Supporting Special Education in the Mainstream School
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword ........................................................................................................................................... v  
Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ vi  

**Part 1**  
**The Development of Policy in Special Education** ................................................................. 1  
1. The Development of Policy in Special Education ................................................................. 3  
2. Models of Support ...................................................................................................................... 12  
3. Working Collaboratively in the Classroom .............................................................................. 24  
4. The Management of Special Needs in Mainstream Schools  
   Literature review ......................................................................................................................... 33  
   Overview of interviews on managing the integration of pupils with special needs ........ 40  
5. Current Issues and Concerns ................................................................................................. 52  

**Part 2**  
**Recent INTO Reports on Special Education** ........................................................................... 67  
   subsection 1. Summary of Responses to Questionnaire to Visiting Teachers for Special Needs (2000) ............................................................ 141  
   subsection 2. Resources for Children with Special Education Needs  
   Responses to Questionnaire - INTO Report 2000 ................................................................. 146  

**appendices**  
1. Department of Education and Science, Circular 08/02 ......................................................... 151  
2. Department of Education and Science, Circular 09/99 ........................................................... 158  
3. Department of Education and Science, Circular 24/03 .......................................................... 161  
4. Template for IEP ....................................................................................................................... 173  

**Bibliography** ............................................................................................................................... 175
The Department of Education and Science has vigorously pursued a policy of integrating pupils with special needs in mainstream schools since the 1980s. The Visiting Teacher Service, initially established in the 1970s was the Wrst support service available to children with special needs who were not attending special schools. Given the increase in the numbers of pupils with a variety of disabilities and special educational needs attending mainstream schools during the last decade, the Department of Education and Science decided to appoint special needs resource teachers to mainstream schools to provide additional teaching support to these pupils.

Special needs resource teachers were left very much on their own when it came to deWning their role and deciding on how best to develop the Resource Teacher Service as a support for pupils with special needs and their teachers in mainstream schools. This report draws on the experience of special needs resource teachers and others in order to contribute to the formulation of policy and guidelines in relation to the future development of support services for pupils with special needs attending mainstream schools. The need for the formulation of appropriate guidelines for managing the provision of special education at school level has arisen in the context of the phenomenal growth in the number of special needs resource teachers currently being appointed by the Department of Education and Science. There are currently approximately 2,300 resource teacher posts in the primary school system. The INTO Education Committee carried out a series of interviews with school personnel in relation to how the provision of special needs education was managed at school level. This research is also included in this report.

The INTO would like to place on record its appreciation of the work of Maria McCarthy, former Policy OYcial of the INTO, who prepared the initial draft of this report, and whose survey on the views of resource teachers, which was carried out for her dissertation, is included in Part 2. The contributions to the preparation of this report by the INTO Education Committee, Senior OYcial Mary Lally, Assistant
General Secretary Tom O’Sullivan, and Lori Kealy are also acknowledged. I would also like to thank Claire Garvey and Ann McConnell for preparing the report for publication. A special word of gratitude is due to Deirbhile Nic Craith, Senior OYcials/Education OYcer who had overall responsibility for the Wnal report.

The INTO has taken this opportunity to publish as part of this report, previous reports on the Visiting Teacher Service and Special Needs Resource Teacher Service, as this earlier work informs current INTO policy in relation to supporting pupils with special needs in mainstream schools. These are included in Part 2. It is hoped that this publication will contribute to the ongoing debate on educational provision for pupils with special needs.

John Carr
General Secretary
October 2003
Introduction

The movement towards the integration of children with special needs in mainstream schools has continued throughout the 1990s. The passing of the Education Act (1998) confirmed official policy to promote and support the integration of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools. The philosophy of inclusion/integration is that children with disabilities/special educational needs are entitled to the same range of educational opportunities and experiences as their peers and should, therefore, be educated in the same physical location. However, children with special needs in mainstream schools will need additional support if they are to benefit from placement in a mainstream school. Regrettably, the resources required to support integration have not always been available. It was only in 1998 that the Minister for Education announced that all children with special needs would have an automatic entitlement to support. Following the enrolment of a child with special needs, schools may now apply for a special needs resource teacher and/or a special needs assistant depending on the needs of the child. This has led to a situation where there are now approximately 2,300 special needs resource teachers and more than 6,000 special needs assistants working in primary schools providing support to children with special needs. A further review of support for special education was commenced by the Department of Education and Science in September 2003, through the issuing of census forms to all schools seeking information on special needs pupils and allocated resources. It is envisaged that the mechanisms for allocating resources to support special needs pupils in schools will change following the review.

Given the significant increase in support personnel in primary schools, it is surprising that the Department of Education and Science has not issued comprehensive guidelines to schools in relation to the respective roles of the special needs resource teachers and special needs assistants. It is also clear that, currently, additional resources are being granted to schools to support children with special needs in the absence of clear policy. Since the publication of the Special Education Review Committee Report (SERC) (1993), there has been no significant policy
development in the field of special education. The SERC report focussed primarily on provision in special schools and classes and many of the recommendations of the report have been implemented. However, there is a need for a further review committee on special education which would focus on developments since the early 1990s, such as the phenomenal increase in integration and the growth in provision for children with autistic spectrum disorder, both within and outside the primary school sector. The lack of coherent policy and guidelines has led to confusion and frustration in schools, particularly among the special needs resource teachers.

The aim of this report is to consider the role of the special needs resource teacher in Irish primary schools in the context of support provision for children with special needs in mainstream schools. The INTO views the appointment of special needs resource teachers to support the learning of children with special needs as a positive development. However, the number of special needs resource teachers being appointed has expanded very rapidly and the present system of simply appointing a resource teacher and placing them unsupported into a school - or indeed a number of schools - is not satisfactory. In the absence of proper induction procedures, ongoing support training and whole school guidelines regarding the role, the INTO hopes that the contents of this report will be of help and assistance in devising future policy in relation to supporting children with special needs.

Chapter 1 of this report contains a brief history of the development of special education policy for children with special needs in Ireland. The current types of support for children with special needs in Irish primary schools are described. In order to assess the extent to which the model/s of support in Ireland reXect practice abroad, various models of support being used in other countries are described in Chapter 2 and their potential advantages and disadvantages noted. Specifically, models of provision in the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Victoria, in Australia are considered. These various models of support provision are described in the context of the developing nature of special education, the increasing emergence of legislative frameworks, the growing awareness of individual rights and the educational rights of children with special needs in the community.

Chapter 3 considers the issue of working collaboratively in the classroom.
Chapter 4 contains the most recent research carried out by the Education Committee in relation to the management of special needs provision in the mainstream school.

Chapter 5 identifies current issues in support provision for children with special needs and makes recommendations for the future development of support services for children with special needs in mainstream schools.

Chapters 1–5 comprise Part 1 of this report.

Part 2 contains a copy of recent brief reports in the area of special education which have been carried out under the auspices of the INTO. This section includes a survey of the views of special needs resource teachers which was carried out in 2000 by Maria McCarthy who was, at the time, a policy official with the INTO. The INTO has also taken the opportunity to publish earlier reports on both the Visiting Teacher Service and the Resource Teacher Service which were presented to the Central Executive Committee in 1997 and 2000. Whereas circumstances have changed since these reports were written, their contents and recommendations have informed current INTO policy in relation to the provision of support for children with special needs in mainstream schools.

Part 1

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION
Integration in educational terms refers, in general, to arrangements and practices to facilitate the education of children with disabilities in regular and in special classes in mainstream schools. Originally termed integration or mainstreaming, the policy of placing children with special needs in regular classes is now more popularly referred to as ‘inclusion’ (Westwood, 1997).

Inclusion has become one of the more contentious issues in the world of education today (Banerji and Dailey, 1995; Barton, 1995; Brucker, 1995). Some writers argue that inclusion should be regarded as a ‘right’ of all children with special educational needs (Kirkaldy, 1990; Oliver, 1996). Others warn that widespread adoption of inclusive models will lead to a deterioration in the education provided for many children with special educational needs and that regular class placement may not necessarily constitute the best learning environment for some children (Kaufmann and Hallahan, 1995; Welton, in Roaf and Bines, 1989; Smelter, Rasch and Yudewitz, 1994). For this reason, it is often argued that the full range of placement options, including special schools and special classes, should be retained by allowing for responsible choices to be made concerning the most appropriate educational setting for each individual with a disability (Vaughn and Schumm, 1995; Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (Government of Ireland) 1993).

Despite the continuing debate, there has been an increase in the number of children with special educational needs being integrated into mainstream schools in Ireland. This trend which began in the 1970s and gained momentum in the late 1980s and early 1990s has changed dramatically the nature of special educational provision. It has also had a major impact on the role of the regular class teacher,
who is now required to cater for the needs of an increasingly diverse group of students (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1994; McCoy, 1995; INTO, 1993; INTO, 2000). The concept that it is the right of each and every child, if at all possible, to be educated in the regular classroom has been adopted in most developed countries. It has certainly influenced policy-making in the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and much of Europe where inclusion in mainstream is now the accepted placement model for students with special needs (Ashman and Elkins, 1994; Gross and Gipps, 1987; Murray – Seegert, 1992).

Policy development in the Republic of Ireland, particularly in the 1990s, has also (in line with developments internationally) moved towards increasing levels of inclusion.

Policy Development in Special Education in Ireland since 1990

In 1990, the Republic of Ireland signed an EU Council of Ministers’ Charter which obliged Departments of Education to actively promote the concept of inclusion in schools. This action was in response to many calls from parents’ groups and others concerned with seeking appropriate educational placement for all children with special needs. At a later date, the Green Paper on Education for a Changing World (Government of Ireland, 1992) highlighted the need to establish greater equity in education particularly for those who were disadvantaged socially, economically, physically or mentally.

However, one of the more significant developments in special education in Ireland, was the publication of The Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (Government of Ireland, 1993). The Review Committee – drawn from the relevant education partners and established in 1991 conducted a detailed examination of the many issues involved in special education provision in Ireland. Its terms of reference were as follows:

To report and make recommendations on the educational provision for children with special needs in respect of:

(a) the identification of children with special needs and their assessment with a view to determining the educational provision best suited to the needs of each child;

(b) the arrangements which should be in place in order to provide for the educational requirements of such children through complete or partial integration in ordinary schools, through special classes in ordinary schools or through special schools or other special
arrangements, in accordance with the circumstances, as assessed, of each child;
(c) the range of support services which may be required and, in particular, the future relationship between remedial teachers, other support-teachers and ordinary class teachers;
(d) the linkages which should exist with other Departments of State and services provided under their aegis (SERC 1993:15).

Written submissions were received and a survey was undertaken to estimate the number of pupils with special needs in ordinary classes in primary schools. Arising from its extensive deliberations, the SERC Report (1993) proposed seven principles which should serve as basic guidelines for the future development of the system in Ireland.

These seven principles are:
1. that all children, including those with special educational needs, have a right to an appropriate education;
2. that the needs of the individual child should be the paramount consideration when decisions are being made concerning the provision of special education for that child;
3. that the parents of children with special educational needs are entitled and should be enabled to play an active part in the decision-making process;
4. that a continuum of services should be provided for children with special educational needs ranging from full time education in ordinary classes with additional support as may be necessary, to full time education in special schools;
5. that, except where individual circumstances make this impracticable, appropriate education for all children with special educational needs should be provided in ordinary schools;
6. that only in the most exceptional circumstances should it be necessary for a child to live away from home in order to avail of an appropriate education;
7. that the state should provide adequate resources to ensure that children with special educational needs can have an education appropriate to those needs.

Furthermore, the Review Committee recommended that due account should be taken of the principles outlined above in the framing of an Education Act. The recommendations contained in the SERC Report have formed the basis for Department policy on special education in Ireland since its publication in 1993.
The White Paper on Education Charting Our Education Future (1995) emphasised the importance of children with special educational needs having the same opportunities and rights of access to education as all other students. The principle of equality underpinned the White Paper. The rights and responsibilities of parents in the education of their children were also recognised. The educational policy consultative process of the 1990s culminated in the enacting of the Education Act (1998) which enshrined, in legislation, the rights of all children to an appropriate education. This was followed in 1999 by the establishment of a National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the extension of a remedial service to all primary schools and the publication of a White Paper on Early Childhood Education Ready to Learn (Government of Ireland, 1999) which stressed the importance of early diagnosis and identification of disability and proposed the development of a comprehensive policy and provision for early special needs education.

In addition, the number of special needs resource teachers who have been appointed to support the integration of children with special needs in mainstream primary schools increased from the original seven appointed in 1994 to approximately 2300 full-time and full-time equivalent resource teachers in October 2003. There are also approximately 4,000 special needs assistants currently employed in primary schools. Additional funding for special education was made available through the New Deal A Plan for Educational Opportunity (Dec. 1999) which included £4.25 million for special needs co-ordination as part of the government’s wider strategy for social inclusion. Furthermore, an internal working group established to examine the operation of special education services and the Cromien Report (Department of Education and Science 2000) which examined the structures within the Department of Education and Science both recommended the establishment of a National Council for Special Education. A proposal to establish such a council is included in the draft Education for persons with Disability Bill (2003), which has yet to be passed by the Dáil.

The National Council for Special Education is in the process of being established and an interim Chief Executive OYcer has been appointed. The functions of the council, as outlined in the Education for Persons with Disabilities Bill (2003) are as follows:

1. to disseminate to schools and to parents information relating to best practice, nationally and internationally, concerning the education of children with special educational needs;
in consultation with schools and health boards to plan and co-
ordinate the provision of education and support services to chil-
dren with special education needs;
in consultation with schools to plan for the integration of educa-
tion for students with special educational needs with education for students generally;
to make available to parents of children with special educational
needs information in relation to the entitlements of their chil-
dren;
to ensure that the progress of students with special educational
needs is monitored and that it is reviewed at regular intervals;
to assess and review the resources required in relation to educa-
tional provision for children with special educational needs;
to ensure that a continuum of special educational provision is
available as required in relation to each type of disability;
to review generally the provision made for adults with disabilities
to avail of higher education and adult and continuing education
and to publish reports on the results of such reviews (which
reviews may include recommendations as to the manner in which
such provision could be improved);
to advise all educational institutions concerning best practice in
respect of the education of adults who have disabilities;
to advise the Minister in relation to any matter relating to the
education of children and others with disabilities; and
to conduct and commission research on matters relevant to the
functions of the Council and, as it considers appropriate, to
publish in such form and manner as the Council thinks
fit the
findings arising out of such research.

It is also proposed that Special Educational Needs Organisers will be
appointed under the auspices of the council to:
Act as a point of contact for the parents of each child with
disability;
Organise the assessment of needs and the preparation and
review of individual child related education plans;
Co-ordinate the provision of the range of services available to
children with disabilities;
Liaise with parents, children, schools and organisations such as

1 Laois Education Centre
Health Boards, the National Educational Psychological Service and the Department of Education and Science.

A Director has also been appointed to the Special Education Support Service which is based in the Laois Education Centre. The main objectives of this service relate to professional development in the field of special education and include coordinating, planning, developing and delivery of significant support in relation to the teaching and management of children/students with special educational needs. It is envisaged that the Support Service will also:

1. Manage and coordinate the delivery, nationwide, of continuing professional development courses in the areas of special education;
2. Undertake a detailed examination and evaluation of current and emerging continuing professional development requirements;
3. Develop and deliver a range of supports in response to the needs identified;
4. Provide ongoing school-based support;
5. Liaise, as appropriate, with relevant bodies.

Support Provision in Ireland

Currently, in Ireland there are four main types of support provision for pupils with special education needs in mainstream primary schools. Support for children with special needs is provided mainly through the establishment of Special Classes, or through the appointment of resource teachers. There is also a Visiting Teacher Service. Children with less severe learning difficulties are supported by the remedial/learning support teacher.

According to the SERC Report (1993) there were 8,000 pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classes in primary schools. Approximately 50% of these were receiving additional support, mainly from remedial/learning support teachers. Since the publication of the SERC Report every school has been granted access to a remedial/learning support teacher and the number of special needs resource teachers has been increased significantly since the appointment of the first in 1992/93 to approximately 2300 resource teachers at present. Consequently, depending on individual circumstance, a child with special needs may spend varying amounts of time in a mainstream classroom with varying degrees of specialist
support.

(I) SPECIAL CLASSES

As the debate on inclusion gathered momentum the Department of Education and Science began, in the mid-'70s, to recognize and encourage the establishment of special classes in mainstream primary schools. Such classes were initially considered suitable for pupils with mild general learning disabilities but expanded to include a small number of children with moderate general learning disabilities. Enrolment in a special class was seen as preferable to transfer to a special school especially if the latter option was at a distance from a child’s home. The categories of special class which the Department of Education and Science currently consider establishing for children with special educational needs and the numbers of such classes are included in Table One.

Table 1 The Number of Special Classes of Various Types in Operation in 1993 and 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Special Class</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mild General Learning Disability</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate General Learning Disability</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe/Profound General Learning Disability</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asperger's Syndrome</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Speech and Language Disorder</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>988</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Guidelines for schools who wish to apply for a special class for children with disabilities are available in Circular 9/99 from the Department of Education and Science (See Appendix 2). There are currently 988 special classes for children with disabilities in mainstream schools (October 2002). With the exception of special classes for children with autism and severe and profound general learning disabilities, the most recent trend for the Department of Education and Science is to allocate special needs resource teachers - on either a fulltime, shared or part-time basis - to support children with special needs in mainstream schools (INTO, 2000).
RESOURCES TEACHERS FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Special needs resource teachers were first appointed in the early 1990s with the appointment of special needs resource teachers to support children with Down Syndrome. The role of the resource teacher, according to the Department of Education and Science, is to provide additional teaching support for children with special needs who have been fully integrated into mainstream schools and who need such support. In addition, s/he should advise and liaise with other teachers, parents and relevant professionals in the children’s interest. Initially, the numbers of resource teachers being appointed was low. However, since the Minister for Education and Science announced in 1998 that all pupils with special needs would be entitled to additional support on enrolment in mainstream schools there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils with special needs being integrated into mainstream classrooms. Consequently, the number of special needs resource teachers has been greatly increased.

Details of how to apply for the services of a full or part-time resource teacher for children with special needs and further details of the role are contained in Circular 08/02 (which superseded Circular 8/99) from the Department of Education and Science (See Appendix 1). However, circular 24/03 has indicated further changes in relation to the allocation of resources for pupils with special educational needs in national schools. At present, a resource teacher can be appointed to a single primary school or a cluster of schools to assist in providing an education which meets the needs and abilities of children assessed as having disabilities. Resource teachers can also be appointed on a part time or ‘hours basis’, where support is required for a small number of children. However, some schools are experiencing considerable difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified teachers to fill these posts (INTO, 2000). In addition, a number of difficulties arose for schools concerning the appointment of special needs resource teachers, particularly in relation to receiving sanction for support provision by the Department of Education and Science, and the lack of professional development support and training available to the resource teachers (INTO, 2000).

SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS

Special needs assistants have been employed in special schools and in some other special education facilities for many years. Expansion
of this service to mainstream schools was recommended in the SERC Report (1993). An announcement by the Minister for Education and Science in November 1998 allowed for the appointment of additional special needs assistants to support the work of teachers whose classes include pupils with special needs. Their duties include helping pupils, individually and in groups, to cope with tasks across the entire school programme under the guidance of the class teacher. This assistance is invaluable, especially if the persons involved are provided with the necessary training. However, at present qualifications in the area of special needs or childcare are not required for appointment and very little, if any, training has been made available for special needs assistants following their appointment.

(IV) THE VISITING TEACHER SERVICE

The Visiting Teacher Service was established in the 1970s to support the education of pre-school and primary school children with hearing impairment. It later expanded to include children with visual impairment, in a separate and independent section. Working closely with Health Boards, the National Rehabilitation Board (NRB) and other agencies, the visiting teachers went into homes, mainstream schools and special schools to assist in diagnosis and assessment, to advise on and teach areas of the curriculum - for example, language development and literacy - and to counsel parents and teachers on children’s educational needs generally and how best to meet them.

The early 1990s brought a major re-structuring of the service. The Department of Education and Science decided that teachers in three specialist areas, i.e. visual impairment, hearing impairment, and mental and physical handicap would offer a comprehensive service to all pupils with special needs attending mainstream schools at primary, post-primary and third level. Children with hearing and/or visual impairment were also offered support and advice at pre-school level. The Visiting Teacher Service also offers some few pupils who do not attend school, home tuition usually during school hours. The visiting teacher engages in continuous liaison with other professionals dealing with the pupils served and with the pupil’s family. S/he may withdraw pupils from class for individual instruction as part of the overall programme of work which is being carried out by the class teachers. The current role of the visiting teacher may be described as follows:
Providing accurate, up-to-date information and guidelines for parents and professionals concerning the education of pupils with certain disabilities;

- Responding authoritatively to queries from parents and professionals on issues pertaining to the education of pupils with disabilities;
- Identifying developmental and educational goals and expectations, and developing strategies for their attainment;
- Employing specialist teaching skills with their pupils, and sharing their skills with classroom teachers;
- Exploring with parents the educational options available and assisting their decision making and giving non-directional advice;
- Facilitating the smooth transition into an initial or alternative educational placement. (INTO 2000)

The caseload of each individual visiting teacher divers according to the severity of disability concerned, the variety of disabilities involved, the geographical location of the pupils and the frequency with which visits are expected.

However, the expansion of the special needs resource teaching service, has created new challenges for the Visiting Teacher Service. In INTO (2000) A Report on the Visiting Teacher Service several members of the Visiting Teacher Service outlined the difficulties being experienced in interfacing with the resource teachers, as some visiting teachers felt that their work was now being done by the resource teachers. As a result, some felt that they were being made unwelcome when they called to visit children on their caseloads in school. To date, the Department of Education has not issued any clear guidelines to each service on how they can best work together in order to enhance the educational support available to children with special needs. There are growing concerns, whether legitimate or otherwise, among the visiting teachers that this model of support provision in Ireland may be phased out or restructured in some way (INTO, 2000). Special Education Support Services are currently under review by the Department of Education and Science.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has broadly outlined the development of recent special education policy for pupils with special needs in Ireland. Current teaching and non-teaching support for children with special needs in
mainstream primary schools in Ireland has been briefly described. However, it has also been noted that there are many issues that need to be addressed if children with special needs in mainstream schools are to benefit fully from the additional teaching support services available. Chapter two will examine the various models of support being used in other countries. An attempt will be made to assess how the model of support provision for children with special needs integrated into mainstream primary schools in Ireland compares with practice abroad.
Models of Support

This chapter investigates the various models of support provision used in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Victoria, Australia. Consideration will be given to these models of provision in the context of the developing nature of special education, the increasing emergence of legislative frameworks and a growing awareness internationally of individual rights and the educational rights of children with special needs in the community. Variations in the definitions of special educational needs and the numbers of children estimated to have special educational needs will be identified as factors in influencing the models of provision used (OECD, 1995; OECD, 2000). Over the years there has been a progression of practice regarding the integration of children with special education needs. This chapter traces the progression from a mainly segregationist approach to the development of integrative, collaborative, consultative approaches based on the concepts of whole school collaboration and different forms of teaming. The chapter describes the many variations which exist on the nature of the support teacher’s role and the ever-increasing complexity of the support teacher’s role in practice. The rationale behind the concept of whole school approaches is described. How collaborative, whole school approaches might best be developed and the factors at individual school level which affect the formation and implementation of effective whole school models are considered. In order to assess the extent to which the Irish model (as outlined in chapter one) reflects practice abroad, a comparison will be drawn, where appropriate, and the advantages and disadvantages of each model noted.

