

The special needs assistants appointed to work with children with ASD also need training and professional development. At present, prior experience or qualifications in childcare or a related area are not prerequisites for appointment as a special needs assistant. An initial training and orientation programme would, therefore, be required on appointment, followed by ongoing opportunities for enhanced training and professional development.

The establishment of additional special classes each year, and the turnover of teachers in existing special classes leads to an annual cohort of teachers who need an orientation programme of training and professional development to enable them cope with the new challenges of the special classes. Class teachers, where children with ASD are fully integrated, also need access to professional development opportunities in the area of autism. This training and professional development needs to be built on each year as teachers become more knowledgeable and expert in the teaching of children with ASD. In addition to creating an understanding of the nature of ASD, teachers need to be familiar with the variety of methodologies that can be used when teaching children with ASD, such as TEACCH, ABA, PECS, etc, so that they can select the most appropriate methodology for the circumstances of the particular children in their classes. Other issues which need to be included in a professional development programme

for teachers are: assessment, curriculum development, individual planning, inter-disciplinary co-operation, information and communication technology, self-reflective practice, managing challenging behaviour, data-collection and teamwork. Working with a special needs assistant in a classroom is an additional challenge for teachers who have traditionally taught in classrooms with no other adult present. Teachers in mainstream schools have traditionally little experience in working with multidisciplinary teams. Professional development courses therefore need to provide teachers and special needs assistants with skills in teamwork and working with multidisciplinary teams. In addition to the provision of continuous professional development opportunities, it is necessary to review current teacher education programmes at pre-service level, in order to ensure that future graduates will have a knowledge of special education needs including ASD.

The INTO recommends

- 1 That a comprehensive professional development plan be put in place to meet the needs of both teachers and special needs assistants working with pupils with ASD;
- 1 That teachers who wish to pursue postgraduate studies in the area of ASD be fully supported, both financially and through study time out of school;
- 1 That newly appointed teachers and special needs assistants to special classes for ASD be offered comprehensive orientation and induction programmes;
- 1 That induction and orientation programmes also be offered to mainstream class teachers who have children with ASD fully integrated in their classrooms;
- 1 That substitute cover be provided for all teachers and/or SNAs who require inservice;
- 1 That recognised, validated training be provided in addressing challenging behaviour;
- 1 That information automatically be provided to all schools with special classes for pupils with ASD regarding available training and professional development opportunities;
- 1 That pre-service education be reviewed to include comprehensive modules on special needs education including ASD.

Curriculum

Teachers in the special schools or classes for pupils with ASD – in the absence of curricula for special education – have tended to adapt the mainstream curriculum to suit the needs of children with special needs. However, development and implementation of curriculum has created a major challenge for the teachers, according to Balfe (2001). Given the variety of abilities of pupils within the autistic spectrum, it may be difficult to design a specific curriculum for pupils

with ASD that would meet the needs of all pupils. For some, an adapted mainstream curriculum, in addition to specific programmes to address the particular needs of pupils with ASD may be sufficient. For others, a curriculum designed specifically to meet their particular needs may be required. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has given a commitment to develop curriculum guidelines for pupils with ASD as the next stage of curriculum development for pupils with special education needs. Currently, curriculum guidelines for pupils with mild, moderate, severe and profound general learning disabilities are in the process of being prepared. Whereas these guidelines may be of considerable benefit to teachers of pupils with ASD they will not address the specific needs of pupils with ASD.

Many teachers of pupils with ASD have also applied particular methodologies to teaching pupils with ASD. Such methodologies include TEACCH, ABA and PECS. While no one methodology is suitable in all cases, teachers use an eclectic approach, drawing on the different methodologies as appropriate in order to meet the needs of the pupils in their classes. Whereas teachers would not advocate one methodology over another, they see a role for different methodologies as part of an overall approach, and would consult with parents when different approaches are being used. Teachers wish to retain discretion in the selection of appropriate teaching methodologies in their classes. Guidance in relation to the different methodologies would be welcomed by teachers, and this is a matter which could be addressed by the NCCA.

The process of individual planning is also used by teachers to plan to meet the needs of the pupils in their classes. In some cases, personnel other than teachers are involved in the process. In most cases, teachers plan in consultation with the special needs assistants and the parents of the children. In some cases, where support services are available speech and language or other therapists are involved. As the needs and abilities of the children vary, individual planning provides a mechanism to plan and review the curriculum and educational programme for each child.