In the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Victoria, Australia, regional differences exist regarding the nature of the support teacher’s designated role and the role in practice. This is hardly surprising when one considers that the degree to which learn-
ing ability can be adversely affected ranges along a broad continuum from mild to severe/profound. Numbers involved can vary from area to area and from school to school and will also be affected by extrinsic factors such as level of funding, class size, teachers’ experience and home environment (Report of the Special Education Review Committee, 1993). Coupled with this information is the fact that there is no single definition of special educational need and that there are significant differences in the numbers of population in different countries who are estimated to have special education needs (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, OECD, 1994; 1995; 2000).

In the United States, following the passing of legislation, up to 32 per cent of pupils were considered to have special education needs of some kind (Jordan, 1994). Following the Warnock Report (1978) and passing of the 1981 Education Act in the United Kingdom, 20 per cent of pupils came within the defined special education remit. In Ireland, following the SERC Report (1993) an estimated ten per cent of pupils were considered to need special help in mainstream schools. For the purposes of the SERC Report (1993) the description “pupils with special educational needs” was used to include all “those whose disabilities and/or circumstances prevent or hinder them from benefiting adequately from the education which is normally provided for pupils of the same age, or for whom the education which can generally be provided in the ordinary classroom is not sufficiently challenging” (SERC, 1993:18).

**The United States**

In the United States, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (1975) (PL-94-142) contains two significant provisions relating to support: (1) the idea of a continuum of alternative placements and (2) the concept of the least restrictive environment. The continuum of alternative placements provision specifies that schools make available an array of educational placements to meet the varied needs of children with special needs. The placement options include general education classes, resource room classes, separate classes, separate schools and other types of placements as needed. The second important provision in special education law with regard to placement is the concept of the least restrictive environment. The aim of this provision is to ensure that, to the extent appropriate, children with special needs have expe-
experiences in school with their mainstream peers. Overall, in the United States, the support model embraces the idea of diverse levels of intervention in a child’s education while in attendance at mainstream schools (Jones, in Cohen and Cohen, 1986; Wiederholt, Hamill & Brown, 1993). Most school boards in the United States currently deploy one or more support teachers in each elementary school. They are known by a number of titles: Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT), Methods and Resource Teacher (M and R), Developmental Teacher and School-based Support Teacher (SBST). There is no generally agreed definition of support teaching. However, increasingly, in the United States general education and support teachers are working together in the various settings using diverse forms of teaming. A number of these models have been implemented in various school districts across the United States. Increasingly, schools in the United States are endeavouring to provide support through multidisciplinary teams of professionals who adjust their collective skills and knowledge to create unique programmes for each student (Vaughn and Schumm, 1995).

The United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, the concept of the support teacher is fundamental to the practice and process of integrating children with special educational needs in mainstream schools (Davies and Davies, 1989). However, as in the United States, there is no generally agreed definition of support teaching and considerable variation exists between authorities in the number of personnel made available to support children with special educational needs (Hart, in Davies and Davies, 1989; Gipps, Gross and Goldstein, 1987). Therefore, children with special needs are likely to receive diverse forms of support according to where they happen to live. Remedial teachers and teachers who formerly taught segregated classes are increasingly becoming support persons for ordinary classroom teachers (Bines, 1986; Garrett, 1988; Thomas, 1986). Teachers are described as Special Needs Assessment and Support Teachers (SNASTs), Teacher Consultant (TC) Designated Teachers (Jordan, 1994) and Special Needs Co-Ordinators (Department for Education and Employment, 1994). The concept of differentiation is also intrinsic to the idea of effective support provision in the United Kingdom. It is stated in the Code of Practice (Department for Education and Employment, 1994) that “differentiation of class work within a common curriculum frame-
work will help the school to meet the learning needs of all children” (DFEE, 1994:11).

New Zealand and Australia

In New Zealand, Wade and Moore (1992) describe a team-based approach to supporting pupils with disability in mainstream schools. Schools have access to support teams either oV-site or on their premises (Glynn & Gold, in Wade and Moore, 1992). The team consists of designated professionals who can liaise with external professionals. A member of the school staV is given a central and guiding role in the implementation of provision. This consulting or support teacher is released from a proportion of teaching duties to carry out the consultative aspect of their role. Glynn and Gold in Wade and Moore (1992) state that a high level of expertise in teaching and in interpersonal skills is needed if the collaboration between the support teacher and class teachers is to be successful.

As this model operates in New Zealand the consulting or support teacher co-ordinates support in the school, collates information on pupils and convenes case conferences (Wade and Moore, 1992). S/he is the link person between the pupil, the professionals and the parents. His/her role is not viewed as one of responsibility for the mainstream children, however, but as that of catalyst for the developing of a classroom programme to meet each child’s individual education needs. The membership of the Support Team brought together for devising an Individualised Education Programme will vary with the needs of the child. It can involve more than one subject teacher, outside professionals such as psychologists or speech therapists and will usually include the parents. In the state of Victoria in Australia support teachers known as ‘integrating teachers’ have been appointed as support in schools which have opted to integrate pupils (Tarr, in Wade and Moore, 1992). In parts of Australia differentiated teaching is practised and is often referred to as ‘adaptive education.’ Adaptive education represents an approach which utilizes many different forms of teaching and classroom organisation to accommodate differences among learners and to cater for children with special needs. According to Quicke, (1995) the purpose of such education is to ensure that all children maximize their potential and receive a curriculum through which they can experience success.
Emergence of Clusters and Networks

The key word in support provision and resourcing in the 1990s is collaboration (Lunt, Evans, Norwich and Wedell, 1994). In place of the older model of special education service delivery in which schools immediately looked to outside ‘experts’ for assistance, it is now emerging that some schools, particularly in the United States and in the United Kingdom, are beginning to look first to their own resources and their own curricula before calling on external help. While support services will still be maintained within the options available to meet special education needs, neighbourhood schools are being actively encouraged to establish mutual help networks in order to share resources, solve problems and develop a pool of expertise that can be of benefit to all teachers and children. It is increasingly being argued that schools in each district, rather than working in total isolation from one another, should try to organise themselves in clusters in order to share resources and make better use of available expertise to service students with special education needs. Gains and Smith (1994) state that [in order to cater for students with special needs] “individual schools will continue to make the best internal provision they deem suitable but will turn to the network when they require specialist resources, information or help. Clearly, they will not only be able to draw on such support but will also contribute to the group. The range of possibilities is enormous” (1994:95). This view has grown, in the worst place, from an increasing recognition that much expertise in schools has been left untapped and could be better utilised to help schools meet their own needs and secondly from the economic reality that resources are finite and that demand always outstrips supply.

At policy level in Ireland a similar model was indeed proposed in the SERC Report (1993) where it recommended that resources should be made available to enable formal, ongoing linkages to be established between ordinary and special schools in an area. These should provide for the sharing of teachers and facilities, the interchange of pupils and participation in joint ventures. The report also recommended the setting up of a number of pilot projects. However, there is often a discrepancy between policy and practice. Any linkages that have been established since the publication of the SERC report have been developed informally at local level between individual schools and not as a result of policy decisions or support at system level. Traditionally in Ireland, the absence of a local regional administrative
structure in primary education hampered the development of such local linkages (Coolahan, 1981). However the recently expanded network of Education Centres could be used to facilitate further development as in some cases schools have begun to share expertise through the Education Centre network. The potential of technology to facilitate communication and linkage between special education support teams is another area worthy of exploration.

**Complexity of the Support Teacher’s Role**

With the growing emergence of diverse forms of teaming and the placement of more children with varying levels of special needs in the mainstream classroom, the role of the learning support teacher has become much more complex. The range of titles used throughout the literature confirms this developing complexity. Some of the scope and variation in the support teacher’s role can be judged from Gain’s comments when he wrote “the role conceived for this group of teachers is breathtakingly broad, full of challenge and potential but equally fraught with problems and difficulties” (Gains, 1994:102). In Britain, the Code of Practice (Department for Education and Employment, DFEE, 1994) significantly raised the profile of special needs in all schools and increased the responsibilities attached to the role of the Special Education Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO). As has been outlined, a teacher with similar responsibilities is typically found in schools in other developed countries, although the exact title of the position may differ (OECD, 1995; 2000). Similarly, in Ireland the role of the special needs resource teacher is considered “complex and wide ranging and comparable to managerial professions” (Pearn and Kandola, 2000:5).

If the new collaborative model is to work effectively, the support teacher – including learning support/remedial teachers and special needs resource teachers – must become more adept at collaboration. This role must involve co-ordinating the efforts of other professionals, building a co-operative interdisciplinary team that works together, providing support to classroom teachers, and becoming actively involved in teaching children in many settings, including the mainstream classroom. The support teacher must be suitably equipped to serve as a highly skilled co-worker and collaborator (Lerner, 1997).
Aims of Support Provision

One of the aims of support provision is to optimise the teaching and learning process of the children with special needs (Westwood, 1997; Lerner, 1997; Government of Ireland, Learning Support Guidelines, 2000). If this aim is to be achieved, there is a growing belief that the support programme must be fully integrated into the general organisation of the school and its activities. Such a collaborative whole school approach is recommended by several authors (Gross, 1991; 1993; Sebba, Byers and Rose, 1993; and Rose, in Rose, Fergusson, Coles, Byers and Banes, 1994). This trend in the United Kingdom was evident even before the Code of Practice on Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (Department for Education and Employment, 1994) was published but the Code further highlights the need for whole school acceptance of responsibility for children with special needs. The Code stated that a whole school approach to supporting children with special needs should provide opportunities for the entire school community to discuss its principles and intentions regarding children with special needs. In Ireland, the Learning Support Guidelines (2000) outline the importance of the whole school approach to special needs. The guidelines state:

"the learning-support programme must be fully integrated into the general organisation of the school and its activities. The school plan for learning support should be in tune with and should form one element of the broader school plan that deals with all aspects of the school’s operation, including provision for inclusion of pupils with special needs" p. 20).

Definition of a Whole School Approach

A whole school approach is an approach which involves all the staff of the school in a shared responsibility for and commitment to pupils with special needs. The model is based on the premise that more is to be gained by support teachers working collaboratively with class teachers and other professionals, rather than working in isolation from the mainstream classroom (Westwood, 1997). The need to restructure classroom teaching and approaches to curricular planning, in order to address special needs in an inclusive classroom setting, became the focus of provision (Guilliford, 1985; Dyson, 1991; Butt, 1991). However, restructuring classroom organisation
and addressing teacher expectations requires change at both an organisational and at an individual level (Fullan and Steigelbauer, 1991).

The importance of schools having their own co-ordinated, special needs policies is reinforced by research that has found that the capacity of both mainstream and special schools to respond to pupils’ special educational needs depended on their having eVective whole school policies (Gross, 1991, 1993; Sebba, Byers and Rose, 1993 and Rose, in Rose et al, 1994). In the United States, the United Kingdom and Ireland such an approach has actually been legislated for. Following the 1993 Education Act, British schools are now required to draw up a school policy on special needs. Similarly, in Ireland, the Education Act 1998 stipulates that schools must have policies on special educational needs as part of the school plan. Furthermore, education plans for pupils with special needs – currently considered good practice – will be required should the Education for Persons with Disability Bill 2003, be passed into legislation. School policies need to state what basic information is required on each pupil with special needs, what assessment reports the school expects, how additional staV, materials and equipment should be allocated and what additional inservice education the staV may require. The school plan should also state what specialist facilities or equipment are available in the school, to what extent teachers will be available to the parents of pupils with special needs and how teachers and parents might work in close collaboration.

Under this approach, the provision for students with special needs has to be seen as an integral part of the planning for all students. Bines (1989) recommends the drawing-up of a whole-school policy, in consultation with the whole staV, as an eVective way of supporting children with special needs. She sees this as going some way towards resolving commonly encountered difficulties around changing teaching practices and around the issues of team teaching and giving advice. The school plan for supporting children with special needs should be in tune with and should form one element of the broader school plan that deals with all aspects of the school’s operations. In particular, the broader plan could indicate how the diVerent resources available to the school might be integrated to best meet the needs of the pupils with special needs. EVective learning support requires high levels of collaboration and consultation involving the board of management, the principal teacher, class teachers, the
support teacher(s), special education teachers, parents, pupils where appropriate and other relevant professionals. Such collaboration should be purposely and specifically planned and the responsibilities of each person or group need to be clearly defined in the school plan.

Involvement of Parents

The importance of parental involvement in education is well documented (Government of Ireland, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1998; GiYn, in Herron, Mc Namara and Travers, 1991; INTO, 1997). Internationally, the development of active parental involvement in education has followed a similar pattern with parents becoming increasingly involved (Topping and Wolfendale, 1984; Atkin, Bastiani and Goode, 1988; DFEE, Warnock, 1978). In relation to special education the current trend is towards parents exercising their rights and taking an increasingly active role in the education of their children. Under the Education Act 1998, in Ireland, parents will be entitled to be involved in the preparation of the school plan and to receive copies of policies and reports on the work of the school prepared by the board of management. They will have a right to seek access to their children’s school records. They will also be consulted in relation to the assessment of the psychological needs of their children and will be advised by the psychologists concerned in relation to the education and psychological development of their children. The parents’ role and influence is crucial in the education process and their involvement in the education of children can be justified on numerous grounds (Macbeth, 1990, Henderson, 1988). This is true for all parents but parents of children with special needs have additional roles and influences (Hewett, 1970). The parent of a special needs child is often in a better position than any other agency (including the school) to provide continuous, intense, and long-term support for the child (Kellaghan and Greaney, 1992). Therefore, the whole school model must include a component, which involves a real, relevant and responsible role for parents in order to ensure that parents and teachers both have ownership of the school’s policy on special needs and that parents and teachers are working together towards the realisation of educational goals for children with special needs.
Drawing up the Plan

The first stage in this planning process involves reviewing current practice or conducting an audit as referred to in Sebba, Byers and Rose (1993). This will give the teacher a picture of current practice as provided by specific teachers or received by individual pupils. It will also indicate any obvious areas where coverage is lacking, or as sometimes happens, where subject matter is being replicated or excluded.

The second stage is development of an overall vision for the future. How does the school see itself meeting children’s individual or special needs, what are the values and principles of the school and what type of support does it wish to offer to children with special needs?

Stage three in the process involves comparing together the vision with practice. One way of doing this, according to Gross (1993), is to list individually and as a group the strengths in current practice which could be incorporated in the whole school policy document. At the same time problem areas could be prioritised for action and development. There are many extensive school development programmes available which provide a range of suggestions for reviewing and reconfiguring on existing practice in the area of special needs (Gross 1991, Wolfendale, 1987; INTO, 1999).

The final stage in the process is the drafting of the policy. This area has been addressed by several writers (Wolfendale, 1987; Bines, 1989). These accounts can act as checklists for schools to work from. If policy is formulated following this model the whole staff of the school have ownership of the plan. The result is more than just another piece of paper. Instead, it represents the staff’s real efforts to work collectively rather than individually to meet the whole range of needs of the children they teach. Because they have consulted and collaborated at each stage, there is also a feeling of shared commitment, responsibility and accountability for outcomes (Davis and Kemp, 1995).

Factors Affecting Implementation of the Whole School Model

However, the development of a whole school plan is much more complex than just drawing up a policy would suggest; but when teachers are individually and collectively willing and able to reconfigure upon and modify their aims and their behaviour in pursuit of ‘whole school’ policies, then the process can be a successful one (Nias,
Southworth and Campbell, 1995). Implementing a whole school model is an "open ended, restless endeavour, involvement in which places staV under continual pressure to learn and to grow" (Nias et al, 1995:196). The written policy is not suYcient without an agreed commitment to putting the components into practice. Implementation of a whole-school approach essentially requires that schools become open to change and plan for it so that change will beexeXected in individual practice (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). The success of the whole school approach will depend on several factors, not least the type of disability and the degree to which the child is impaired.

LEVEL AND TYPE OF DISABILITY

Learning disability occurs across a wide ability range, from mild through moderate and severe/profound. Consequently, the area of special education is very diverse and needs diVer widely among individuals. The pupil may, therefore, require diVering levels of individual attention on the part of the teacher. As stated by Van Kraayenoord and Elkins, "students who have a learning diYculty do not form a homogeneous group. They have a wide variety of characteristics, ranging from academic diYculties to cognitive and social-emotional problems" (Van Kraayenoord and Elkins, in Ashman and Elkins, 1994:244). The practical problems of supporting children with special needs are most obvious in the case of individuals with severe and multiple disabilities, since many of these students require a high degree of physical care and management over and above their special educational needs. However, there is evidence to suggest that, where schools are prepared to accept the challenge of full inclu-

-24-
lighted in much of the literature focusing on providing eV ective support (Hegarty, Pocklington and Lucas, 1981; Biklen 1985; Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis and Ecob, 1988; Nias, Southworth and Campbell, 1995). Purposeful leadership of the staV by the principal was a key factor identiW ed by Mortimore et al (1988) in eV ective overall school organisation. They stated that purposeful leadership occurred where the principal understood the needs of the school and was involved actively in the school’s work without exerting total control over the rest of the staV. Principal teachers were involved in curriculum discussions and inXuenced greatly the content of guidelines and policies drawn up within the school without taking complete control. EV ective principal teachers involved all the staV in the decision making of the school. Davis and Thomas (1989) highlighted the vision, dedication, energy and instructional leadership of the principal teacher as being the single most important factor in overall school success.

ATTITUDES OF THE TEACHERS

It has been suggested that a key element in the eV ectiveness of support must be the views of the personnel who have the major responsibility for implementing it, i.e. the teachers (Forlin, Douglas and Hattie, 1996). Ainscow, in Clark, Dyson and Millwards (1995) argues that it is teachers’ willingness to make things work and to Wnd ways through diYculties that are the strongest forces in successful support. Attempts to compel mainstream teachers who may lack conW dence or who feel that they already have enough to cope with in their daily job to adopt approaches that are foreign to them have, according to Ainscow, in Clark et al (1995) the potential for damaging the whole support process. After all, it is what the classroom teacher thinks and does that will ultimately have the greatest eV ect on the pupils’ learning experiences (Biklen, 1985; Thomas & Feiler, 1988; Davies and Davies, 1989). Logan, Diaz, Piperno, Rankin, MacFarland & Bargamian (1994) state that:

Teachers today more fully recognise the value of inclusion because they see its power as an ev ective instructional practice. We feel that two factors are critical to the ev ectiveness of the district’s inclusion ev orts: ev ective collaboration among class-
room teachers and the special education staV, and a weekly block of instructional planning time. (Logan et al, 1994)
Factors Teachers Consider Necessary for Successful Implementation

It is essential to understand what influences the beliefs and practices of teachers who are the most important agents in the implementation of non-segregated education in order to plan for effective support for pupils with special needs. The INTO found in its 1993 survey that teachers considered that a whole school approach to supporting children with special needs could be an enriching and progressive experience when planned and supported by the provision of necessary resources and services; but that unplanned support could be harrowing and upsetting to both pupils and teachers (INTO, 1993). Other Irish studies found that teachers considered reduction in class size as a prerequisite to successful support (INTO, 1993; McCormack and Smith, 1990; Bates, 1992). Gross and Gipps in Dessent (1987) reported similar findings in their research across six Local Education Authorities in the UK where the majority view of teachers was that smaller classes were the main requirement for meeting special education needs in classrooms.

Features of Good Practice

Nias et al (1995) state that in schools where staff place a high value upon a sense of interdependence and teamwork and are predisposed to deal openly, but with respect, for one another’s need for security, with their personal and professional differences and disagreements, the whole school model is more likely to work effectively. In addition, where schools value individuals and where staff show consideration, sensitivity, kindness and supportiveness to each other and where there is a willingness to resolve problems and disagreements through compromise and negotiation, a culture of collaboration develops and thus makes it easier for everyone to learn from others and work together with them (Nias et al, 1995). On the other hand, where schools do not hold these values then the whole school model is difficult to implement effectively. Research by Ainscow and Muncey (1990) in schools which were successful in developing supports for children with special needs in a whole school context found the following factors to be important:

- Effective leadership from the principal teacher. The principal teacher needs to be committed to meeting the needs of all pupils.
A sense of optimism that all pupils can succeed should permeate through the school;
1. Staff should be confident that they can deal with children’s individual needs;
2. Arrangements for supporting individual members of staff need to be put in place;
3. There should be a commitment to providing a broad and balanced range of curriculum opportunities for all children;
4. There should be systematic procedures for monitoring and reviewing progress.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the various ways in which support is provided to children with special education needs in mainstream schools. The transition from the traditional approach which centred on the provision of support by specialist teachers to a more consultative whole school model has been traced. The importance of collaborative planning in schools has been highlighted. It has been stated that this should be a process owned by staff, which actively involves all staff and which should take place over an extended period of time. Parents need also to be included in the process. The school which will be most effective in meeting individual needs will be the one which incorporates all of these elements into its planning and monitoring process. Increasing levels of collaboration have led to the role of the special needs resource teacher becoming increasingly more complex and demanding. Chapter three will examine how the collaborative models of support can be organised in the classroom.
3

Working Collaboratively in the Classroom

Internationally, the 1990s have seen the withdrawal method lose favour as a model of support delivery and the increasing emergence of collaborative, in-class models of instruction for supporting children with special needs (Sebbia, Byers and Rose, 1993; Government of Ireland, Learning Support Guidelines, 2000; Quinn, 1987; Nowacek, 1992). This chapter examines the research on the withdrawal method and describes the various ways team models of support in class can be organised. Other forms of in-class support are also described. Where appropriate, reference will be made specifically to the Irish context.

Decline of the Withdrawal Model of Support Delivery

Traditionally, in the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Victoria, Australia resources for the education of pupils with special needs integrated in mainstream schools have centred mainly on the provision of support to pupils and/or teachers by ‘specialist’ teachers, either individually or as a team member. This model focused on identifying basic skills which were missing from the pupils’ repertoire and training the pupils in those skills. This training generally took place outside the classroom either in a group or on an individual basis and was often quite divorced from the curriculum within the classroom (Dessent, in Davies and Davies, 1989).

During the 1970s and the 1980s there has been a significant change of attitude within the field of special education, crystallised in the recommendations of the Bullock Report (Department for Education and Employment (DFEE), 1975) and the Warnock Report (DFEE, 1978). Both reports shared the view that special educational provision in mainstream schools should be more closely related to the
child’s overall learning experiences. In Ireland, the Review of Remedial Education (Government of Ireland, 1998) also stated that the practice of withdrawing children with learning difficulties for learning support was problematic (Government of Ireland, 1998). Critics of the withdrawal system consider it to be further stigmatisation of children with special needs albeit within the mainstream rather than in a special school or unit (Norwich, 1990). Withdrawal concentrates on disabilities rather than on abilities and such an emphasis, it is felt, can lead to a restricted programme involving little or no work across the curriculum. Withdrawal labels children and this has implications for their morale and self esteem (Government of Ireland, 1987). Some researchers have also questioned the long term effectiveness of such methods (Archambault, in Slavin, Karweit and Madden, 1994; Bullock, 1975; Galloway, 1985; Sheil, Morgan and Larney, 1998). The difficulties encountered by the children tend to become chronic (Government of Ireland, 1987). Pupils most in need of continuity in their learning are faced with the task of trying to transfer learning from one setting to the other, which rarely happens successfully (Allington, in Hoover, 1986; Edwards, 1985). The instruction of the child is often fragmented and uncoordinated due to lack of communication and co-operation between classroom and special needs teacher (Thomas & Feiler, 1988). The class teacher may devolve responsibility to the special needs teacher with the result that, in some cases, the pupil actually receives less academic instruction than his/her peers (Department of Education, 1987). However, proponents of the withdrawal method point out that many children with special needs need the resource room with its small numbers a less threatening environment than the mainstream classroom. A sympathetic and understanding relationship, which is difficult to achieve in a large class, can be formed quickly between the pupils and teacher. Withdrawal is also a valuable support to mainstream class teachers in their efforts to meet the special learning needs of children who are not making satisfactory progress at school (Department of Education, 1987).

During the same period there was a parallel development in the use of ancillary staff. The Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education (England) (1967), had as early as 1967 identified a group of non-teaching staff in mainstream schools who had a key role to play in supporting teachers in the classroom. By 1978, the Warnock Report was noting the presence of support staff carrying out educational programmes as directed by the teacher, as well as providing
care for pupils with special education needs in the mainstream school.

**In-class Organisation of Instruction**

It is appropriate at this point to examine the various ways in which the support teacher can organise in-class instruction in collaboration with the class teacher. If children with special needs are to be supported successfully in mainstream schools the ways in which instruction is delivered will need to be flexible enough to respond to individual differences (Stainback, Stainback and Stefanich, 1996). More and more, in the United Kingdom, the United States and other European countries schools are using non-teaching staff including parents as a support for children with special needs in the classroom. In Ireland, the employment of non-teaching personnel in mainstream primary schools is a relatively recent development, dating back to 1998 when the Minister for Education and Science made his announcement regarding automatic entitlement. Used properly and well, a school’s support assistants can be an important and vital asset to the support teacher and the mainstream class teacher (Pothecary and McCarthy, 1996). The wide variety of activities that they could be involved in which would support both the teacher and the child are outlined in the following table.

### Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting Teachers</th>
<th>Supporting Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. In teaching the class:</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. As members of the whole class</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) supervising groups while teacher attends consultation meetings, or covering for periods of short absence</td>
<td>(a) responding to individual requests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) involvement in team teaching</td>
<td>(b) managing behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) taking one group, e.g. the most able</td>
<td>(c) providing praise and encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. In managing the class</strong></td>
<td><strong>2. As members of small group in class</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) providing an extra pair of eyes and ears</td>
<td>(a) keeping pupils on task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) taking a share of student demands for help</td>
<td>(b) explaining task requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) offering support and advice on management strategies</td>
<td>(c) supporting written work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. In differentiating materials</strong></td>
<td><strong>3. As individuals in class</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) acting as a scribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) delivering a structured programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) providing emotional or behavioural support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(a) word processing modified worksheets
(b) photocopying appropriate materials
(c) providing lists of subject-specific key words

4. In managing resources
(a) laying out the lesson area before the lesson
(b) collecting the apparatus from another colleague or the library
(c) assessing the readability level of textbooks or worksheets

4. As members of a small withdrawal group
(a) delivering differentiated or structured curricular materials e.g. corrective reading
(b) discussing problems
(c) delivering specific group programmes e.g. social skills activities

5. As individuals on a withdrawal basis
(a) delivering structured learning
(b) delivering specific therapy programmes or medical procedures
(c) counselling individuals

5. In record keeping
(a) completing a reading record of individual students’ programmes.
(b) filling in observation schedules
(c) assessing specific skills for review meetings.


However, there is a lot more to their deployment than merely providing hard-pressed teachers with extra help. Thomas (1992) indicates that putting additional adults in a classroom is not, in itself, scient to improve the quality of education experience available to children with special needs. Boundaries between the roles of the assistant and the teacher need to be clearly defined (Mortimore, Mortimore and Thomas, 1994). The issue of training for assistants is also important if they are to be an effective support. While many teachers may initially be concerned about having another adult in their classroom, most come to value the benefits such adults bring and would be reluctant to do without them (Fletcher-Campbell, 1992).

Parents in the Classroom

There is now considerable evidence to show that involvement of parents with their own children’s learning can have beneficial results. However, this role should not be confused with that of parent volunteer. Many schools in the United Kingdom and the United States are now encouraging parents into classrooms to act as parent volunteers. In Ireland, the idea of using parents as helpers in classrooms is
also relatively recent. While some schools have difficulty dealing with the over-assertive parent or the one with poor social skills, there are real problems in turning down genuine offers of help. Far better is a judicious matching of individual volunteers to specific duties. Tizard, Schofield and Hewison (1982) focus on effective communication between parents and teachers and the organisation of support as key factors in a successful partnership. If the true potential of using parents as helpers in classrooms is to be exploited teachers need training in how to work with parents and need ongoing support in resolving potential sources of conflict.

**In-class Collaborative Models in Action**

The concept of differentiation is increasingly emerging as fundamental to providing effective support to children with special needs in mainstream schools. The term is used to describe the various strategies teachers use to enable groups of students with diverse learning characteristics to participate in the mainstream programme (Good and Brophy, 1994; Beane, 1996). Differentiation embraces the rethinking of teaching approaches, the application of different grouping strategies in the classroom and the optimum use of whatever resources and support may be available (Sebba and Ainscow, 1996).

As children with special needs are increasingly being placed in mainstream classrooms and since research on the effectiveness of the withdrawal model of delivery is at best ambiguous, it is essential that in-class methods to facilitate partnership between general and special education be developed. The process of in-class collaboration involves people with diverse areas of expertise interacting to work out creative solutions to mutually defined problems (Friend & Cook, 1996, Vandercook, York and Sullivan, 1993, Sugai and Tindal, 1993). Collaboration is considered as a style of interaction – a way that individuals or groups work together (Friend and Cook, 1996). Successful in-class collaboration involves (1) mutual goals, (2) voluntary participation, (3) parity among participants, (4) shared responsibility for outcomes, and (5) shared resources. There are several instructional models that are collaborative – including co-teaching, consultancy, teaming, peer and class tutoring – each requiring a team effort on the part of the mainstream classroom teacher and the support teacher and a commitment to making the model work.
Co-teaching represents one example of partnership between mainstream and special education teachers. Co-teaching is defined by Cook and Friend (1995) as two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended group of students in a single physical space. In this model both mainstream and special education teachers are present simultaneously in the mainstream classroom with joint responsibility for instruction. The class teacher maintains the primary responsibility for subject matter instruction and the special educator is responsible for the students’ mastery of academic skills necessary to acquire the subject-matter content (Bauwens, Hourcade and Friend, 1989). Using this model, the mainstream and special education teachers work together to teach students with/without special needs in a shared classroom. Both are responsible for instruction planning and delivery, student achievement, assessment, and discipline. Students receive age-appropriate curriculum, support services, and possible modified instruction. This model provides a minimum of scheduling problems, continuous and ongoing communication between educators, and lower student to teacher ratio than the teaming or consultant models. Bauwens et al. (1989) maintain that this model uses the unique and specific skills of each educator most effectively. They see the mainstream teacher as being particularly knowledgeable about curriculum and curricular sequencing, and skilled and experienced in large-group management, whereas the special educator is seen more as an expert in task analysis, curriculum modification, and behaviour management. An evaluation of this type of approach carried out by Minke, Bear, Deemer and Glyn (1996) was positive. They described the placement of children with special needs in mainstream classes with what they call the “protected resources” of a “Team Mastery Approach” (TMA) as being a useful one. They reported more positive views of inclusion, higher levels of personal efficacy and higher ratings of their own competence for both the special teachers and the class teachers as a result of the team teaching. They also reported that it appeared to allow for greater instructional adaptations in the inclusive setting than in traditional settings. On the other hand, Reeve and Hallaghan’s (1994) review of a team teaching case study involving a resource teacher for students with special needs and behaviour disorders and their mainstream class teachers, highlights the difficulties of making team teaching effective. Their findings concur...
with the research Wnding on the qualities which teachers associate with eVective collaboration. These included the importance of communication, good interpersonal skills, agreement on personal and professional attitudes and beliefs and personal attributes necessary for collaborative communication (Nowacek, 1992; West and Cannon, 1988; Reisberg & Wolf, 1986; Idol and West, 1987; Bauwens et al, 1989).

Friend and Bursuck (1996) describe many variations on the co-teaching model including the following:

(II) ONE TEACHER, ONE SUPPORT TEACHER
Teachers work together to deliver the same material to the entire class. Teachers circulate around the class providing immediate re-teaching. This organisation works well for teaching a unit where one teacher is more expert than the other. Students still have two teachers to ask questions of and get help. This model also oVers a lower pupil to teacher ratio.

(III) PARALLEL TEACHING DESIGN
The teacher divides the class into groups and both teachers, the general and the special education teacher teach them simultaneously. The student to teacher ratio is low in each group. More time is devoted to learning rather than students waiting for help. Opportunities for re-teaching are almost immediate. Communication is constant and behaviour problems can be minimised through smaller group numbers. Disadvantages reported indicate that it may not capitalise on the special education teachers’ particular expertise.

(IV) STATION TEACHING
This collaborative teaching model divides up instructional content and pupils are placed in small groups or stations. Each teacher teaches his or her material to the pupils at a station and then moves to the other station. It is ideal for subject matter taught in units with no particular sequence. Benefits include the fact that opportunities for re-teaching are immediate, the student to teacher ratio is low, teachers become experts with material, and communication among teachers is constant.

(V) ALTERNATIVE TEACHING DESIGN
In this model, one teacher leads an enrichment or alternative activ-
ity while a second teacher re-teaches a small group of students if they are having difficulty with content. One teacher teaches a small group of three to eight students, while the other teacher instructs the large group (Friend and Bursuck, 1996). The teaching of maths is compatible with this design as a lot of re-teaching is done.

(VI) SUPPORTIVE LEARNING

Supportive learning is where the class teacher maintains responsibility for presenting the content of the instruction and the special educator implements supplementary activities to reinforce that taught by the class teacher.

(VII) CONSULTANT MODEL

This model is used successfully in schools with a low incidence of pupils with special needs and an overall small pupil population. The special education teacher is made available to re-teach a difficult skill or to help the student(s) practice a newly acquired skill. This is a non-intrusive approach that provides the special needs students with at least two teachers to ask for help with curriculum problems. Regularly scheduled meetings are recommended rather than communication on an as-needed basis (Gartner and Lipsky, 1997).

(VIII) TEAMING MODEL

The special education teacher is assigned to one grade level team with one planning period per week for the team. The special education teacher advises the class teacher on possible instructional strategies, modification ideas for assignments/tests, and behaviour strategies. The team meets on a regular basis, establishing consistent communication among the team members. The team model is presented so teachers are not working independently to achieve success with their pupils. All team members work together and broaden their knowledge in various areas, whether they are from general education or special education. Reported disadvantages of this model include possible resistance to implementing any suggested modifications, delayed assistance for pupils with difficulty because of overly high pupil to teacher ratio, and limited opportunities for special education teachers to work in the general education classroom.

(IX) PEER TUTORING

Peer tutoring is an effective method of providing one-to-one instruc-
tion in mainstream classrooms. In this system, the emphasis is on two children working together rather than on teachers and children working together. The tutor is the child-teacher and the tutee is the learner. Peer tutoring is based on the belief that the target student is able to learn more effectively from a fellow student and that the tutor benefits because the best way to learn something is to teach it. The peer tutor helps the tutee learn, practice or review an academic skill. An incidental advantage of peer tutoring is that the tutor serves as a model of appropriate academic and non-academic behaviours. The relationship between the two students also offers opportunities for building social relationships within the classroom. Peer tutoring is relatively simple to implement. It requires little effort and time from the teacher and it permits teachers to use their skills efficiently. It is also a practical way to meet the special academic needs of a few children in a class and is generally liked by the children (Slavin, 1991).

There are two types of peer tutoring. In same-age peer tutoring, one child in the class tutors a classmate. In cross-age peer tutoring, the tutor is several years older than the child being taught (Slavin, 1991). Class-wide peer tutoring is a more organised version of peer tutoring that involves the whole class. Tutor-tutee pairs work together on a class-wide basis. At the beginning of each week, all children are paired for tutoring and these pairs are then assigned to one of two competing teams. Tutees earn points for their team by responding to the tasks presented to them by their tutors. The winning team is determined daily and weekly on the basis of the highest teams’ points total (Fiore & Becker, 1994; Greenwood, Delquardri and Hall, 1989).

To implement these models of collaborative teaching and learning effectively, Lerner (1997) identified two kinds of competencies which learning support teachers needed to have—(1) competencies in professional knowledge and skills (having the information and proficiencies for teaching and testing) and (2) competencies in human relationship (the art of working with people).

It is important to state that while the withdrawal model of support continues to lose favour with policy-makers, in Ireland and elsewhere,

1 Included in Part 2 of this report
2 This is likely to change following the passing and implementation of the Education for Persons with Disabilities Bill
in practice there is some evidence to indicate that teachers prefer to withdraw pupils for specialist teaching rather than participate in more collaborative or consultant models. According to Minke, Bear, Deemer and GriYn (1996) teachers continue to follow the withdrawal model even though they are aware that it may not be the most eVective form of support. Research in Scotland on Learning Support Teachers has shown that 91% of the support teachers surveyed indicated that withdrawal tuition was practised and 55% accorded it W rst or second ranking in prioritising aspects of their role (DuYeld, Brown and Riddell, 1995). Research in Hong Kong also indicated that support teachers there preferred withdrawing pupils for individual instruction rather than the new consultative role advocated (Hing Fung Tsui, 1995). In Clough and Lindsay’s (1991) study in the United Kingdom, the allocation of a classroom assistant was the preference of the classroom teachers. These W ndings seem to indicate that, despite the advantages of the consultative and whole-school approaches, teachers do not rate these models highly among their preferences for support. However, teachers may have had little expeience of well-structured alternative models. Where teachers have had the opportunity to beneW t from responsible in-service (Clough and Lindsay, 1991) or from specialist teacher in-school support (Jordan & Silverman, in Jones, 1990) they have been found to be more in favour of collaborative and consultative models.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, there is a considerable weight of opinion and research which questions the eVectiveness of the traditional withdrawal style of support delivery. In practice, there is evidence to suggest that some teachers in Ireland and elsewhere still tend to prefer this approach. However, it is important to understand that eVective change takes time (Fullan, 1992). If teachers have worked for most of their school career in a climate where special needs are attributed exclusively to factors within the home background or within the child and where understanding children’s special needs and proVer ing appropriate teaching has not been seen as the responsibility of the class teacher, it cannot be expected that those accustomed to this type of model will adapt overnight. Positive inXuences on teachers’ attitudes to change include eVective leadership by the principal teacher, provision of inservice training, experience of teaching pupils
with special needs and contact with support teachers who have specialist knowledge. It is essential that teachers are provided with training in consultative techniques and given time to plan and solve problems collaboratively if a change in current practice is to be encouraged. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the INTO Education Committee’s research in relation to the management of special educational provision in mainstream schools.
The Management of Special Needs in Mainstream Schools

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent and forthcoming legislation will have a significant impact on educational provision for special needs pupils. Managing special needs provision in mainstream schools is a complex issue and there are many factors that will determine whether each special needs child is best served by the Integration/Inclusion model. How schools assess and provide for pupils with special needs has changed in recent times creating additional challenges for principal teachers but also for class and special needs resource teachers. Dean in Managing Special Needs in Primary Schools (1996, p. 7,8) states that:

‘The success or otherwise of Integration depends to a large extent on the attitudes of those taking part, the children with special needs, the other children in the school, the governors, parents and teachers. If all concerned believe that Integration can work and are prepared to do everything possible to make it work then it seems likely that it will be successful’.

According to Postlethwaite and Hackney (1988:79) the pre-requisites for success of Integration are as follows:

1. Adequate preparation before the integration takes place with a good exchange of information and visits.
2. Adequate resourcing so that the ordinary teacher does not feel overwhelmed by the new demands and the pupil is not immediately deprived of the benefits found in special schools/units.
3. The goodwill of all concerned seems to be paramount.

In addition effective leadership, a sense of optimism, staff confidence, support and procedures for monitoring and reviewing progress are essential, (Ainscow and Muncey, 1990). On the other hand, integration is less likely to succeed where there is inadequate monitoring of progress; insufficient support of a specialist or non-specialist nature, a
lowering of academic expectations or social isolation, (Jaimeson et al. 1997). The increasing trend towards the integration/inclusion of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools has led to a situation where many teachers are still grappling with the enormity of this sea change in work patterns and classroom organisation, with very little information or in-service. However, despite this, much positive progress has taken place in recent years in the area of integration of pupils with special needs. To what extent integration or inclusion may be considered successful remains to be seen.

Co-ordination and Management of Special Needs Provision

According to Dean (1996) a whole school approach to the management of special needs is essential. A whole school approach seeks to ensure that all members of staff accept a commitment to work together to provide the best possible education for children with special needs with every teacher accepting responsibility for assessment and providing for those children, (Dean, 1996, p.9). This view is further supported by Gross (1993) who maintains that success in relation to meeting the needs of children with special needs depends on: ‘a collaborative will among staff born out of collaborative school development work in special needs’, (Gross, 1993, p.1). To enable a whole school approach to develop and to enhance collaboration there must be professional development for teachers and other staff, (INTO, 1993).

The commitment of a whole staff to integration is insufficient, on its own, to ensure the success of integration. It is also necessary to co-ordinate the provision of support. Dean (1996) argues that it is essential that schools should have at least one teacher who has particular expertise in special needs who would be able to act as adviser to colleagues overing ideas about problems and resources and keeping up to date with new developments. The teacher who is given this responsibility should be avorded the opportunity to engage in ongoing professional development as appropriate.

Under the British Code of Practice in relation to provision for children with special needs (DFE 1994), the special needs teacher’s role has shifted from that of teacher of special needs pupils to that of a Special Educational Needs (SEN) coordinator. The role of a SEN coordinator can be described as an enabler or facilitator whose prime task
is to develop the expertise and confidence of all staff to teach children and young people with special needs. They are also seen as someone who could act as an advocate for special needs both arguing the rights of children and young people with special needs (and their parents) and also ensuring that both policy and practice reflect the implementation of those rights. Other duties of the SEN coordinator include:

1. Supporting colleagues at class level - not relieving them of their work.
2. Initiating and supporting transformation in colleagues’ thinking in relation to the integration of children with special needs.
3. Coordinating children’s special education programmes - always working with teachers.
4. Ensuring the IEP is drawn up.
5. Coordinating provision and use of resources.
6. Communicating information about special needs to principal teachers, staff, parents, governors, e.g. school policy in relation to legal requirements, new developments, research findings.
7. Evaluating provision and organising evaluation involving other staff.
8. Liaising with external agencies as appropriate.
9. Coordinating, monitoring and reviewing the progress of all children involved in cooperation with teachers, parents and other outside relevant agencies.

(Dean 1996, pp 66-68)

There is no specific post in Irish primary schools for the co-ordination of special needs, though in some schools, special needs resource teachers or learning support teachers may take on such a role. However, their main role is to teach the pupils for whom they have responsibility. If such a post were in place in Irish mainstream primary schools it is possible that many of the frustrations currently being experienced by principal teachers - particularly teaching principals - class teachers and resource teachers in relation to the management of integration of children with special needs might be alleviated.

**Identification of Pupils and Assessment of their needs**

The early identification of pupils with special needs is crucial in order to ensure that such pupils are supported appropriately in school (INTO, 1993, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003). It is of great assis-
tance to the class teacher when pupils with special needs have been identified prior to enrolment. However, once in school, early identification is assisted where information regarding the child is received from pre-school, previous teachers and parents. Teacher observation is also important. As Dean (1996) states, it is important to study the whole child as an individual, to consider his or her home circumstances, learning styles, personality, interests and what motivates him or her. Consultation with the child’s parents, an assessment of the child’s attitude to learning and to school, an analysis of the child’s skills, strengths and actual knowledge, a review of the school/classroom context and listening to the child’s own view of his or her progress, are also key aspects of the identification process according to Dean (1996).

In addition to teacher observation, tests are also used as part of the process for identifying children with special needs. Testing can be informal using teacher designed tests and/or checklist materials. Tests - screening tests, norm referenced tests, criterion referenced tests - yield different information. According to Pearson and Lindsay (1986), it is considered best practice for teachers to ensure that all the data gathered, through testing and teacher observation, informs planning and teaching to meet the needs of the individual child. The importance of early identification and appropriate assessment has also been recognised by the Department of Education and Science, in the various circulars regarding special education support services and in the Guidelines for Learning Support. According to previous research carried out by the INTO (1997, 2000), how such policies are implemented in practice vary depending on the circumstances of the school.