The INTO recommends

- 1 That curriculum guidelines for pupils with ASD be prepared by the NCCA, in consultation with practising teachers;
- 1 That guidelines be prepared for teachers in relation to individual planning;

- 1 That guidelines be made available to teachers in relation to the various teaching methodologies which can be applied to teaching pupils with ASD – TEACCH, ABA, PECS, etc – and particularly in relation to how the various methodologies relate to the aims of the curriculum;
- 1 That proper validated research be conducted in Irish settings in relation to the effectiveness of various intervention approaches;
- 1 That guidelines be provided to teachers regarding assessment of learning of pupils with ASD.

Conclusion

Parents of children with ASD have had to battle with the Department of Education and Science in order to obtain specialist provision for their children. Teachers have willingly responded to requests from the Department of Education and Science to provide education to children with ASD. However, current educational provision for children with ASD is dependent to a large extent on the goodwill of teachers. They have often been left without adequate information and support in doing so. The challenges such teachers face have been outlined in chapter three. Balfe (2001) in her study of teachers in the special classes for pupils with ASD, has also identified and described similar challenges. In order to address these challenges, the provision of appropriate professional development opportunities and appropriate support services is essential. In addition consideration needs to be given to providing incentives to teachers who opt to teach in difficult special education situations. Whereas an allowance is payable to teachers who hold the Special Education Diploma from St. Patrick's College and to teachers who hold Masters degrees, the allowance system needs to be reviewed to offer additional incentives to teachers who engage in further professional development. Consideration also needs to be given to allowing pension credit to teachers who have given a long-term commitment to special education. The service of committed teachers is a prerequisite to providing a good education to children with ASD. Therefore, investment in teacher development, along with appropriate remuneration and recognition is essential.

A strategic approach to planning for educational provision, including the availability of support services, adequate funding, ongoing reviews and assessments, will contribute to addressing the learning needs of children with ASD. The need for co-ordination and planning,

particularly between the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Health and Children will also be required if educational provision for pupils with ASD is to be enhanced. There is also a need for continuous research in the area of special education, including approaches to intervention in educational settings in Ireland. In the context of the current policy vacuum in the area of special education, consideration should be given to re-constituting the Special Education Review Committee, to review and advise on current policy and practice.

APPENDIX 1

Special classes in mainstream schools (2001 – 2002)

COUNTY	ROLL NO	SCHOOL
Clare	4 9 1 9	Cratloe NS, Ennis, Co. Clare
Cork	1 3 8 2 8	Douglas B.N.S
Cork	1 4 0 0 0	St. Marie's of the Isle NS, Shaman Crawford St., Cork
Cork	1 6 9 0 1	Scoil Pádraig Naofa, Skibbereen, Co. Cork
Donegal	1 9 5 5 3	St. Crona's NS, Dungloe, Co. Donegal
Dublin	1 7 7 3 2	Scoil Chiaráin, Donnycarney, Dublin 5
Dublin	1 9 3 1 4	Scoil na Maighdine Mhuire B, Ballinteer, Dublin 1 6
Dublin	1 9 5 7 9	St. Helen's JNS, Portmarnock, Co. Dublin
Dublin	1 9 9 2 9	St Brigid's S GNS Finglas
Dublin	2 0 0 6 6	Lucan Educate Together, Lucan, Co. Dublin
Dublin	1 7 3 5 5	Our Lady of Good Counsel Girls
Kerry	1 3 6 1 5	St. John's NS, Balloonagh, Tralee
Kildare	1 8 2 8 8	Scoil Mhíchíl Naofa, Athy
Kildare	1 8 5 1 5	Scoil an Linbh Iosa, Prosperous, Naas
Kildare	1 9 4 5 9	Leixlip GNS, Leixlip, Co. Kildare
Kildare	1 9 6 7 5	Scoil Eiríde, Kilcullen
Louth	1 8 1 0 7	Scoil Réalt na Mara, Dundalk
Meath	5 6 3 0	St. Michael's BNS Trim
Meath	1 7 9 6 9	Scoil Mhuire, Navan
Waterford	1 3 6 3 5	Ballyduff NS, Kilmeaden, Co. Waterford
Waterford	1 7 3 5 1	St. Mary's NS, Ballygunner, Co. Waterford
Westmeath	1 8 2 1 2	Presentation School, Mullingar
Wexford	1 6 6 0 5	Kilrane NS, Rosslare Harbour, Co. Wexford
Wexford	1 9 7 3 9	Scoil Mhuire, Coolcotts
Wicklow	1 8 7 3 2	St. Joseph's National School, Newtownmountkennedy
Galway	1 6 9 4 3	Scoil Nioclás Naofa
Donegal	1 9 9 6 7	Scoil Íosagáin Bunrana
Donegal	1 9 9 6 3	Scoil Aodh Rua agus Nuala
Leitrim	1 7 9 0 6	Scoil na Maighdine Mhuire

Wicklow 15383 St. Peter's Infant School, Arklow