**Individual Planning**

It has become common practice in many countries, including the US, and many EU countries, to prepare individualised programmes for pupils with special needs, (OECD, 1994). Such programmes are often called ‘individual education plans’ (IEPs). In general an IEP would describe the pupil’s special needs and outline learning goals in areas of the curriculum of the curriculum which have been prioritised for the child. The IEP is normally prepared in consultation and should be regularly reviewed, (Keady, 2003). The importance of individual planning, has been identified in many Irish reports and documents in recent
years, including the Learning Support Guidelines (1999), Draft Curriculum Guidelines for Pupils with General Learning Disabilities (NCFA, 2002), Report of the Task force on Autism (2002) and most recently in the Education for Persons with Disability Bill (2003). Much debate surrounds the issue of IEPs, whether pupils with IEPs progress better than those without, their usefulness for class teachers, their impact on classroom practice, and their role in accountability. While IEPs are not yet mandated by legislation in Ireland, individual curriculum planning to meet the needs of pupils with special needs is considered good practice.

The skill required to keep a whole class of children working productively is considerable (Dean 1996, p. 87). Lewis (1991) stated that there is a need for a classroom climate in which “there is an acceptance that all children (and adults) have strengths and weaknesses and individual differences are recognised” (p. 89). Teachers can give themselves a little space and time in the classroom by creating a classroom routine that encourages children to be independent learners - employing independent work practices, valuing cooperative group work, using resource based learning, peer tutoring. A selection of materials for special needs teaching and learning, clearly labelled, should be located centrally in the school.

Dean (1996, p. 62) maintains that if children are involved in planning their own programme and in some self recording and if their programmes are at the right level for them, this should make it possible for them to work without constant attention from the teacher. With regard to teachers helping the individual child, Chazan et al (1980) noted that teachers who enabled children with problems to succeed managed to wind time to give the individual child the attention s/he needed because they were well organised.

In the well organised classroom, as outlined by Dean (1996), there are clearly defined rules of behaviour and independent work is encouraged, children can wind what they need and can move to the next piece of work with minimum help from the teacher; helpers in the classroom work as a team with the teacher and are clear about their responsibility and contribution to the children’s learning. Some cooperative work takes place and individual work is differentiated so that the child will spend maximum time on task. This will free the teacher to oversee the class learning and to give individual help where necessary. To what extent class teachers in Irish primary schools are enabled to provide individualised support for pupils with special needs remains to be seen.
Behaviour /Emotional Difficulties

Problems with behaviour are often associated with learning problems because learning involves motivation, the ability to concentrate and to stay on task. Children find it difficult to adjust for a variety of reasons: for example, physical disability (sight, hearing), low self esteem (possibly caused by an inability to learn), family background (genetic), child’s home life. The home can have a major influence on how children adjust in school (INTO, 1997). A failure of the home to provide basic emotional support may cause the child to seek to satisfy their emotional needs in inappropriate ways at school.

Knowledge of the home environment – particularly in the case of disruptive children – is crucial for teachers. The relationship that such children form with their teachers may be crucial in helping them cope in school. Furthermore, the relationship teachers form with the parents of those children might help them cope better at home. A better understanding of the home among teachers will assist them to be more sympathetic to some of the family difficulties encountered by the children in their care. As Dean (1996, p. 132) states “When children have special needs it is important for parents and teachers to work together so that the demands made on the child are as consistent as possible. Building relationships with parents can be problematic as schools and parents may find themselves in a situation where they blame each other for difficult situations that might develop thereby inhibiting the capacity for joint work in resolving problems. This is particularly the case with the parents of children experiencing emotional /behavioural difficulties who are likely to have more than average anxieties about their children” (Greenhalgh 1994, p. 293).

The task of managing really challenging behaviour can be stressful for teachers. The importance of teachers supporting each other in this difficult task cannot be overemphasised. Disruptive behaviour may also indicate a need for schools to change approaches to learning for the child in question rather than simply attributing such behaviour to external causes alone. In managing children with behavioural difficulties, Dean (1996) recommends:

1. Giving children clear guidance on what’s expected.
2. Focusing praise /encouragement on acceptable behaviour/achievement.
3. Considering the adjustment of the classroom to organise better for success – e.g. seating arrangements, pupil groupings.
Consulting the child to see how s/he can reXect on behaviour, developments, and achievements.

She further advocates that a well structured programme, with short structured tasks that lead to quick success and approaches that rely substantially on positive reinforcement of desirable behaviour rather than punishment for undesirable behaviour, will be more powerful in the management of behavioural difficulties. In addition, schools’ behaviour policy should state clearly how school staV react to bad behaviour in order to avoid a situation where children receive a bad name within the school rarely receiving praise even when deserved.

Evans and Wilson (1980) maintain that children with behaviour difficulties tend to need more space than other children since they may become irritated with or irritate other children in their proximity. This creates a challenge for teachers in relation to the organisation of furniture in classrooms - particularly for group or paired work - in order to address the needs of children who are easily distracted. Many teachers express frustrations regularly because their overcrowded classrooms make eVective integration of children with special needs extremely difficult to realize. It appears that providing for children with behavioural or emotional difficulties in the mainstream school is one of the greater challenges for teachers in the context of integration and inclusion (INTO, 1995).

School Policy

The organisation and management of special needs in any school will depend on the skills of the staV, the role of the special needs coordinator and any external help that might be available, (Dean, 1996). Best practice in this regard might have the following characteristics though school size will determine how they might be achieved:

1. The respective roles of the class teacher and SEN coordinator clearly defined.

2. All staV working closely together - solving problems, reXecting on work, supporting each other, and developing their work in classrooms.

3. A clear pattern of partnership with parents of children with special needs: including regular meetings respecting the knowledge parents can oVer about their
children and their contribution to the IEP.

According to Dean (1996), the School’s Special Needs Policy should include all of the above mentioned aspects and should be reviewed at regular intervals by the whole staV.

Staff Development

Professional development for staV is vital if the school is to maintain good provision for special needs, (Dean, 1996, Wolfendale and Bryans, 1978). To enable a whole school approach to develop and to enhance collaboration there must be professional development for all staV. Integration must be seen as a professional challenge and teachers need to be supported accordingly. All teachers need to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to become competent at diagnosing and providing for the most common special needs. In-career courses would also need to address issues such as working as a team with other adults within the classroom and working with parents which requires empathy, skill and a readiness to be open minded (INTO, 1993, 2000). In addition, Wolfendale and Bryans (1978) recommends that professional development should also include:

1. Recapitulation of principles and processes of child development and the psychology of individual diVerences.
3. Assessment of learning diYculties in speciWc areas: language, aspects of reading failure, perceptual motor skills.
4. Forms of educational interventions and their organisation.
5. Administration and interpretation of screening results.
6. Opportunities to design, carry out and evaluate under supervision a short intervention programme with individual children or within a small group.

The attitude of the principal teacher towards children with special needs is very inXuential on how staV will respond to the ‘professional challenge’ of maximizing the beneWts of inclusion for the special needs child. Principal teachers must ensure teachers plan, create an eVective learning environment, and mediate a diVerentiated curricu-lum. Even though learning diYculties are generally due to causes outside the teacher’s control, all learning diYculties must be tackled by good teaching, (Dean, 1996). Professional development opportu-nities for teachers are therefore crucial.
Concluding Comment

The above brief review of literature has identified a number of issues that need to be considered regarding the integration or inclusion of pupils with special needs in mainstream schools. The need for a whole school approach has been clearly identified, and the importance of collaboration and sharing of expertise emphasised. Coordination of special needs provision at school level, in addition to individual planning by classroom teachers have also been identified as important for the success of integration/inclusion. The particular difficulties associated with providing for pupils with behavioural and emotional needs have been highlighted. Recognising that integration/inclusion is a professional challenge for teachers, the importance of professional development cannot be ignored. How these issues are addressed in the context of integration/inclusion in mainstream primary schools in Ireland has been the focus of the Education Committee’s research which is described on next page.

OVERVIEW OF INTERVIEWS ON MANAGING THE INTEGRATION OF PUPILS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The following overview was compiled from narratives supplied by members of the Education Committee who interviewed principal teachers, resource teachers and class teachers in a number of primary schools in May/June 2003. Efforts were made to include different categories of schools. Included are responses from the following:

1. 2 large, single sex schools (> 16 teachers)
2. 3 small, mixed rural schools (< 7 teachers)
3. 1 large, mixed junior school included in the Giving Children Break initiative
4. 1 large, urban junior school included in the Urban Breaking the Cycle initiative
5. A large, mixed school in a rural town
6. A mixed, rural school serving an area designated disadvantaged
7. A large, mixed school serving an urban area designated disadvantaged
8. Scoil Ghaeltachta

The purpose of the interviews was to identify the issues associated
with the integration of pupils with special educational needs in main-
stream classes. It was noticeable that none of the responses
received from interviewees indicated dissatisfaction with the princi-
ple of integration and many mentioned positive outcomes for pupils.
However, several signiﬁcant challenges associated with the manage-
ment/operation of integration were highlighted and these are
outlined below.

Identification and Assessment of Pupils’ Special Needs

Identification of special needs prior to enrolment

A variety of approaches to identiﬁcation of special needs prior to
enrolment were reported. These included reliance on local knowl-
edge, links with pre-school/Early Start Units where they were
existed, interviews with parents and children during the term before
enrolment and informal liaison with community health personnel. In
some schools, a combination of strategies is used. Schools may be keen
to have necessary supports in place as quickly as possible to meet the
child’s needs but have no automatic entitlement to access informa-
tion on future pupils from other agencies. One interviewee expressed the hope that a national register of children
with special needs, as originally proposed in the Education (for
Persons with Disabilities) Bill (2002), would enable schools to make
an early identiﬁcation of future pupils’ needs.

Currently, most schools rely on parents to contact them early
enough and to be frank enough in the information they provide to
enable the school to begin seeking necessary supports. Interviewees
from larger schools in particular stressed the need for a system of
early assessment that would provide them with the evidence
required to secure resources from the child’s ﬁrst day at school.
Those from smaller schools tended to be satisﬁed with the informal
procedures they currently use.

Identification of special needs of pupils already in the school

One interviewee made the point that, unless their disability is mani-
festly obvious, most pupils with a special need will go through Junior
Infants and possibly much of Senior Infants with little possibility of
their needs being identiﬁed and addressed. Teacher observation
seems to be the predominant strategy in use at this level although
one person mentioned the BelWeld Infant Assessment ProWle (BIAP).
Some schools have structured sheets for teachers of Junior Infant classes to record their observations. Should the teacher have concerns regarding a pupil’s progress, it is usually brought to the attention of the principal teacher, the learning support teacher and/or the resource teacher.

From Senior Infants on, all schools reported using formal assessment for screening and diagnosis of learning difficulties. A number of instruments were mentioned, the Middle Infant Screening Test (MIST), the Non Reading Intelligence Test (NRIT), QUEST and the Neale Analysis being the most common. Standardised tests such as Micra-T, Sigma-T and the Drumcondra Attainment tests were frequently mentioned as serving a screening function, particularly by interviewees from smaller schools although several people felt these instruments were now somewhat outdated and unreliable.

It was also noticeable that larger schools reported using a greater variety of assessment tools, possibly because these schools are more likely to have full time learning support and resource teachers on staff who can administer diagnostic tests and who can allocate time for the analysis of results. It is very common for the interpretation and analysis of assessment results to be carried out by the learning support or resource teachers in all schools. In some of the larger schools a team comprising the principal, the class teacher and teachers involved in providing supplementary education carry out this task.

Satisfaction levels with the assessment tools available varied considerably. One school said they were very satisfied with the tools they use although this was the school that reported using a wide variety of assessment tools. Other schools rated the assessments as adequate or unsatisfactory. One interviewee, working in a disadvantaged area, found many of the tests unsuitable for their pupils because of a mismatch between the experience of the children and the content of the tests. The Gaeltacht school highlighted the lack of appropriate diagnostic tools to assess children whose first language is Irish or whose education is being received through the medium of Irish.

PROCEDURES FOR ACCESSING PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENTS

The majority of teachers interviewed reported that psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) carried out some assessments of pupils in their schools. Many reported that
other (private) psychologists had been engaged to provide additional assessments where schools needed to go beyond the annual quota set by NEPS. Funding for these additional assessments comes from a variety of sources including pupils’ parents, board of management funds, contributions from charitable organisations such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and from DES grants given under Giving Children an Even Break or as refunds in areas where NEPS personnel have not been appointed. The importance for psychologists (and other professionals) to have an adequate command of the Irish language, to understand bilingualism and the linguistic background of Gaeltacht children was also mentioned.

It is rare for parents to refuse permission for their child to undergo an assessment but it was reported by a small number of interviewees. In some cases, parents asked for the results of screening tests before consenting to the assessment. One interviewee stressed the importance of discussing the issues in a sensitive manner with parents.

Where parents had sourced assessments in isolation from the children’s schools, it was reported that the DES did not act upon the recommendations.

Interviewees expressed strong feelings of frustration with the procedures for accessing psychological assessments and also with the current application procedures for resource hours and/or employment of special needs assistants. There were striking similarities in the criticisms from all categories of schools. These included:

a. Assessments

1. Insufficient personnel available to conduct the necessary number of assessments resulting in high costs and additional administration if private psychologists have to be engaged;
2. Inordinate delays resulting in pupils advancing through school and even into second level without being assessed;
3. Perception of inequity of access around the country;
4. Apparent lack of regard for the recommendations of teachers;
5. Additional workload in acquainting private psychologists with terms of Circulars 07/02, 08/02 and SER 1 and 2;
6. Lack of access to assessment relating to emotional and behavioural difficulties
7. Tendency for some assessments reports to be ‘timid’ possibly because of fear of litigation;
Involvement of psychologist ceases after assessment whereas schools would value the collaboration of psychologist in drafting and reviewing IEPs.

b. Applications for resource hours/special needs assistants

- Often extreme delay between assessment and sanction to employ resource teacher/SNA;
- Teachers in ‘front line’ when parents complain about this type of delay;
- Responsibility and workload shifted from Inspectorate to principal teachers. For teaching principals, this causes an unacceptable intrusion on teaching time;
- Difficulty in winding qualified personnel to provide part-time resource hours.

Selection and Deployment of Staff as Special Needs Resource Teachers

Where the number of applicants from within a staV exceeded the number of resource positions available, the most common approach is to adapt the procedures for appointment to promoted posts i.e. internal advertising, applications and interviews. Criteria for selection are also similar, experience, interest and ability. There seems to be a tendency, particularly in smaller schools, for staV to informally agree who should apply, and a number reported that there has only been one applicant for each available post.

Some schools have a policy of limiting the number of years a teacher may spend as resource teacher. Many do not but may consider setting a limit in order to allow other staV members to gain varied experience. One interviewee sounded a word of caution about the practice of advertising for and employing a resource teacher as opposed to an assistant teacher. There is a risk that the person appointed would feel contractually entitled to retain that position as long as s/he wished, limiting other staV members’ mobility within the school.

Teachers felt it is more appropriate for qualified and experienced teachers to fill resource posts in order to meet the requirements of the pupils in question. As a result, mainstream teaching posts are sometimes filled by less well qualified personnel but it was acknowledged that this was an issue of teacher supply rather than a negative impact of resource provision per se. A number of teachers who do
not hold the required qualification in Irish have been appointed to resource posts and a question arises as to their mobility should the resource post be suppressed.

Access to prior training and induction for resource teachers is either non-existent or sporadic. Many resource teachers have begun to source relevant courses independently, funding the courses themselves and attending in their own time. In some cases, participation in conferences arranged by organisations such as the Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA) or Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education (IATSE) provides some access to professional development. The resource teacher in the Gaeltacht also had access to courses organised by Muintearas. The establishment by teachers of their own support networks has been very beneficial in sharing practice and providing some professional development. Informal orientation by experienced colleagues within a school was also said to be useful.

Caseload and Work Practice for Resource Teachers

Few schools had set out a job description for resource teachers. Where it had been done, by and large, principals had defined it in line with DES guidelines and/or the Learning Support Guidelines. Procedures for monitoring the work of resource teachers are largely informal. Some said it would be based on IEPs and, in a small number of interviews, the teacher’s preparation/cuntas míosúil were mentioned as methods of monitoring. Several interviews mentioned that their school is in the process of drafting a policy on the integration of pupils with special needs, including the role of the resource teacher(s) in their schools.

In contrast to learning support teachers, the assignment of a specified number of resource hours to children has established a definite caseload for resource teachers. In most schools, pupils are taken individually in accordance with DES guidance but a minority of schools have decided to group pupils according to ability thus maximising time and providing for some element of social development for the pupils, something that is especially important for children with emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Individual education plans (IEPs) were mentioned by practically all of the teachers interviewed as the strategy used in drafting a programme of instruction for special needs pupils. Varying degrees of collaboration were reported when describing how these IEPs are drafted – in some cases class teachers, present and former, are consulted by the resource teacher. Principal teachers, psychologists, SNAs and parents may also be involved. The resource teachers and principal teachers review IEPs on a regular basis.

It would seem that practice in the area of IEPs is still evolving. Issues that need to be addressed include the need for structured time for collaboration rather than snatching opportunities whenever possible and the need to include psychologists in this collaboration rather than having to rely solely on their written reports.

If special needs pupils are absent, their time allocation is used for another child or, occasionally, for the resource teacher to catch up on record keeping, liaison with others or work of that nature. If resource teachers are themselves absent for long periods, substitute teachers are recruited.

Withdrawal of Pupils vs Provision of Supplementary Teaching in Classroom

Providing supplementary teaching within the mainstream classroom is rare but is happening in some instances. Withdrawal of the pupil from the class enables him/her to build a positive relationship with the resource teacher and the individualised attention is beneficial. Where resource teachers take groups of pupils together, unless they are all in the same class, working within the classroom is less of an option.

Withdrawal of pupils can create difficulties. Pupils are frequently absent from class and miss out on aspects of the curriculum. They may also encounter difficulties with homework based on activities they have not covered. For mainstream class teachers, withdrawal of pupils at various times of the day is very disruptive. As one teacher put it, “When is the class going to be a class?” At the same time, there is hesitancy on the part of some class teachers about working in the same classroom with another adult.

Lack of physical space within classrooms is also a barrier to in-class...
support, particularly if pupils need to use mobility aids. Some thought in-class support could be ‘embarrassing’ for older pupils.

For principal teachers, timetabling is becoming more and more of a headache as they try to co-ordinate supplementary teaching slots with other arrangements such as PE and ICT. In smaller schools, the idea of combining the role of learning support and special needs resource would be welcomed as it would enable all supplementary teaching to be provided by the same person thus avoiding the multiplicity of school clusters for shared learning support, resource and part time resource posts. In larger schools, where it is less likely that part time or shared posts would be a consideration, a stronger distinction is drawn between the two roles and there would be little support for combining them.

**Benefits and Challenges Arising from the Appointment of Resource Teachers**

Teachers identified several benefits for pupils arising from the introduction of resource provision. Children are getting appropriate support, based on their own learning needs and, as a result, are happier, experiencing more success and have more positive attitudes to school. They are being maintained in mainstream schools in their own communities as opposed to being placed in special classes or special schools.

Other pupils have opportunities to develop a more inclusive attitude, becoming more accepting of difference as they share a class with peers who have special needs.

For mainstream teachers, the support of a resource teacher who can focus on the individual child has helped reduce the common feeling of guilt experienced when a special needs pupil simply cannot be given enough time and attention because s/he is one pupil in a large class.

The predominant challenge identified is the increase in administration/bureaucracy related to the procedures for arranging assessments and for appointing resource teachers and special needs assistants. This bears most heavily on principal teachers, especially teaching principals. Teachers also referred to the need for greater organisational capacity in their own classrooms, particularly around timetabling as they attempt to arrange their day around periods when pupils are withdrawn for supplementary teaching.
For many schools, the absence of appropriate accommodation in which resource teachers can work has posed a significant challenge. Schools are making do with cupboards, corridors or converted toilets/cloakrooms and few were in a position to report that their school had adequate space. Some referred to the need for increased vigilance, particularly during break times, as special needs children often need more care and attention.

**Special Needs Assistants**

The number of SNAs currently working in the system is an indication of schools’ willingness to utilise what is still a relatively new resource for mainstream schools. Most of the people interviewed spoke in terms of SNAs having been appointed to assist with the care as opposed to the learning needs of pupils. This included a wide range of needs associated with physical, emotional or behavioural disabilities. There seems to be reasonably strict compliance with guidelines pertaining to the role and duties of SNAs and few schools had set out job descriptions tailored to their own school’s context. Based on these interviews, the majority of SNAs are assigned to particular pupils as opposed to the school as a whole. This focus on one child only is not seen as the most efficient or beneficial use of staff nor is it always in the best interests of the child. Principal teachers in particular would seem to prefer to appoint SNAs to the school staff thereby allowing for more flexibility in deploying them.

While some schools require applicants for the post of SNA to have some qualifications in addition to the basic requirements, most do not. This generally breaks down as a difference between larger urban/suburban schools and smaller rural schools and may have to do with the availability of courses in larger population centres. An NCVA qualification in childcare is the most commonly mentioned additional requirement. In many cases, there has been a transfer of personnel from the FÁS/CE schemes to the new SNA posts and this has meant that the SNA is familiar with the routines of the school which is a help. A number of interviewees indicated that the need for discretion and confidentiality is an important factor in selection of SNAs. Because of this, some schools recruit from outside the school’s immediate community.

While teachers readily acknowledge the benefits of having more
hands on deck’, there is no doubt that the appointment of SNAs can pose considerable challenges. The lack of prior training for SNAs is seen as a significant weakness in the system. The arrival of an SNA in a classroom, in addition to the arrival of the special needs pupil(s), adds significantly to the workload of the mainstream class teacher. One described it as being akin to having an additional pupil and complained that it intrudes on already precious teaching time. It is a new challenge for many teachers who are unaccustomed to working with another adult present in their classroom and the on-site training of another adult is not a role for which teachers have been prepared. One or two of the larger schools arrange an induction and mentoring system for SNAs which is organised by resource teachers and/or learning support teachers.

There are schools in which some members of the teaching staff are unwilling to accept the presence of an SNA in their room and while principal teachers may do their best to accommodate that in the allocation of classes, it may not always be possible to reconcile the needs of pupils with the preferences of the teachers.

The degree to which SNAs can participate as full members of staff varies from school to school. In some schools, separate staff meetings are held between SNAs and the principal/resource teachers. In other situations, SNAs attend parts of ordinary staff meetings. There is also a variation from school to school in relation to the participation of SNAs in IEP meetings. In some schools they participate fully while in others they are not included. For social events, most schools report that SNAs are fully included.

Clarification of the role of the SNA and the boundaries to that role needs to be given before appointment in order to prevent misinterpretation at a later stage. Parents too need to understand the distinction between the roles of the teacher and the SNA. Some teachers cited examples of SNAs holding ‘parent-teacher meetings’ which they felt was inappropriate. Another interviewee questioned whether the current definition of the role shouldn’t be broadened. She felt that the added value in terms of pupil learning within the current role was limited and felt that there was scope for the appointment of ‘para-educators’ with a higher entry requirement and more systematic training.
There was limited awareness of the Visiting Teacher Service (Sensory Impaired) among the interviewees. One principal teacher, to whose school a visiting teacher calls weekly to support a pupil with hearing difficulties, praised the service highly. She suggested that it could be used as a model for others, including the role of the resource teacher, in that it provides for co-ordination of all agencies dealing with a particular child from pre-school through third level. The service also provides ongoing advice and support in the child’s home. Where other interviewees mentioned the visiting teacher service, it would seem that the support was limited to very occasional visits to the school.

Other professional supports (e.g. speech and language therapists, occupational therapists) are more frequently available outside of school and there is a strong feeling evident that there is insufficient access to these supports, either for pupils themselves or as a source of advice for teachers.

**Implications of Integration for Classroom Teachers**

In theory, the classroom teacher has ultimate responsibility for seeing that the learning needs of the special needs pupil are being addressed. One class teacher interviewed questions whether this is possible in practice given that the class teacher is the only one without non-teaching time during which all of the necessary liaison and co-ordination can be done. It is also questionable when the classroom teacher is often not covering the core subjects (Language, Maths) with the pupil.

The lack of time for all that is required in order to properly manage integration in one’s classroom was raised again and again. Familiarising oneself with the needs of the child and the best ways to address those needs is time consuming and saps the confidence of teachers. Before one even has time to build up this familiarity, preparation of IEPs, curriculum differentiation, sourcing appropriate materials, timetabling and liaison with colleagues must be faced. In addition, there is often another adult to train and monitor. The availability of a colleague, the resource teacher, has certainly been of assistance in dealing with these responsibilities but the complete lack of systematic preparation/training for managing integration is a huge

3. supportt@into.ie
fault in the system. Practically every interviewee referred to the need to provide in-service training in the whole area of integration of special needs pupils. This training should include some background information on common disabilities, practical advice on the effective deployment of SNAs and information on appropriate materials and resources.

The question of what constitutes integration/inclusion was also raised. Whether or not presence of the pupil in the classroom for part of the day constitutes meaningful integration is open to question and whether or not a form of reverse integration would not be more beneficial to the pupils. This could involve the pupil joining with mainstream classes for a variety of curriculum areas while having a dedicated learning programme within a special class.

**Funding, Accommodation and Resources**

Lack of physical space for resource teachers to use and the lack of Xoor space in some older classrooms is a source of dissatisfaction for many teachers. Lack of storage space in which necessary equipment and materials can be kept safely is also a problem – in most schools there simply isn’t enough space available.

Schools are slowly building up a stock of appropriate resources for supplementary teaching but there can never be enough as new materials are constantly being developed and the needs of pupils are so varied.

Funding for materials is said to be very inadequate and slow in being distributed. The figures need to be increased and the bureaucracy involved in accessing the funds needs to be reduced.

A suggestion was made that a guideline figure for grant aid needs to be established for each category of disability in order to ensure that suitable resources can be purchased.

**Whole School Issues**

About half of the schools involved in the interviews have drafted a policy in relation to the integration of pupils with special needs. The principal teacher, the resource teacher or the learning support teacher has responsibility for co-ordinating procedures within these schools in relation to special needs. This seems to centre mainly on enrolment, arranging for assessments and providing for collaboration...
between resource teachers and classroom teachers. Others report that they are working at drawing up such a policy and practice seems to be evolving in these schools.

The issues of space, time for collaboration and delays in accessing resources were reiterated again and again.

**Benefits and Challenges Arising from Enrolment of Pupils with Special Needs**

There was widespread acceptance of the desirability of integration. Practically all respondents mentioned the fact that children’s right to be included was being addressed and a more inclusive mindset was being developed by other pupils and by staff. As resource teachers become more experienced they are becoming a valuable resource for their colleagues as well as for pupils as they can provide practical advice in relation to particular pupils’ needs and how to address them.

There were suggestions that a quota system might need to be considered both for a school and for individual classes in order to prevent an imbalance arising between special needs and mainstream pupils. This was particularly true in relation to social, emotional and behavioural problems, which seem to be regarded as the most challenging of all special needs. One class teacher interviewed spoke of constant correction by the teacher of disruptive behaviours as being like, “Mum and Dad constantly Wrighting at home” and the impact that can have, particularly on sensitive and timid children who she feels tend to become withdrawn. There is also a tendency for ‘borderline’ pupils to become drawn in or to emulate the behaviours of disruptive pupils. One teacher expressed a fear that teacher time was being ‘sucked away’ from other pupils by disruptive behaviour on the part of some and one respondent expressed the opinion that the real losers were the better able pupils. Teachers never have enough time to address the need for extension of the learning of the more able children.

The expectations of parents of special needs pupils are also reported to have become a challenge for schools. Some parents feel that if their child is in a mainstream school then it should be reasonable to expect them to achieve at a mainstream level. If they do not,
there can be dissatisfaction with the school. It is difficult to mediate to parents, some of whom may be unwilling to accept that their child has special needs, what constitutes a reasonable level of achievement for their child.

**Conclusion**

Many of the experiences referred to in these interviews are reflected in the literature on special education provision in other countries. If, as Dean writes, “The success or otherwise of integration depends to a large extent on the attitudes of those taking part...” (1996, p. 7-8) then there may well be a positive future for the policy of integration in Irish primary schools. Despite the challenges being faced by schools, there was a broad consensus in the interviews that the integration of special needs pupils in mainstream classes is a worthy aim. However, as the literature review above also reports, several fundamental issues need to be addressed if there is to be a realistic prospect of success. The concerns of teachers interviewed serve to highlight these issues.

1. Teachers were clearly of the view that it was necessary to balance the rights of children with special needs and the other children in the class.
2. Schools need to have access to relevant information on a pupil’s condition and educational requirements prior to enrolment so that appropriate intervention can be provided as early as possible to support the child’s learning. At present, schools have no entitlement to information before a child enrols.
3. Guidance needs to be provided on the range and suitability of screening and diagnostic tests. Selection of tests is currently dependent on the experience of teachers at local level. In the absence of training opportunities for resource teachers, such experience can be limited. Culturally appropriate tests should be developed to cater for pupils from Irish speaking homes, from disadvantaged backgrounds and, increasingly necessary, for pupils from other cultures. All services should also be available through the medium of Irish.
4. The bureaucracy associated with arranging for psychological assessments and the subsequent processing of applications for resource hours/SNA appointments must be reduced. Some teachers and principals interviewed were almost in despair with
the amount of administration required and the delays between application and deployment of staV. Proposals contained in Circular 24/03 to provide an annual allocation based on predicted incidence of special educational needs are intended to obviate the need for individual applications other than in exceptional circumstances.

The recruitment of additional psychologists is also necessary to expedite matters. Teachers who were interviewed expressed the opinion that, in addition to carrying out assessments, psychologists should be available to schools to provide advice and to participate when appropriate in drafting and review of education plans. Teachers would also like to see their observations and recommendations becoming an integral part of overall assessment procedure.

The lack of access to professional preparation for the role of resource teacher is a significant weakness in the sector. Wolfendale and Bryans (1978) stress that all teachers need to become competent at diagnosing and providing for the most common special needs. As a minimum, all resource teachers need to be supported in acquiring that competence.

Training for special needs assistants and for the teachers who guide and monitor their work is also identified as an urgent requirement. The role of the SNA is also highlighted as an issue that requires consideration. Several interviewees questioned the current job description and whether it represents an efficient use of resources.

The demands on the mainstream class teacher arising from integration are significant. Timetabling, constant withdrawal of pupils, writing opportunities to collaborate with resource teachers, SNAs and parents have all become an enormous challenge. The planning and classroom management that will enable a teacher to address the needs of the pupils with special needs within the mainstream class is such that teachers can be overwhelmed, particularly if they have a number of pupils with special needs in their classroom. If teaching in a multi class situation, this is further exacerbated. Suggestions of establishing a quota system were common. The weighting system currently being discussed by the DES and the INTO may begin to address this.

The current role of the resource teacher – the provision of supplementary teaching to specific pupils, divers from that
outlined by Dean in *Managing Special Needs in the Primary School* (1996). Under the British code of practice, the SENCO is a resource to colleagues as they develop the competence to teach pupils with special needs. A move towards such a role in Irish schools could enhance the whole school capacity to provide for pupils with special needs and lessen the workload on principals, particularly teaching principals, who currently have responsibility for co-ordination and monitoring of provision.
Current Issues and Concerns

In this section the findings of Irish based research—including the most recent work of the INTO Education Committee will be discussed in order to establish the extent to which the support provided to children with special needs in Ireland reflects practice identified in the literature. The findings of the research conducted to date raise serious questions about whether the current support services can deliver an effective service under present conditions. This section of the report identifies the factors that act as barriers to the delivery of effective support, highlights issues at school level which prove problematic such as collaboration with parents and the use of other non-teaching personnel and makes recommendations relevant to both policy-makers and schools themselves in order to ensure that pupils with special needs receive the education best suited to those needs.

Whole School Approach

There is a consensus in the literature reviewed that schools should adopt whole-school, collaborative models of practice to support children with special needs. Implicit in the whole school approach are feelings of shared commitment, responsibility and accountability for outcomes (Davis and Kemp, 1995). The whole school approach is based on the premise that all teachers in the school are involved in a sharing of responsibility for the education of pupils with special needs. Engaging in collaborative consultation is seen as a means by which the whole school community, including the principal teacher, the resource teacher and the class teacher will work together to devise appropriate policies, strategies for school-level and classroom-level intervention. Implicit to the model is the sharing of expert-
ise. Givener and Haager, in Falvey, (1995) suggest that effective support provision will be facilitated if special education teachers and regular class teachers increase their level of communication and learn from each other so that they can best facilitate the education of all their pupils. By having significant input into the decision-making process, the teacher feels ownership for the plans that are made and can comment at once on the feasibility of any intervention strategies being suggested. The role of parents and other professionals in the whole school collaborative process must be considered also (Lorenz, 1998).

Despite the concept of whole school collaboration being recommended at policy level in Ireland there is no evidence at system level of a structured framework for facilitating school staff in developing whole school policies on special needs. The findings of the research done to date indicate that although whole school discussion takes place in some cases, it is clear that the method of intervention employed by the majority of special needs resource teachers is the withdrawal of children either on an individual or small group basis. A range of support options is not, therefore, realistically considered. Results in the IATSE Survey (2000) indicated that while whole school discussion took place in 42% of cases, the method of intervention employed by the vast majority of resource teachers was the withdrawal of children. In the McCarthy (2001) study it appeared that where consultation did take place with the class teachers it tended to be more to evaluate pupil progress rather than to plan programmes or to work collaboratively.

As part of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PESP) introduced following the revised primary curriculum (1999), school staffs have been allocated specific days for planning in relation to curriculum implementation. In addition, the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) was established in 1999 to foster a culture of collaborative planning in schools. This is the first time in the history of primary education in Ireland that national provision has been made for primary teachers to work collaboratively in planning for curriculum implementation during school time. Initial reports from the schools which have engaged in collaborative planning are positive in relation to the work undertaken and the progress achieved during the planning days. In some areas a very positive development has been the locally organised clustering of small schools for planning days. Schools, however, have identified the need for more struc-
A recurring theme and a matter of serious concern. No formal structure for ongoing consultation or exchange of information and ideas exists at present. Because of the absence of a formal structure regular liaison and support from other teachers is perceived as being very poor. While the special needs resource teachers consider support within the schools to be generally good, it has also emerged that many of them consider the level of support from class teachers inadequate – not out of an unwillingness to help but rather from a lack of knowledge and understanding of the role of the resource teacher (McCarthy 2001).

The INTO recommends

1. that formal time be allocated as part of the school year to enable teachers to engage in collaborative work and planning;
2. that an orientation/induction session be held with the whole school staff following the appointment of a special needs resource teacher to a school.

Role Ambiguity

The role of the special needs resource teacher is defined in DES Circular 08/02. However, at school level, there appears to be a lack of clarity and a degree of confusion regarding the nature of the role of the special needs resource teachers. According to McCarthy (2001) there is a variation in the numbers of children taught by the resource teachers and some are providing a support to children who have learning difficulties more appropriately addressed by learning support teachers though this was not the case in the findings of the Education Committee (2003). The absence of clear guidelines to assist school staffs and the special needs resource teachers, particularly in the early stages of their appointment, has serious implications for the development of whole-school collaborative practices. Decisions made at the outset will determine the quality of support provision for years to come. IATSE (2000) has stated that “the integration of children with special needs, supported by a Resource Teacher Service, is in its infancy and the structures and methods of support being established at present, will form a scaffold for its future deve-
RECENT INTO REPORTS ON SPECIAL EDUCATION
opment. Equally, where ineYcient practices are established, they will be diYcult to change or replace” (IATSE 2000:2). Hence every eVort should be made in the early stages to assist schools in setting up a workable system of support. Special needs resource teachers should be able to consult, visit and collaborate with others before setting up a system in their own school. They need to be given every opportunity to view a variety of approaches before Wnally deciding which approach would suit their own circumstances best.

The INTO recommends

1. that the Department of Education and Science clarify the role of the special needs resource teacher;
2. that the Department of Education and Science publish guidelines for special needs resource teachers in consultation with the education partners;
3. that newly appointed resource teachers be facilitated in visiting schools where models of support have been established and developed.

Support from other Professionals

Special needs resource teachers who have access to psychologists Wnd such liaison very helpful. However, as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has not yet been fully established, access to psychological support is not universal creating diYculties for resource teachers and for schools who are trying to access support. There is further evidence that there is a shortage of other available professionals such as occupational therapists and speech and language therapists, a situation which further contributes to a feeling of professional isolation among resource teachers. As stated by Bone and Mason,

“There is a real need for support from other members of staff and outside agencies for the person most closely involved with the child. It is very easy to become isolated with a feeling of total responsibility for the child” (Bone and Mason, in Lorenz, 1998:9).

In Ireland, the Department of Health and Children retains the responsibility for organising and ensuring access to services such as physio-

therapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy. There are not sufficient numbers of these therapists made available to schools. Due to the shortage of therapists, resource teachers often find themselves implementing therapy programmes during resource times. The fact that therapists working in schools work under the auspices of a different Department is also problematic. The Department of Education and Science would need to examine the feasibility of employing therapists from various disciplines directly to work in school settings. It is noted, however, that the establishment of the Council for Special Education may seek to address the inadequacies in relation to the availability of therapists to support special needs pupils in schools.

The INTO recommends

1. that the Department of Education and Science consider the direct employment of therapists to provide a support service for schools;
2. that the full cohort of psychologists be appointed to NEPS immediately.

Guidelines and Support

Once a model of support has been put in place special needs resource teachers have a great deal of autonomy in relation to their role. This presents a convincing case for providing whole school induction on the appointment of a special needs resource teacher to a school so that good practice is put in place from the beginning. Professional autonomy is essential for resource teachers though such autonomy needs to be based on “theory guided decision making” (Burke, 1992:102). At present, many resource teachers have indicated that more consultation and guidance, particularly when setting out, would be very much welcomed. It would also appear that there are no formal structures by which a school or cluster of schools come together to review the model of support provision once it has been put in place.

Within the existing system in Ireland, there are many sources of potential advice and guidance which are currently under-utilised – for example the Inspectorate, the Visiting Teacher Service, other special needs resource teachers and learning support teachers. Inspectors, who used to play a crucial role in having the position established, have, with a few exceptions, much less input in advising and guiding the special needs resource teacher later on. The Cromien Report
(Government of Ireland, 2000) has highlighted the importance of the role of the Inspectorate in the context of developments of new provision in the education system. The Report also acknowledged that support and assistance could also be available from alternative sources. The potential of the Visiting Teacher Service to provide support for special needs resource teachers needs to be further explored.

Given that the Visiting Teacher Service was established in the 1970s, there is no doubt that a wealth of expertise has been accumulated by the visiting teachers concerned both in terms of specialist qualifications and in terms of length of experience in special education. The expertise which currently exists within the Visiting Teacher Service is a resource which could be drawn on to provide support to both classroom teachers and special needs resource teachers – particularly newly appointed resource teachers. A mechanism needs to be developed which would enable the expertise within the Visiting Teacher Service to be shared with resource teachers and classroom teachers. However, the Visiting Teacher Service does not provide a service to all pupils with special needs. At school level consideration could be given to ensuring that all children with special needs have access to expert support from the Visiting Teacher Service as required. The development of a team approach between the class teacher, principal teacher, the special needs resource teacher and the visiting teacher is recommended. This team approach involving class teachers, resource teachers and visiting teachers, where appropriate, would be based on establishing a relationship which promotes mutual respect and a three-way exchange of information, ideas and programme suggestions. A team approach may also involve other professionals as required such as speech therapists, social workers, audiologists and psychologists.

**The INTO recommends**

1. that a team approach be fostered between class teachers, special needs resource teachers and visiting teachers where special needs pupils have access to all such support teaching.

**Teacher Support Groups**

Evidence from recent research indicates that the support group network for special needs teachers is underdeveloped. Special needs resource teachers generally do not have access to support groups. In
the small number of cases where they have been set up, individual teachers and, in one case, a psychologist have taken it upon themselves to do so (IATSE, 2000). While these groups are to be lauded and will help serve as a model for local support groups, they are difficult to sustain without proper funding and support. Other resource teachers received support from the INTO mailing list for support teachers and found the support from colleagues via the mailing list invaluable. The use of mailing lists holds great potential for the sharing of professional tips and for reducing the sense of isolation that some of the resource teachers seem to be experiencing. There is a clear need for a structure, which would allow easy access to information and advice from fellow professionals. The use of information technology such as a mailing list is one workable option.

A centrally co-ordinated network of support groups is essential. Both special needs resource teachers and visiting teachers have indicated that there is a great need to meet with their colleagues, to discuss professional issues and to share their common concerns and expertise. The organisation of national conferences, regional seminars and the implementation of a structured programme of in-career development would provide suitable opportunities to meet the various needs of visiting teachers, resource teachers and class teachers in the area of special education.

Increasingly, the Education Centres, professional associations such as the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO), the Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education (IATSE) and the Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA) and some third level colleges are endeavouring to provide professional support. Even though they command a wealth of experience and knowledge between them, without proper funding and support from the Department of Education and Science these initiatives will not be in a position to provide adequate support on an ongoing basis. It appears that special needs resource teachers are not fully aware of the possible supports that may be available to them through the Education Centre network and the professional associations. The lack of information available to resource teachers regarding support services and professional development is inexcusable in the current context of the information age.

The INTO recommends

that funding be made available to organisations such as IATSE and the Education Centres in
order to develop support networks for teachers in special education;
that funding be made available to existing networks of special needs resource teachers to enable them to continue their supportive role at local level.

Development of Links Projects

The INTO has consistently advocated the development of links between special schools and mainstream schools. There is anecdotal evidence (InTouch, November, 1998) indicating that some pilot projects are operating on an informal local level. Given that the development of such links is official policy it is disappointing that mechanisms to support such linkage have not been developed at system level (Coolahan, 1981; Government of Ireland, 1987; 1993; 1995; Ó Murchú, 1996). Structures such as substitute cover to release teachers to visit special and mainstream schools would need to be put in place so that the existing skills and expertise of teachers in special schools/classes can be made available to advise other teachers of children with special needs. Funding also needs to be made available to schools to facilitate the development of Links projects between mainstream schools and special schools. Disability and special needs awareness training among mainstream class teachers should form an integral part of these projects. Eventually, the existing special schools could become Resource Centres for their areas as recommended in SERC (1993). The statement in the Helios II Guide to Good Practice (European Commission, 1996) expresses this idea as follows: “the future special school has the potential to be the centre which co-ordinates special needs education and other community services and provisions for mainstream schools” (p.45).

The INTO recommends

1 that formal structures be established to enable linkages between special and mainstream schools to be developed;
1 that funding be available to enable such linkages to be developed;
1 that the establishment of linkages be supported by professional development opportunities for teachers and staff in both special and mainstream schools.

Induction and Professional Development

One of the key findings which emerged in all recent studies was the
high level of dissatisfaction among special needs resource teachers with the present system of professional development and training in special needs education. The present system of providing professional development and training in special needs education is not meeting the basic requirements of most resource teachers. Resource teachers are of the view that induction courses for all members of staV, led by experienced practitioners, would be of enormous beneWt. Despite its recognised importance, induction in relation to their new role has not yet been made available to all resource teachers. Class teachers and principal teachers have also been ignored in that few, if any, courses are available which would prepare them for the enrolment of pupils with special educational needs and for the support of a special needs resource teacher.

Prior to 2003 the Advanced Diploma in Special Education was only available to teachers who had taught for at least a year in special education. Teachers who wished to obtain the diploma in special education had therefore to spend an academic year in Dublin at their own expense. This was not a feasible option for special needs teachers living outside the greater Dublin area. The introduction of accessible, award-bearing, professional development courses in special education in a number of colleges throughout the country in September 2003 has therefore to be welcomed. These courses, which are outlined in Department of Education and Science Circular 16/03, are organised on a block release basis. Consideration needs to be given to expanding the provision of professional courses leading to accreditation on a modular and on a regional basis in order to ensure the accessibility of such courses. Part-time and distance education courses could also be considered. Issues which need to be addressed, include the development of collaborative work for both class and resource teachers, information on learning disabilities, training and guidance in how to deal with specific conditions, devising appropriate individual education plans and behaviour management.

The INTO recommends

1 that an induction course be available to all special needs resource teachers on appointment;
2 that ongoing professional development courses be available to both class and resource teachers in the area of special education and that such courses be accredited;
3 that the issues of collaborative work, information on learning disabilities, training and guidance in how to deal with specific conditions, preparation of individual education plans and
behaviour management be considered on professional development courses for both class and resource teachers;
that courses should be accessible to all resource teachers regardless of geographic location;
that professional development courses leading to certification be available on a modular and/or distance learning basis in order to facilitate all teachers;
that time for consultation and planning be allocated in a structured and realistic manner;
that professional development opportunities also be available to support personnel in the classroom.

In-Class Support

The provision by the Department of Education and Science of special needs assistants is a resource which is greatly welcomed by teachers. In some cases the potential benefit of having a special needs assistant is not fully realised. Most of the work of the special needs assistants consists of reinforcing the work of the teacher. While reinforcement work is important for children with special needs (Lerner, 1997) there are other ways in which resource teachers and class teachers could utilise the resource the special needs assistants provide. According to Lorenz (1998) “support staff in classrooms have an important role to play not only supporting students but also in supporting teachers” (p. 5). The issue of professional development and training for special needs assistants is crucial if they are to be an effective support. At present lack of such opportunities and the non-existence of a proper career structure lessen the attraction of the role. As a result some schools experience difficulty in recruiting special needs assistants. However, the appointment of special needs assistants also create additional challenges for teachers in relation to managing and working with other adults in the classroom.

The INTO recommends
1. that professional development and training be available to all special needs assistants in relation to their role;
2. that a module on working with special needs assistants be included in professional development and training courses for both class and special needs resource teachers;
3. that special needs assistants be included in team meetings to discuss curriculum programmes and progress of children with special needs as appropriate.
Consultation with Parents

Consultation with parents is an important dimension of the role of both resource and class teachers in relation to pupils with special needs. Pressure of time is often given as a reason for a lack of consultation, though at times the value of consulting with parents may not be fully appreciated. Most resource teachers are reluctant to take time from teaching to fulfill this role. The influence of parents can be highly influential for the good and they are in law and in reality, the co-educators of their children (Government of Ireland, 1998). As stated by Kellaghan and Greaney, “of all the agencies that impact on a child’s educational development, it is clear that the family is crucial, if for no other reason than that it is in a better position than any other agency (including the school) to provide continuous, intense, and long-term support for the child” (1992:22). In addition, there is a unique relationship between the parents of a child with special needs and the child and these parents have a particular knowledge of their own children (Hewett, 1970). It would seem, therefore, in the best interests of all concerned that every eVort is made to arrange a system of close collaboration with parents. In some instances, it may well be the case that the visiting teacher may be better placed to carry out the role of consulting with parents but this arrangement needs to be formalised at local level. Teacher education, at both pre-service and in-service levels, needs to ensure that teachers are prepared for this aspect of their professional responsibilities. According to Macbeth, Corner, Nisbet, Ryan, & Strachan,

“... home-school liaison should become a central feature of teacher training and retraining. This should include techniques by which teachers can assist parents in the process of educational partnership. International exchange of training material would be helpful and there is need for research into the extent that teacher training currently emphasises cooperation with parents” (1984:207).

The INTO recommends

1. that teacher education, both at pre-service and in-service levels, address the issue of parental involvement, particularly in relation to children with special needs.
Delivering a Broad Based Curriculum

One of the challenges in special education is the difficulty of delivering a broad range of curricular experiences while dealing with a broad range of children with various learning difficulties. In this context, the publication of draft curriculum guidelines for pupils with general learning disabilities by the NCCA is welcomed. It is envisaged that following a consultative process these guidelines will be reviewed and amended. Schools need to recognise and capitalise on the diverging skills and talents of individual teachers. Traditionally in Ireland there has been a generic approach to teaching with the group or class teacher being responsible for the delivery of the curriculum to his/her group – with the exception of therapies which involve other professionals. Where specialists have existed they have often been in areas such as physical education or in music. The specific needs of pupils whose home language diverges from the school language also need to be taken into consideration in planning appropriate curricular intervention.

As part of ongoing review and development, the school staff could consider all possible ways in which staff could collaborate in order to enhance the provision of a broad based curriculum to all pupils. However, Gross cautions that what is agreed must be reliable, “it is no good, the head teacher promising to come in and free the teacher to work with a group if half the time s/he will be called away by other more pressing commitments” (1993:67). Many action plans for children with special needs founder because they are based on something that proves impossible to deliver regularly. Children with special needs require consistency and in these cases it may be better to have a more realistic plan that can be relied on rather than a more ambitious one that cannot. Schools also need to be aware of the extent the hidden curriculum may have on pupils with special educational needs and to be sensitive with regard to the use of terminology to describe settings for pupils with special needs and how the opportunities for learning are set up.

Co-ordination of Provision

1. Irish National Teachers' Organization, INTO Members' Handbook.
There is no doubt that there is a lack of co-ordination of overall support provision for children with special needs. Support needs to be co-ordinated at both system level and at individual school level. There is a need for co-ordination between the Visiting Teacher Service and the Resource Teacher Service to be placed on a formal footing with clear guidelines being drawn up as to the roles and responsibilities of the two different support services. Firstly, an overall co-ordinating body is needed to co-ordinate support services on a local or regional basis and ensure that there is neither overlap nor omissions from the services. Such a body could also contribute to the development of support groups for teachers and professional development for teachers. The establishment of the National Council for Special Education is therefore welcomed.

At individual school level or at least among clusters of schools, consideration could be given to appointing a Co-ordinator for Special Needs. The Special Needs Co-ordinator could oversee the development of the whole school policy on special needs with special regard for curricular policy and resource planning. With the creation of additional posts of responsibility, schools now have an opportunity to create and develop such roles. The role could have two main functions – resource management and staff development. The individual co-ordinator at school level could link with personnel appointed under the auspices of the National Council for Special Education, who would be responsible for co-ordination at regional and national levels. The co-ordinator at school level could have responsibility for overseeing the development of curriculum materials including resource packs. While this type of work may be initially time consuming, it could save on teacher preparation time and overcome some of the difficulties associated with finding the right materials for each lesson. The development of resources is expensive and can become a major problem for small schools or schools in disadvantaged areas where funds are low. The sharing of resources and the co-ordination of their use could reduce duplication in individual classrooms and lead to a greater number of pupils benefiting from whatever resources are available.


The INTO recommends

1 that the National Council for Special Education be established and fully resourced immediately;
2 that additional posts of responsibility be created at school level to enable the appointment of special needs co-ordinators within schools/clusters of schools.

Resources

Special needs resource teachers are generally dissatisfied with the resources available to them at school level. Some resource teachers were lucky to have ‘inherited’ resources from a remedial/learning support teacher in the school or had particularly supportive principal teachers or boards of management. The current level of the start up grant is €6,356 and to expect teachers to set up a properly resourced service for children with special needs on such a small amount of money is unrealistic. It is also regrettable that some resource teachers appear to have no access to any funds with which to purchase materials. The issue of capitation funding is an ongoing issue with the Department of Education and Science. It is anomalous that while enhanced capitation funding does apply to children in special classes in mainstream schools it does not apply to children integrated into mainstream classrooms but attending a resource teacher for part of the day. The failure to provide enhanced capitation funding while at the same time promoting a policy favouring integration of children with special needs is a conflict in terms. Despite repeated calls from the education partners the Department of Education and Science has refused to grant enhanced capitation funding to date. Some schools have also indicated that the lack of physical space in the school building can also inhibit the work of the resource teacher for special needs.

The INTO recommends

1 that the grant available on the appointment of a special needs resource teacher to a school/cluster of schools be increased to €5,000;
2 that the annual grant available to resource teachers for the purchase of equipment and materials be increased to €1,000;
3 that the enhanced capitation funding available to special schools and classes also be applied to children with special needs who are fully integrated in mainstream schools.
Information and Communication Technology

It is generally accepted that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can play a very important role in the education of children with special educational needs and indeed is increasingly being used internationally to enhance their learning (Hope, 1986; Underwood, 1994; Cox, 1997; Holland, 1997). ICT has enormous potential for the work of special needs resource teachers both in terms of classroom activity, collegial support through mailing lists and for the purposes of assessment and record keeping. Many resource teachers see the potential in developing their information technology skills but are constrained by a lack of funding and lack of knowledge and advice regarding available useful software packages – particularly in relation to choosing programs and incorporating them into individual schemes. Furthermore, a survey conducted by the National Centre for Technology Education also revealed that “teacher skill is still the biggest reported barrier to further integration of ICT” (NCTE, Summary Report, May 2001:4).

The INTO recommends

1. that training in the use of ICT be available to all special needs resource teachers;
2. that information on the various ICT resources appropriate for children with special needs be made available to all special needs resource teachers;
3. that funding be available to all schools for the purchase of ICT materials and resources.

Intensive Early Intervention

The importance of intensive early intervention in alleviating the effects of learning disabilities is well documented (Stanovich, 1986; Slavin, Karweit and Wasik, 1994; Campbell and Ramey, 1994; Pikulski, 1994; Brock, 1995). The fact that the majority of resource teachers are shared among a number of schools – some with up to nine schools – gives rise to cause for concern about the effectiveness of any intervention which is at best patchy when diluted among so many. The distances travelled by resource teachers also erodes the amount of teacher pupil contact time.

The INTO recommends

1. that the number of schools which comprise a cluster should be re-examined so that resource teachers can provide an effective intensive intervention programme.
Conclusion

A number of important issues have emerged from recent research on special education provision in Ireland which raise serious questions about whether current support structures can deliver an effective service under present conditions. Several factors emerge from the research done to date which act as significant barriers to the delivery of effective support. These include (a) the lack of clear guidelines regarding the role of special needs resource teachers, (b) the absence of a professional support structure, (c) the paucity of professional development opportunities, (d) the dearth of time for consultation and planning, (e) the inadequate allocation and training of support personnel, (f) the absence of overall co-ordination and (g) inadequate general levels of resourcing.

The number of special needs resource teachers being appointed has expanded very rapidly and this is a positive development. However, the present system of appointing resource teachers and placing them into a school or indeed possibly a number of schools, unsupported, is not satisfactory. Professional development, support and training in addition to adequate funding is urgently needed. There is also a need to review how resource teaching hours and special needs assistants are allocated to schools in order to ensure that schools can provide an appropriate support service to pupils with special needs who are enrolled in the school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Pupils</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total 662</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Pupils</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total 41</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is also evident that there is an enormous level of experience and expertise in the system which is not being fully utilised. For example, the Visiting Teacher Service could be given an enhanced role in providing support and guidance to both resource teachers and class teachers where appropriate. Support for the development of networks of resource teachers on both an informal and formal basis is also required. The potential of ICT as a support tool could also be explored further and a co-ordination structure must be put in place. If an eVective education support service for children with special needs is to be provided, investment is essential. Children with special needs, who are integrated in mainstream schools deserve the best support possible, to enable them to achieve their potential. To develop more inclusive practices, according to Knoster, in Lorenz (1991), schools need a vision, skills, incentives, resources and an action plan:

"Without the vision, there will be confusion as no one will be sure where they are heading. Without the requisites skills, staff will be anxious and unable to implement new strategies. Without incentives there will be resistance from individuals or groups blocking progress. Without resources, staff committed to change will experience frustration and may lose heart. Finally without an action-plan those involved will go round and round on a treadmill achieving little" (1991:94).
Views of Special Needs Resource Teachers (2001)

This chapter describes the current attitudes and practices of special needs resource teachers in relation to their current role as found by McCarthy (2001) in her research for her dissertation on the Role of the Resource Teacher for Special Needs. During November 2000, the views of a random sample of 51 (out of a total of 412) special needs resource teachers were sought through the issuing of a questionnaire and through structured interviews with a view to describing various aspects of their role and assessing satisfaction among teachers with the resource teacher as a model of support. A total of thirty-two questionnaires were returned – a response rate of 62%. The following issues regarding current practice were addressed: the needs of the children the resource teachers teach, the number of children they teach, the role of the special needs assistant, the role of the class teacher, the level of collaboration, the amount of individual instruction, the structure of the resource teachers’ day, provision of resources, the child’s access to available resources, the level of qualifications, the professional development needs and the interface between parents and the resource teacher. This report includes an analysis and discussion of the findings of the questionnaire and the interview data.

Sample Characteristics

Of the thirty-two resource teachers who responded to the survey twenty-eight (87.5%) were female while four (12.5%) were male which reflects closely the gender breakdown within the teaching
profession in general. Almost all had over 11 years teaching experience with only one of those surveyed having less than 7 years teaching experience. Of the thirty two resource teachers who responded, twenty-nine reported having had prior experience of teaching pupils with learning disabilities in ordinary classrooms. There was a variety of type of teaching experience within the group also, with nine of the respondents indicating that they had worked as remedial/learning support teachers while two of those had also worked as special class teachers. Four others had taught in special schools. Twenty-two (68.7%) of the respondents had been in the post of special needs resource teacher since it had been allocated to their school. Twenty-five (78.1%) of the respondents worked in a number of schools on a shared basis, with seven (21.8%) of the respondents working in a cluster of five schools. Distances travelled varied greatly but six (18.75%) respondents reported that they travelled more than 100 miles in a week.

Accommodation

Twenty eight (87.5%) respondents claimed that they had a separate room available to them. While this figure would make it appear that accommodation is adequate the qualitative data highlights that many of the special needs resource teachers are seriously unhappy about the inadequacy of their accommodation which include corridors, storerooms and busy staff rooms. In addition, six (18.75%) respondents who work in more than one school indicated that they only had the use of a separate room in some of their schools. The qualitative data also revealed that many of the resource teachers had suggestions about how conditions conducive to implementing a more effective form of support could be achieved. Suggestions included improved funding for learning materials, use of a room which was free from interruption and the provision of adequate computer hardware and software. The need for secretarial assistance was also mentioned by a small number of resource teachers.

Withdrawal Model of Support

None of the respondents indicated that they worked in the regular classroom alongside the class teacher either in a group with other pupils or individually. Withdrawal of pupils for individual or group instruction was the main means of support delivery used by the resource teachers who responded. Twenty-eight (87.5%) indicated that they allocated 1–3 hours individual instruction time per week. The resource teachers indicated a clear preference for withdrawing pupils individually out of their class. Their second preference was to withdraw a group of pupils out of class. Only four (12.5%) resource teachers reported that they would prefer to work in the mainstream classroom with the special needs children. Working with pupils in a group in their classroom was a slightly more popular concept, with six (18.7%) resource teachers expressing a preference to engage in this model of delivery.

**Individual Teaching Versus Group Teaching**

Respondents were more likely to teach children on an individual basis rather than in a group – 177 children were taught on an individual basis and 138 were taught in a group. Access by pupils to the Visiting Teacher Service seems to be of a very limited nature as only sixteen (0.5%) children were reported as having such access.

**Priorities**

The delivery of individualised instruction was considered by twenty three teachers (71.8%) the worst priority of their role as resource teachers. Six (18.7%) respondents stated that collaboration with the class teacher was their top priority. Two teachers (6.25%) considered liaising with parents as their top priority and one teacher was of the view that reinforcing the work of the class teacher was the top priority. No respondent rated group teaching as top priority. It is clear that the majority of respondents perceive their role as being predominantly that of supporting the pupil rather than that of supporting teachers or parents. The type of support expected and favoured by the majority of respondents was that of the withdrawal model for instruction, with individual instruction being more common than small group instruction. It also emerged from the qualitative data that resource teachers have quite strong reservations about the practicality of sharing a special needs resource teacher among a large
number of schools and indicated that there was a need for more resource teachers, each serving a smaller numbers of schools.

**Caseloads**

From an analysis of the questionnaires it is evident that the resource teachers teach children with a wide range of varying disabilities. The vast majority of children taught by the resource teachers have mild general learning disabilities. Children with specific reading disability, children with Down Syndrome and children with language disorder are also frequently taught by special needs resource teachers. Some children were reported as having more than one disability. The numbers of children which the resource teachers teach also varied from one teacher to the next, ranging from seven to fifteen. However, only one resource teacher taught fifteen children. Nine respondents (28.1%) stated that they taught ten children and seven (21.8%) teachers reported that they taught twelve children. It appears, therefore, that the difficulties of large caseloads encountered by remedial teachers (Government of Ireland, 1998; INTO 1993; 1994) and the visiting teachers (INTO 1997; 2000) does not arise for the special needs resource teachers who have managed to keep their caseloads reasonably small. Interestingly, some resource teachers reported that they were teaching some children (16) with remedial needs which would suggest that, in some few cases, resource teachers were not being used for the purpose for which they were intended.

**Guidelines to the Role of Resource Teacher**

Nineteen (59.3%) of the respondents indicated that they had been given guidelines concerning their role. Such guidelines were most likely to have been given by the local inspector or principal teacher. The respondents indicated that they had a considerable degree of autonomy in how they organise their role with thirty one (96.8%) claiming that they had more say than the local inspector and/or the school principal teacher. A number of resource teachers indicated in their qualitative responses that this was not necessarily positive as it
contributed to many of them feeling isolated and feeling that they could operate generally as they saw fit.

**Programme Planning**

The respondents were asked about the nature of the role – how programmes of work were planned, how homework was assigned, and how consultation with parents took place. It is clear from the replies received that special needs resource teachers carry out a broad range of activities, in addition to teaching, in collaboration with the class teachers. In general, resource teachers engaged in programme planning, assigning homework, preparing materials for use with pupils and managing pupils’ behaviour in consultation with the class teacher. Only two teachers responded that they consult with parents in collaboration with the class teachers. For half of the respondents contact with parents only happens once every term and for one quarter of the teachers, contact occurs each school year. This is quite critical for the consistency and uniformity of information that parents are given about the progress of their children.

Regarding other activities, special needs resource teachers adapt books for their pupils (twenty two, 68.7%), supply worksheets (thirty one, 96.8%) and draw up behaviour modification plans (twenty four, 75%). The number of respondents (twenty one, 65.6%) who stated that they were not involved in correcting pupils’ work is one which gives cause for concern. An analysis of the qualitative data reveals that part of the reason given for this on the part of teachers is lack of time.

**Barriers to Collaboration**

Time was the most significant factor which emerged as a barrier to effective collaboration. Most meetings to discuss pupils with class teachers took place during class time and or lunchtime. Twenty-three (71.8%) of the respondents indicated that they met to discuss pupils with class teachers during class time. Twenty-seven (84.3%) indicated that they met to discuss pupils with class teachers during lunch-time. Some of the qualitative comments regarding availability
of time for consultation highlight the very real barriers that exist. Respondents referred to the fact that class teachers were unable to leave their classes during class time and that no set time was available for consultation. A number of resource teachers also mentioned the distance they had to travel or the number of schools they visited as a barrier to meeting class teachers for consultation. On a more positive note, however, it is heartening that no resource teacher reported that they never discussed pupils with class teachers.

**How the Role is Perceived**

The special needs resource teachers surveyed saw their role predominantly as that of supporting the pupils with special needs rather than supporting the teacher or parent. Thirty resource teachers (93.7%) reported that they saw themselves as primarily a resource to the pupils and two (6.25%) reported that they were primarily a support to the class teacher. In relation to shared responsibility between the class teacher and the resource teacher only twelve (37.5%) resource teachers considered that it was a shared responsibility. Nine (28.1%) saw themselves as solely responsible for the education of the pupils with special needs and seven (21.8%) saw it as a shared responsibility between class teachers, resource teacher and principal teachers. In general, the resource teachers considered class teachers to be fairly open to collaboration – ten (31.2%) resource teachers stated that most of their class teachers were open to collaboration and eight (25%) reported that all were. Relationships between class teachers and resource teachers also appear to be good with twelve (37.5%) resource teachers reporting that they had a good relationship with all their class teachers and eight (25%) reporting that they enjoyed a good relationship with most. The level of support received from principal teachers was also very high with thirty-one (96.8%) respondents indicating that they were supportive. However, a significant number of resource teachers revealed that they sometimes felt isolated as a teacher which is a cause for concern. Twenty-two (68.7%) reported that they sometimes felt isolated in their base schools and seventeen (53.1%) indicated that they sometimes felt isolated in their other schools. Attendance at staV meetings is high with thirty respondents (93.7%) indicating that they always attend staV meetings in the base school. However, the fact that twelve (37.5%) respondents indicated that they never attend staV meet-
ings in their other schools is a serious cause for concern. StaV meet-
ings form a crucial part of the whole school planning process and each of the key members of the learning support team would need to be present. Seventeen (53%) respondents revealed that they did lunchtime supervision in their base school with W fteen (46.8%) revealing that they did not. Only one of the resource teachers reported being often asked to cover for absent colleagues. Nineteen resource teachers reported that they never have to cover for absent colleagues. This W nding indicates that schools recognise the impor-
tance of the role of the resource teacher in supporting children with special needs. Being requested to cover for absent colleagues was a concern for remedial/learning support teachers according to the INTO survey of 1994. It appears that this practice is no longer preva-
ent. Thirty (93.7%) of the respondents indicated that they had lunch with the other teachers while in their base school, only sixteen (5.0%) respondents reported having lunch with colleagues while in the other schools.

**Evaluation of Pupil Progress**

Evaluation of pupil progress appears to involve more collaboration than did programme planning. All (100%) the resource teachers reported that they evaluated pupils’ progress in collaboration with class teachers. Twenty-six (81.2%) of the respondents evaluated pupils’ progress with parents. Seventeen respondents (53.1%) evaluated pupils’ progress with the psycholo-
gist and ten respondents (31.2%) with the principals. It is unclear, however, from this data how frequent such evaluation took place. Almost all of the resource teachers used a variety of means of moni-
toring progress – twenty-eight (87.5%) used commercial tests, eight-
een (56.2%) used checklists of objectives and twenty (62.5%) used samples of pupils’ work to evaluate progress.

**Collaboration with Other Personnel**

Special needs resource teachers engaged in collaboration with a vari-
ety of personnel other than class teachers. Eight (2.5%) respondents

reported that they collaborated with the Visiting Teacher Service, fourteen (43.7%) respondents stated that they collaborated most often with speech therapists and thirteen (40.6%) reported that they collaborated with the psychologist. The lack of reported consultation/collaboration with the school inspector is noteworthy and a cause for concern. Thirty (93.75%) respondents indicated that the educational psychologist was the most supportive. However, it appears from the qualitative data that the lack of access to an adequate psychological service is proving very frustrating for the resource teachers.

Twenty-nine (90.6%) respondents indicated that they had access to help from a special needs assistant. The duties of the special needs assistant centred mainly on reinforcing both the work of the class teachers (twenty-six respondents) and the resource teacher (twenty-one respondents). Seventeen (53.1%) resource teachers reported that the special needs assistants were involved in behaviour modification. Responsibility for the special needs assistant was perceived by the special needs resource teachers as lying, in the main, with the class teacher. Only one resource teacher considered the principal teacher responsible for the special needs assistant.

Professional Development and Qualifications

The findings of the survey in relation to professional development indicate a serious lack of provision for special needs resource teachers. Nineteen (59.3%) respondents stated that they had no pre-service training in remedial education/learning support. However, twenty-four (75%) respondents reported that they had done an in-service or postgraduate course in special education. Such courses varied from one-day summer courses to one year certified courses. Twenty-six (81.25%) respondents indicated that they felt they had the necessary skills to support their pupils. Twenty-two (68.75%) respondents stated that they had the necessary skills to support the teachers with an almost equal number stating that they had the necessary skills to support parents. The resource teachers indicated that they would welcome professional development and training in the following areas: information on materials (twenty-seven respondents (84.3%)); information on learning disabilities (twenty-four (75%) respondents); support with Individualised Education Plans (twenty-three (71.8%) respondents); curriculum ideas (twenty
respondents (62.5%); interpersonal skills (twenty respondents (62.5%)); behaviour management (twenty respondents (62.5%)). A small number (15.6%) used technology such as an INTO mailing list to communicate with other resource teachers. Of those who used this form of support seven (21.87%) reported that it was helpful. There is probably scope for further development of technology as a means of providing support for the special needs resource teachers.

Resource Provision

In general the special needs resource teachers were dissatisfied with the level of resources available to them. A total of twenty six (81.25%) respondents indicated that the funding they received was less than adequate. Interestingly, two respondents (6.2%) indicated that they received no funding at all. It is evident from the qualitative data that many of the resource teachers are of the view that there are very useful learning aids, particularly in the area of computer software, available on the market, but that funding was not available to purchase them. Many agreed that information technology was under used and its potential under recognised.

Conclusion

It has emerged in this survey that the perceived role of the special needs resource teacher is to provide support for pupils with special needs who are fully integrated in mainstream primary schools. The most popular model for providing such support is the withdrawal of individual children, or groups of children from their classrooms for intensive support by the special needs resource teacher. This model was also the stated preference of the majority of resource teachers surveyed. There was no evidence of resource teachers working with pupils in their mainstream classrooms and few resource teachers seemed to favour it. However, there was some evidence that both class teachers and resource teachers shared responsibility for the planning of pupils’ programmes and for the evaluation of pupils’ progress. Consultation and collaboration with parents was less evident and would require further research. Although there was an expressed commitment among the resource teachers to a collaborative way of working in school, very little time, if any was formally set aside for it. When requested to indicate areas that could be improved
in relation to providing a support service to pupils with special needs, the resource teachers identified funding, training and professional development and access to other professionals such as educational psychologists as key areas of concern for them.
Special needs resource teachers provide a support service for children who have been assessed as having special needs to such an extent that they experience significant learning difficulties and who would have been previously referred to special schools or classes, if such existed locally. The special needs resource teacher is appointed to a base school and provides educational services at the base school and in other schools in the cluster where pupils attend. In addition to teaching these pupils directly when s/he visits them, the special needs resource teacher provides advice to their class teacher and liaises with parents/guardians and with the relevant health personnel.

Special needs resource teachers were first appointed to clusters of schools around the country by the Department of Education and Science during 1993/94 in response to the trend towards integrating pupils with special needs in mainstream schools. Integration was supported by the publication of the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) in 1993. This report recommended that as a first option in ordinary schools, teaching support for pupils with general learning disabilities would be given by a resource teacher in a designated school or a cluster of neighbouring schools (p.171). Integration and the provision of ‘peripatetic resource teachers who should be available to all schools where children with disabilities are enrolled’ was recommended by the INTO in its policy document Accommodating Diversity also published in 1993 (p.14).

By January 1997, a total of 46 special needs resource teachers had been appointed to cater for special needs pupils. During 1997, the INTO established a committee comprising representatives of the
CEC, the Resource Teacher Service and Ms Maureen Costello, a
primary school principal teacher who was researching the Service as
part of her MA thesis. The aim of the committee was to review the
service currently being provided in schools, to identify issues which
needed to be addressed and to make recommendations in relation to
improving the existing service and its future development. Views of
all the special needs resource teachers providing support, in early
1997, were sought through the issuing of a questionnaire which was
devised and analysed, as part of her thesis research, by Ms Maureen
Costello, in consultation with the INTO. A total of 41 of the then 46
special needs resource teachers responded to this questionnaire and
these views, in addition to the work of the committee, are included in
this report.

By the end of 1997, the number of special needs resource teach-
ers had been increased by the Department of Education and Science
to 78.

**Special Needs Resource Teacher Profile**

**Qualifications**

All probated primary teachers are eligible for appointment as special
needs resource teachers. Over half of the special needs resource
teachers surveyed have, however, undertaken additional inservice in
special or remedial education.

Their inservice ranges from the one-year fulltime Diploma in Special
Education for which special needs resource teachers are eligible to
apply, to short courses such as the INTO inservice 5-day course on
Learning Difficulties in Literacy or Maths provided during school
summer holidays. Five teachers completed the Special Education
Diploma course in St Patrick’s College of Education, Drumcondra.
Four teachers completed a one-year Remedial Education Diploma,
three in St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra and the fourth in University
College Galway. One teacher completed a Higher Diploma in Remedial
and Special Education in University College Dublin. Three teachers
completed a Higher Diploma in Compensatory and Remedial
Education. One teacher obtained a Higher Diploma in Psychology in
University College Dublin. Two teachers qualified with a Masters
Degree in Education.

According to the research carried out by Ms Maureen Costello, the
proportion of special needs resource teachers who have had the
opportunity to avail of training in special or remedial training is favourable when compared with the number of class teachers they support who have similar training. In comparison, one-sixth of the 71 class teachers involved in Ms Costello’s survey, had received in-service training in special or remedial education. Inservice training, availed of by class teachers, consists mainly of short, part-time courses, although one class teacher has had the opportunity to complete a one-year part-time Diploma in Remedial Education and another chose special education as a module in a Masters in Education course.

EXPERIENCE

Special needs resource teachers have considerable experience of teaching in special educational environments. One-third of special needs resource teachers had previously worked as remedial teachers, a quarter had taught in special schools and almost 40% had taught special classes. As the vast majority of the class teachers they support do not have teaching experience in special education, the special needs resource teachers’ experience enhances the service they provide.

GENDER

Ninety percent of special needs resource teachers are female. This is over 10% higher than the overall representation of females in the teaching profession, currently estimated to be 78%. Ten percent of special needs resource teachers are male, in comparison with 22% in the profession generally.

AGE

The majority of special needs resource teachers are within the age range of 26 to 50 years, which is similar to the age range of primary teachers, in general. Twenty-two percent of special needs resource teachers are aged between 26 to 30 years; 10% are in the 31 to 35 years age category; 24% are aged between 36 to 40 years; 22% are aged 41 to 45 years; 20% are in the 46 to 50 years category; 5% are aged between 51 to 55 years; 2% are aged over 56 years.

Profile of Schools

Special needs resource teacher posts are evenly distributed between
urban and rural areas. Current figures from the Department of Education and Science show that, at the end of 1997, they serve a total of 258 schools in 18 counties. One hundred and thirty nine schools were represented in the Costello survey which was based on posts which had been allocated up to the beginning of 1997. Over one-third of resource settings surveyed involved single schools and almost two-thirds involved a cluster of schools, ranging in number for 2 to 8 schools per cluster. Discounting the single-school settings, the average cluster contained 5 schools. Table 3, on p.79, illustrates the number of schools served by the 41 special needs resource teachers surveyed.

1. Ireland (1972) The Education of Children who are Handicapped by Impaired Hearing, Dublin, Government Publications
Table 3: **Number of schools served by individual special needs resource teachers** (INTO Survey 1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools Served</th>
<th>No of Teachers</th>
<th>% of Total Special Needs Resource Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TRAVEL TIME**

Many special needs resource teachers are concerned about the amount of travel necessary between schools. The average weekly distance travelled by special needs resource teachers serving a cluster of schools is 34 miles, with a range between 5 and 150 miles. A number of special needs resource teachers and class teachers have expressed concern that time spent travelling is a factor which reduces the effectiveness of the special needs resource teacher’s role in supporting the schools they serve.

**SERVICE TO SCHOOLS IN ISOLATED AREAS**

As the Special Needs Resource Teacher Service develops, more schools will avail of this service. However, as the Special Education Review Committee Report (SERC 1993) acknowledged – “there will always be schools which it would be impracticable to support by means of shared support teachers, because of the low numbers of pupils with special educational needs on rolls and of their distance from urban centres and other schools” (p.180). The INTO believes that service to schools in isolated rural areas needs to be addressed, in order to ensure that pupils with special needs, living in such areas, can be provided with support locally in order to aid their integration into their local mainstream school community. Consideration may have to be given to the allocation of additional funding to these schools to allow them to organise locally the provision of additional

---

2. Department of Education, Circular 14/91
teaching support for pupils with special needs.

**Caseloads**

A total of 662 pupils with special needs are supported by special needs resource teachers in the 41 settings described in this report. A setting represents the schools(s) served by 1 special needs resource teacher. The number of pupils served ranges from 4 pupils to 40 per special needs resource teacher. The average number of pupils served is 15.

Table 4  **Number of pupils served by individual special needs resource teachers**  
(INTO Survey 1997)

Given the maximum class size for pupils with mild learning disabilities, the caseload of the special needs resource teacher should be no more than 11, and should be less in cases where the special needs resource teachers are catering for more severe needs, or where they are serving a number of schools. It is totally unacceptable that 80% of special needs resource teachers had a caseload of more than 11 pupils and that almost half of the special needs resource teachers had 15 pupils or more.

As part of the Costello survey, 155 class teachers were asked to select from three choices which factors would assist them best in teaching a child with learning disabilities in an ordinary class. The worst choice of nearly 50% of the class teachers was that the maximum class size should be reduced by 5 pupils for every pupil with disabilities enrolled. Their second choice was the support of a special needs resource teacher catering for approximately 12 pupils. The third preference was for the support of a trained classroom assistant for part of every day. This is a clear indication that class teachers do not consider access to a special needs resource teacher alone as sufficient to support pupils with special needs. Class teachers would consider it as important that class size be reduced by giving an agreed weighting equivalent to 5 children, to all pupils with special needs who are integrated into mainstream classes. This would allow the class teacher more time to teach pupils with special needs who spend by far the greater amount of their time with the class teacher.

A further analysis of the caseloads reveals that:

1. In the case of the special needs resource teacher who had a caseload of 40, all were identified as having remedial needs, 2 had a
mild intellectual disability, 3 had a hearing impairment, 4 had a language disorder, and 1 had a physical disability. In the case of the special needs resource teacher who had a caseload of 28, 9 were identified as having a remedial need. The other 19 had a variety of disabilities. It is surprising that a significant number of children are deemed as having remedial needs. When the special needs resource teachers were initially being appointed, it was not envisaged that they would cater for children with remedial needs. The reason for the inclusion of so many pupils with remedial needs may well originate from the time of the publication of the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC 1993) which stated that the resource teacher may support some pupils in need of remedial help only (p.172). However, the Department of Education and Science briefing guidelines for special needs resource teachers, which are more recent than the SERC report, specify that “The pupil is not to be confused with those pupils for whom remedial teaching is normally provided... It is not intended that the resource teacher will teach pupils who need, or avail of, remedial education”

In another case, all but 4 of the 21 children who were receiving the support of a special needs resource teacher had a behavioural disorder. This situation would obviously create difficulties for any special needs resource teacher, as originally, it was not envisaged, as part of their role, that behavioural difficulties would be the primary special need to be supported.

In the case of the special needs resource teacher who had 32 children in her caseload, 8 had a language disorder, 7 needed remedial assistance, and 5 were identified as having a specific reading disability. The 8 pupils with a language disorder would warrant a separate teacher alone.

Types of Disability

A wide range of disabilities is included in the caseloads of special needs resource teachers. This range includes children with Down Syndrome, Noonan’s Syndrome which has similar characteristics to Down Syndrome; dyslexia; hearing impairment; visual impairment; specific...

3. Department of Education, Circular 14/91
reading difficulties; language difficulties; behaviour problems; physical handicap; autism; epilepsy; pupils with rare disabilities such as microcephalus, neurofibromatosis, osteogenesis imperfecta.

Children who have a mild learning disability (223 pupils) and those described as having remedial needs (188) represent the two largest groups supported by special needs resource teachers. At the other end of the scale, there are seven children whose disability is not known. The range of disabilities is illustrated in Table 5. Although, as stated above, the actual number of pupils supported by special needs resource teachers is 662, Table 3 presents the number of pupils with disability at 877 to take account of pupils who have more than one disability.

Table 5: **Range of disabilities of pupils supported by special needs resource teachers**
(INTO Survey 1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>No of Pupils with Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexia</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild Learning Disability</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Learning Disability</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Handicap</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Difficulties</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Unspecified</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>877</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The INTO recommends**

1. that the caseload of the special needs resource teacher and the number of schools served reflect the pupil/teacher ratio for special schools and classes to improve the effectiveness of the Resource Teacher Service to pupils with special needs;
2. that class size is adjusted by the weighting of children with special needs who are integrated in mainstream classes.
Assessment and Referral Procedures

Problems are being experienced, at school level, due to the lack of a comprehensive, nation-wide psychological service, which includes standardised assessment and referral procedures for children with special needs, as part of their integration into mainstream primary education.

In much of the country, psychological assessment services are under the auspices of the Department of Health and the level of service in each area is determined by the resources and personnel available to each Health Board. This had led to a wide variation in assessment and referral procedures between Health Board areas. An additional problem is being created by a number of Health Boards withdrawing psychological services to schools in their region, leaving these schools with no service at all.

In the areas where the Schools’ Psychological Service is provided by the Department of Education and Science, schools have been issued with procedures to follow in referring children to the Psychological Service. These procedures were first issued to schools in 1990 and are currently being updated. The procedures provide a structure recommended by the INTO which “enable the direct referral of pupils with special needs to the school psychological service by the principal in consultation with the class teacher.” (p. 30) However, because the Schools’ Psychological Service is restricted to certain areas, and is over-stretched, it does not provide a comprehensive service throughout the country.

Based on the experience of the special needs resource teachers surveyed for this report, the reality of how and when a child with special needs is assessed and referred reflects the inadequacies in the current services. According to the special needs resource teachers, the majority of pupils had been referred to them by a number of different professionals, including the school principal, class teacher, psychologist and school inspector.

- The majority, or 40% of pupils are referred by the school principal/teacher. The original source of these referrals is not clear nor is it clear how many of them are based on psychological assessments;
- Thirty-five percent are referred by a psychologist;
- Seventeen percent are referred by the class teacher;
- The school inspector is responsible for 15% of referrals;
- Others who occasionally refer pupils include the remedial teacher.
visiting teacher for Travellers and a speech and language therapist.

Sixty-seven percent of pupils supported by the special needs resource teachers have been psychologically assessed. According to the Department of Education and Science, children should be referred to the special needs resource teacher when psychologically assessed. However, as outlined above, it is so difficult to have children assessed that they are often referred, in practice, pending assessment.

**Support Services**

Special needs resource teachers’ access to other support services varies from being very limited to minimal. Only half of special needs resource teachers receive support from an educational psychologist or the school inspector. Even then, special needs resource teachers have indicated that they have only occasional access to a psychologist, rather than ongoing support. Only 40% have access to the support of a speech and language therapist. Less than 10% benefit from the services of an occupational therapist. Some children have access to the Department of Education and Science Visiting Teacher Service. In one area, a visiting teacher employed by the Down Syndrome Association provides support.

In comparison with other services listed above, the majority of special needs resource teachers consider that the support of an educational psychologist is the most important support to them in their work. A total of 57% of the teachers rate it first in importance and 23% rate it second. The main services prioritised by special needs resource teachers as a necessary support to their work are included in Table 6 below.

Services, not listed in this Table, which special needs resource teachers also identified as a necessary support include other special needs resource teachers, school principal, class teacher and other staff, trained classroom assistants, behavioural counsellors, social workers, psychiatrists, and the Area Medical Officer (community care).

Table 6: Percentage of special needs resource teachers with access to support from other professionals (INTO Survey 1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% with support</th>
<th>% rating support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

-101-
at present | first of six preferences | second of six preferences
---|---|---
Speech & Language Therapist | 39 | 12 | 30
Occupational Therapist | 7 | 2 | 10
Educational Psychologist | 52 | 57 | 23
School Inspector | 52 | 14 | 14
Specialist Teacher | 9 | 10 | 10

The INTO recommends

1. that the school-based Psychological Service immediately be expanded to provide a nationwide service;
2. that additional support services such as speech and language therapists and occupational therapists be available to schools, as required;
3. that children with visual and hearing impairments continue to have access to the appropriate Visiting Teacher Service, and that this access form part of a team approach which would include their support by the special needs resource teacher, where required;
4. that qualified classroom assistants be provided as an additional support to schools where pupils with special needs are integrated.

**Planning, Preparation and Collaboration**

Special needs resource teachers and class teachers consider the planning of a programme for pupils with learning difficulties as their joint responsibility, although the amount of consultation and planning can vary depending on an individual child’s needs, the needs of the class teacher and the time available.

Special needs resource teachers collaborate with class teachers on various aspects of the pupils’ education including programmes of work for the pupils; preparation of materials for use with the pupils; managing pupils’ behaviour in class; homework; consultation with parents.

Few special needs resource teachers and class teachers were in a position to allocate formal time for consultation. Consultation usually takes place informally during class time, lunch time, before and after school. Half of special needs resource teachers (51%) report having ten minutes per week to consult with class teachers. A quarter (25%) of special needs resource teachers are satisfied with this, but 39% would like to have half an hour per week to consult with class teachers and 23% would opt for half an hour per fortnight.

The little time available for collaboration and consultation is a
barrier to effective planning as long-term planning and collaborative problem-solving cannot be developed during a ten-minute consultation.

STAFF MEETING

Special needs resource teachers are often socially and professionally isolated in the schools they serve, with the exception of their base schools, where almost 90% of them always attend staff meetings. Only a third of special needs resource teachers attend staff meetings in schools other than their base schools. This does not help their integration with the mainstream teaching staff in those schools and also limits special needs resource teachers’ opportunities to discuss and share ideas and views with school staff which can lead to openness and collaborative problem-solving.

INDIVIDUALISED EDUCATION PROGRAMME (IEP)

While over half of special needs resource teachers devise an IEP, a large proportion of special needs resource teachers are not clear as to what an IEP involves. Other teachers, professionals or parents are not usually involved in drafting the IEP. This happens mainly because of special needs resource teachers’ limited time for consultation with class teachers and limited access to other support staff such as an educational psychologist, speech therapist, occupational therapist, school inspector or specialist teacher.

PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

The special needs resource teacher also provides support to the teacher and pupil in class through the following means:
1. by adapting books and texts for pupils’ use in class;
2. supplying worksheets and workcards;
3. supplying concrete materials;
4. correcting pupils’ work completed in class.

The INTO recommends
1. that all schools be facilitated in allocating time for planning and consultation between special needs resource teachers and class teachers;
2. that special needs resource teachers be facilitated to attend a staff meeting at least once a year in each of the schools they serve to afford them the opportunity to contribute to, and benefit from the development of whole-school policies on the integration of pupils with special needs in their school;
that guidelines be available for schools on devising a policy on the education of pupils with special needs, and defining the whole-school implications of this policy;

that, in planning for the needs of individual children, that special needs resource teachers have access to other support services as required.

**Funding**

Special needs resource teachers have identified funding as an issue which needs to be addressed in relation to the provision and development of materials and supports. Currently, the Department of Education and Science provides an initial grant of €635 in the first year that a special needs resource teacher post is established. A grant of €317 per special needs resource teacher per annum is provided after year one. This grant is considered completely inadequate by special needs resource teachers to cover the provision of specialist teaching material.

The INTO is concerned that, at present, capitation grants to boards of management are allocated at different rates depending on the support teacher model in operation. Boards of management of mainstream schools where pupils with special needs are served by a special needs resource teacher, are allocated the same capitation grant for all of the pupils of the school, regardless of disability. In comparison, the boards of management of schools with special classes are allocated the rate payable for the pupils of the particular category in special schools. This is an anomaly which needs to be addressed by the Department of Education and Science.

**The INTO recommends;**

1. that the current annual funding of £317 per special needs resource teacher be increased immediately to a minimum of £317 per school supported by each special needs resource teacher;

2. that all children with special needs, whether in a mainstream or special class, attract the enhanced capitation grant payable to special schools and classes.

**The Role of the Special Needs Resource Teacher**

Special needs resource teachers have not been given a standard set of guidelines which sets out their role clearly and comprehensively.

5. Ireland (1972) The Education of Children who are Handicapped by Impaired Hearing, Dublin, Government Publications
There are general guidelines available from the Department of Education and Science in the form of a briefing sheet which was first drafted in 1993 and is currently being updated and developed.

Only half of special needs resource teachers have received these guidelines. Half of that group would like more specific guidelines from the Department as the existing guidelines are perceived as being vague and too basic and are limited to outlining the criteria for the allocation of resource posts. The guidelines would need to address specific issues such as pupil assessment, referral, planning and conditions of employment.

The Department would also need to ensure that a level of support, similar to that provided for children with special needs at primary level, is continued when these pupils transfer to post-primary level.

A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

Special needs resource teachers also highlighted the need for guidelines for their schools as to their role. A number of special needs resource teachers stated that they felt that their role was misunderstood by schools. Ideally, as one special needs resource teacher stated "when schools are being provided a special needs resource teacher, all the staff in the school should be educated as to what is involved." Because special needs resource teachers are less likely to attend staff meetings or have their lunch with teachers in schools other than their base schools, the need for such guidance is essential.

A number of class teachers also believed that there was a need for the staff of schools to be given a definition of the role of the special needs resource teacher.

GROUP/INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

Special needs resource teachers spend most of their working hours teaching pupils, mainly on a withdrawal basis, and the average number of hours per week spent working with pupils varies from half an hour to 10 hours, per pupil per week, individually or in groups. The average caseload is 15 and the average number of hours per week spent teaching pupils on a withdrawal basis is 2.6 hours per pupil per week. Special needs resource teachers are concerned about the impact of the size of their caseloads on the amount of time available for teaching, as they believe that many pupils need 5 hours or more of individual or small group instruction time with the special needs resource teacher each week, which they cannot provide, in the context of their current caseloads.

The basis on which pupils are taught by special needs resource teachers can be illustrated as follows:

1. 62% of pupils are taught by special needs resource teachers in a group;
2. 44% are taught on an individual basis;
3. A small percentage of pupils are taught both individually and in a group, depending on the needs of the each child.

WITHDRAWAL/CLASS SUPPORT

As stated above, withdrawal of pupils for individual or group instruction is the main means of support delivery used by all special needs
resource teachers. Only 7% of resource teachers work with pupils on an individual basis in the pupil’s main classroom. Working with pupils in a group in their classroom is slightly more common, 16% of special needs resource teachers use this model of delivery on occasion, taking into consideration such factors as the class teachers’ needs, timetable, and class size. The flexibility to choose this model, when appropriate, can happen if the class size is adjusted, as recommended, by the weighting of children with special needs who are integrated in mainstream classes.

PREFERENCES FOR WITHDRAWAL MODEL OF SUPPORT

When asked to prioritise aspects of their role, 83% of special needs resource teachers gave delivery of individualised instruction top priority out of five options which included collaborating with and supporting class teachers, preparing learning materials for pupils to use in class, and liaising with parents. According to Costello (1997), it appears that class teachers and parents also support individualised instruction as their top priority, with 86% of class teachers and 80% of parents rating it first or second priority over other options including consultation and collaboration.

Special needs resource teachers prefer the withdrawal model of delivery as it gives the flexibility to provide individualised instruction. A total of 90% of special needs resource teachers prefer to withdraw pupils either individually (52%), or in a group with other pupils with disabilities (38%). Almost all (97%) of class teachers prefer to have pupils withdrawn from class either for individual instruction (75%) or in a group (22%).

Given the large size of mainstream classes in Irish primary schools, this preference may also be justified by the need expressed by the special needs resource teachers for a place free from distraction in which to reinforce what the child has not grasped in class. However, in this context, special needs resource teachers’ experience of alternative accommodation to the main classroom is less than ideal as they can frequently be located in such places as a noisy corridor or cloakroom.

Both special needs resource teachers and class teachers see the special needs resource teachers’ role predominantly as that of supporting the pupil, more than the teacher or parent. The type of
support expected and favoured by the majority of special needs resource and class teachers is that of the withdrawal model for instruction.

**Conditions of Employment**

Special needs resource teachers work for 183 days per year, similarly to their other colleagues in primary schools. Their working day can be longer than a class teachers’ day if their work involves travel between a cluster of schools. Special needs resource teachers receive travel expenses at public service rates. They are appointed as assistant teachers to schools in accordance with the normal appointment procedures. However, in order to be deployed as a special needs resource teacher, one must be fully-probated. Where such posts are shared between schools, the post is allocated to a base school, which is currently determined by the Department of Education and Science.

**ACCOMMODATION**

Although 75% of special needs resource teachers have the use of a room in all the schools they visit, the teachers emphasise that, in many cases, the accommodation is inadequate for their needs. In some cases, the provision of a room of their own is limited to their base school. In other cases, the room they use is not their own and is allocated to them at that particular time because it is unoccupied, for example a computer room or a remedial room. Sometimes, they teach children that they would prefer to withdraw, in the mainstream classroom because of lack of space in the school. Their classes are also accommodated in a variety of other locations which include corridors, a corner of the assembly room, the school library, cloakrooms, cramped and dark store rooms, busy staV rooms, and a sacristy. Special needs resource teachers consider that having their own classroom is essential, and those who do not have one state that it would be an enormous benefit in terms of organising their work and class management. In their experience, the non-classroom environments
are inappropriate as they are often noisy, cramped, and distracting to their pupils.

SUBSTITUTION

Nearly a third of special needs resource teachers have to act as substitutes sometimes in their base schools. One-twelfth of them have to do occasional substitute teaching in the other schools they serve to cover for teacher absences, course days etc. This practice is a resection on how the role of the special needs resource teacher can be under-valued, though it also highlights the difficulties schools have in finding substitute teachers. It is the view of the INTO that special needs resource teachers should not have to act as substitutes.

YARD DUTY

Nearly 40% of the special needs resource teachers surveyed do yard duty in their base school, the majority of whom are in single schools. Given the high level of travel expected from special needs resource teachers who support a cluster, it appears that most school policies take account of this by not allocating special needs resource teachers to do yard duty.

The INTO Recommends

1. that the Department of Education and Science develop, in consultation with the INTO, a comprehensive set of guidelines for special needs resource teachers in relation to their role which would address specific issues such as pupil assessment, referral, report writing, planning and conditions of employment;
2. that the Department of Education and Science provide these guidelines to all special needs resource teachers on appointment and to current special needs resource teachers, as well as to principals/teachers of the schools they serve;
3. that the Department Inspectorate provide support to ensure the implementation of these guidelines;
4. that such guidelines be adapted to the needs of each particular school in consultation with the staff of those schools;
5. that the Department ensure that a level of support, similar to that provided for children with special needs at primary level, is continued when these pupils transfer to post-primary level;
6. that every special needs resource teacher be provided with a suitable room to ensure an appropriate learning environment for their pupils.

Inservice Training Needs
It was stated earlier in this report that over half of special needs resource teachers have already availed of inservice education. However, only 5 of the 41 special needs resource teachers surveyed have, to date, completed a Special Education course, although all special needs resource teachers are eligible to apply to do the Diploma in Special Education in St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra. Three special needs resource teachers would like to have done a diploma in remedial education, but experienced difficulty in getting accepted on remedial education courses, even though they consider this qualification relevant to their work. Their course applications were refused on the basis that they were special needs resource teachers and priority had been given to remedial teachers. Nonetheless, although providing remedial support is not supposed to be an integral part of their job, in reality, special needs resource teachers teach a significant number of children with remedial needs, as shown in this report.

Special needs resource teachers have also identified a number of other areas in which they need further inservice training. These areas include curriculum ideas; collaborative skills; interpersonal skills; behaviour management; IEP development; information on physical and learning disabilities; information on materials. They identified as their first priority further training in the development of IEPs, both for themselves and the class teacher. The second priority area identified is information about materials for use with their pupils.

Table 7: Special needs resource teacher preferences for Inservice training (INTO Survey 1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>1st Preference</th>
<th>2nd Preference</th>
<th>1st &amp; 2nd Preferences Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IEP development</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on materials</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on physical and learning disabilities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular ideas</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour management skills</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INSERVICE RE ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF INSTRUCTION

Alternative models of instruction need to be considered further in relation to the full integration of children with special needs into mainstream schools. This report indicates that 90% of special needs resource teachers favour the withdrawal model of instruction as it gives the flexibility to provide individualised instruction. As the remedial teacher has been the only support teacher model with which the majority of Irish class teachers would be familiar, it is possible that the special needs resource teachers are adopting the withdrawal model by default rather than making a deliberate choice from a number of considered alternatives. Irish teachers have not had the opportunity to benefit from the responsive inservice or specialist teacher in-school support which has increased both class and support teacher preference for consultative support over the individual instruction model of support in other countries. One special needs resource teacher identified the potential for a negative impact on integration in the operation of the withdrawal system when she commented – “The role has great potential to initiate change but is in danger of becoming isolated and confined to the resource room. Then the special needs resource teacher and the children with special needs merely become segregated within mainstream education.”

INSERVICE FOR CLASSTEACHERS

While class teachers generally considered that the responsibility for the education of the pupil with special needs in their class was a shared one, they identified the need for inservice training to prepare them for the effective teaching of pupils with special needs in mainstream classes.

The INTO recommends

1. that all special needs resource teachers, on appointment, be offered an orientation course of one week’s duration in order to familiarise themselves with their role;
2. that all special needs resource teachers have the opportunity to do the Special Education diploma;
3. that the Special Education diploma be organised on a distance learning basis to facilitate the participation of special needs resource teachers and special class/school teachers who reside outside the greater Dublin area;
4. that specialist modules on aspects of special education be devised as a follow-up for those
who have undertaken the diploma and that such modules be available to special needs resource teachers;
1. that special education become a core module in all pre-service education for teachers;
2. that special needs resource teachers be facilitated in attending additional inservice courses as required;
3. that principals and class teachers integrating pupils with special needs be given preparatory and supportive inservice.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report provides a review of the service being currently provided by special needs resource teachers. The report confirms that special needs resource teachers are providing a service for pupils with special educational needs which, generally, satisfies the main criteria of both the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (1993) and the Department of Education and Science’s briefing guidelines (1993).

1. Special needs resource teachers are providing support in mainstream primary schools to pupils with special educational needs;
2. Support is provided in the form of direct teaching of individual pupils or small groups for regular and sustained periods;
3. Special needs resource teachers are also providing advice and support to class teachers.

This report identified problems which need to be addressed in a number of areas in relation to improving the overall service being provided to children with special needs by special needs resource teachers, their support to class teachers and the support which special needs resource teachers themselves need in order to carry out their role more effectively.

The report findings indicate that the main problems which need to be addressed, as a priority, include the following:
1. The caseloads of special needs resource teachers need to be significantly reduced as, currently, 80% of special needs resource teachers have a caseload which exceeds the maximum class size for pupils with mild general learning disabilities of 11:1. Caseloads of special needs resource teachers should reflect the severity of disabilities concerned and the number of schools being catered for. The indications suggest that, in the short-term, the number of special needs resource teachers needs to be increased to cater
adequately for the existing number of schools which avail of the service. Reduced caseloads would have a positive impact on a number of problems identified by special needs resource teachers and which include the amount of time available for individualised instruction, time for consultation and collaboration with class teachers, distance between schools and travelling time.

A weighting system needs to be introduced for all pupils with special needs who are integrated into mainstream schools and classes. A weighting system would allow for a reduction in maximum class size in cases where there are pupils with special needs enrolled. Additional funding could also be made available, based on a weighting system. For example, if a pupil with special needs is weighted as an equivalent of 5, the maximum class size would be reduced by 5 in that particular pupil’s class, and the school should receive the equivalent of 5 times the capitation grant. As indicated in this report, the Costello (1997) survey found that class teachers identified reduction of class size as their first choice of assistance in teaching a child with learning disabilities in a mainstream class.

In the long-term, the issue for schools which do not have access to a special needs resource teacher but which have children with special needs has to be addressed. Although the number of special needs resource teacher posts had increased to 78 by the end of 1997 and the number of schools served had increased to 258 in 18 counties, the Service is, by no means, nationwide. The Special Education Review Committee report identified, in 1993, an overall total of 8,000 children in need of such support (p. 261).

The INTO believes that the ongoing overall expansion of the Special Needs Resource Teacher Service should take place within an agreed timescale supported by appropriate funding and monitoring.

The Department of Education and Science needs to provide a clear job description for special needs resource teachers and comprehensive guidelines related to their role which distinguish their role formally from that of a remedial teacher. In isolated areas, where there is not a sufficient caseload for both a remedial teacher and a special needs resource teacher support, consideration should be given to combining both roles.

Services to individual pupils in isolated areas also need to be addressed on a local basis, to ensure the support and integration of
pupils with special needs in schools in these areas.

This report indicates that there is an urgent need for the expansion of a comprehensive, nationwide school-based psychological service, both for assessment and support of pupils with special needs.
The Visiting Teacher Service is a support service available to children with certain special needs i.e. hearing impairment, visual impairment and a limited number of pupils with mental handicap in certain areas of the country who are attending mainstream schools, special classes, and in some cases, special schools. There is also a Visiting Teacher Service for children of Traveller families. However, this report deals only with the Visiting Teacher Service for children with disabilities. Each visiting teacher has a caseload spread over a given number of schools in a relatively large area and follows a rota of visits to the homes of children and visits to primary and post-primary schools. The frequency of visits is determined by the pupil’s degree of disability and need and the size of the teacher’s caseload. In addition to direct teaching of pupils, visiting teachers offer an advisory service to both teachers and parents. The majority of visiting teachers have more than ten years’ experience in the Visiting Teachers Service and have developed a wealth of expertise and experience. All visiting teachers have a qualification in special education, specialising in hearing impairment, visual impairment, or mental and physical handicap.

The Visiting Teacher Service was first established in the 1970s as a support service for children with hearing impairment who were attending mainstream schools. A service for children with visual impairment was established a few years later. The trend towards integration since the mid-1980s led to the Department of Education’s decision to restructure the service and to extend the Visiting Teacher Service to cater for children with mental handicap.
notably children with Down Syndrome. The restructuring and expansion of the service has implications for the visiting teachers employed in the service and for the direction of future development within the service.

With a view to examining the issues raised through the restructuring and expansion of the service, the INTO established a committee comprising representatives of the Visiting Teacher Service and the CEC. Views of all the visiting teachers were sought through the issuing of a questionnaire, and these views in addition to the work of the committee are included in this report.

The Development of the Visiting Teacher Service

HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN

In 1967, a committee was appointed by the Minister for Education: “To review the provision made for the education of deaf and partially deaf children and to make recommendations.” As part of the investigations of this committee, a pilot study was carried out in 1967-68 to establish the incidence and needs of hearing impaired children attending primary schools. This study was carried out in counties Meath, Kildare and Louth by Ms Lucy Mooney, a teacher of the deaf. It indicated the extent to which hearing impairment might be found among children attending primary schools and also suggested that these children might make satisfactory progress if appropriate assistance were provided.

At this time too, with the improvement of diagnostic services, children were being fitted with hearing aids at an earlier age and it was being recognised that early intervention was of vital importance for educational development and particularly for the development of language. Thus, the requirements of pre-school, hearing-impaired children and their families became clearly identified as another area of educational need. In 1972, the Report of the Ministerial Committee recommended that a visiting teacher service for hearing impaired children be established and managed by the Department of Education, with a view to providing assistance for children with a hearing impairment who were appropriately placed in mainstream schools. The visiting teachers were to assist pupils with reading, speech training and with the use and maintenance of hearing aids. It was also envisaged that the visiting teacher would liaise with the Health Boards, with the National Rehabilitation Board and with special...
schools for the hearing impaired concerning the pupils in their care. The visiting teachers were also given responsibility for providing a service to preschool children and their parents. (See Note 1, p. 123).

The Visiting Teacher Service was officially established on 28 February, 1972 and by January 1981 had a staff of twenty seven teachers who were directly employed by the Minister for Education under the Rules for National Schools. Prior to 1992, the Director of the Service was a Divisional Inspector of schools and (until her retirement in 1994) a senior visiting teacher co-ordinated the work of the Service under the general direction of the Divisional Inspector.

As the Service developed and grew to its full complement, the role of the visiting teacher of the deaf became more clearly defined, both in objectives and methodology. In the late eighties, this role was summarised in the Department document, Visiting Teacher Service for Children with Hearing Impairment, which is outlined in Note 2 (pp. 124-5).

VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN

The Visiting Teacher Service for visually impaired children was established by the Department of Education in 1976. The first appointee, Sr Clare Byrne of the Irish Sisters of Charity, was given the task of ascertaining the level of demand, nation-wide, for the new visiting service, from parents of visually impaired children. In the course of data collection, a caseload was built up and attempts made to streamline referrals which came from many sources, including area medical officers, public health nurses and social workers for the blind. Often children were referred by word of mouth. As there was only one person covering 26 counties, priority was given to pre-school children in the form of an early intervention programme. The visiting teacher assisted parents with the visual stimulation of their visually impaired infants in order to mitigate some of the effects of visual defects on early development and advised on education placement.

The success of the early skeletal service gave rise to a huge increase in demands for home visits and two additional teachers were appointed in 1979 to deliver an expanded service to three defined geographical regions. The duties, responsibilities and conditions of service are outlined in Note 2 (pp. 124-5). It is noted that a qualification in the education of the visually impaired was desirable but not essential and that the successful candidates would be facilitated in acquiring the appropriate qualifications if necessary. Each
teacher had responsibility for the provision of a range of services within a given region including co-operation with other professionals in identifying and diagnosing children with serious visual impairment, counselling and advising parents on the early training and education of visually impaired children, assisting visually impaired children enrolled in mainstream or other special schools, advising classroom teachers on issues pertaining to visual impairment, liaising with Health Boards, the National Council for the Blind and with special schools for children with visual impairment.

Following the expansion of the service in 1979 visiting became as regular and as frequent as distance and caseloads allowed. As the service became firmly established a trend away from special school placement and towards mainstream education for partially-sighted children became evident. This trend began as a trickle and gathered momentum as time went on, the integration of partially-sighted children being followed by the integration of low-vision and blind children into mainstream schools as parents came to realise that there was now an alternative to a special boarding school in Dublin for some young visually impaired children. Early successes in mainstream schools provided the encouragement needed for these schools to meet new challenges to the enrichment of all.

The National Rehabilitation Board provided a consultancy and advisory service to the visiting teachers through their psychologist, Ms Joan Curran, who had extensive experience in the field of visual impairment and its associated problems. Her support had been particularly valuable in dealing with borderline and complex cases of visual impairment. The Visiting Teacher Service for the Visually Impaired suffered a setback in June 1992 with the departure of psychologist Joan Curran from the National Rehabilitation Board (NRB) to take up another post. Ms Curran has not, to date, been replaced.

Because visual impairment is a condition with a low level incidence, there were only three visiting teachers for the visually impaired employed in the service prior to the restructuring and expansion of the service in 1992. It was difficult for such a small team to give a regular service to all pupils with visual impairment on a country wide basis. According to the Special Education Review Committee Report (1993) about half of such pupils in mainstream schools are visited only once a term or less.

The very success of the Visiting Teacher Service for the visually impaired
impaired has created other problems of its own. With the increasing numbers of low-vision and blind children opting for mainstream education comes the need for additional technological and other supports, hitherto available only in the special schools for the blind, viz. special equipment and mobility training. While the Department of Education and Science has begun to address the issue of technology, the absence of a cohesive programme of mobility training for low-vision children in mainstream schools can have serious implications for their social and emotional development and places them at a disadvantage vis-a-vis their peers who opt for special school placement. These emerging needs create challenges which must be met by the newly restructured Visiting Teacher Service.

THE EXPANSION AND RESTRUCTURING OF THE SERVICE

The Visiting Teacher Service for the Hearing Impaired and the Visiting Teacher Service for the Visually Impaired had operated independently of each other since their establishment. The visiting teachers liaised and met with their colleagues within their own area of specialism only. Their caseloads consisted of pupils with either hearing or visual impairment as appropriate.

The proposal to expand and restructure the Visiting Teacher Service was first mooted in the early 1990s. The job description for the post of a visiting teacher of children with hearing impairment in 1990 stated that the visiting teacher shall “be required to work with children with other handicaps from time to time”. This was the first reference to the provision of a service for pupils with special needs other than hearing or visual impairment. The first reference to a “generic” Visiting Teacher Service was made in a Departmental Circular on Young in 1991 which announced thirty additional posts in special education including “generic” Visiting Teacher Service.

One of the purposes of restructuring the Visiting Teacher Service was “to enable pupils with visual impairment in ordinary schools to receive visits from local visiting teachers on a much more frequent basis”. The word ‘local’ may be inappropriate in all cases, however, as the majority of visiting teachers still cover a wide geographical area. A more local support service is provided by the resource teachers who are appointed as members of school staVs in order to provide additional support to the pupils with special needs, who are enrolled in mainstream schools.
Up to 1992, the majority of the visiting teachers who had been appointed to the service had been teachers in the special schools for the Visually Impaired or the Hearing Impaired - as appropriate. With the expansion of the service in 1992, prospective visiting teachers were required to have one of the three diplomas in special education or their equivalent, i.e. the Diploma in Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment or Special Education.

The job description of the additional visiting teachers appointed in 1992 stated that the visiting teachers shall “have responsibility for children with certain handicaps in his/her district, including children with a mental, physical, emotional, hearing and visual handicap” (See Note 4, pp. 128-9). It was envisaged in the new, expanded and restructured service that all visiting teachers would provide some degree of support to children with special needs outside their own area of specialisation. However, it was also envisaged that children with special needs of a severe or profound nature, e.g. children who are blind, profoundly deaf or severely hard of hearing as well as all preschool children would continue to be provided a support service by a visiting teacher with the appropriate specialist qualification. It was proposed too that inservice training would be provided to the visiting teachers in accordance with perceived needs and following consultation with them.

Initially, following their appointment in 1992, an inservice programme in the education of pupils with visual impairment was provided for all visiting teachers whose specialism was in mental and physical handicap. An inservice programme in the education of children with mental handicap was also provided for the visiting teachers of the hearing impaired and visually impaired. Further inservice has since been provided, though a comprehensive, systematic approach to incareer development has not yet been developed for all visiting teachers.

The Department of Education had originally proposed in 1992 that the restructured service would operate on a trial basis and that the operation of the service would be kept under review during this period. The restructured Visiting Teacher Service came into operation in October 1993 following lengthy discussions between the existing visiting teachers, the Department of Education and the INTO. The Visiting Teacher Service now incorporates three categories of specialist teachers: visiting teachers of the hearing impaired, visiting teacher of the visually impaired and the visiting teachers of the mentally and
physically handicapped. The Department of Education and Science is responsible for ensuring that sufficient teachers within each specialist area are recruited into the service with a view to providing a comprehensive Visiting Teacher Service for all pupils with special needs. The operation of the service has not yet been reviewed.

**Current Provision**

**General**

An educational support service is provided by the visiting teachers to parents and children at pre-school, primary and post-primary level. The visiting teachers generally visit the children in their schools. In the case of preschool children the visiting teachers visit them in their homes. Children who do not attend school may also receive home tuition, normally during regular school hours. Children enrolled in special schools and classes are also entitled to a support service if required. A number of young people with hearing and/or visual impairment attending third level institutions or training workshops are also in receipt of a support service. A problem has arisen, however, in the case of some children who attend private schools. Visiting teachers have been informed that children attending private schools are not entitled to receive visits during school hours. A directive to this effect was issued by the Department of Education in March 1993 (See Note 5, pp. 130). Prior to the issuing of this directive, children attending private schools had been visited by the visiting teachers in their schools. In providing a support service, therefore, the visiting teacher must now visit the children in their homes after school hours. This is a very unsatisfactory situation for both teachers and pupils as it’s not the most optimum time for educational input and support. An after school service does not allow for consultation and discussion with the children’s class teachers, a vital function of the Visiting Teacher Service.

The objectives of the Visiting Teacher Service include the following:

1. to provide accurate, up-to-date information and guidelines for parents and professionals concerning the education of pupils with certain disabilities;
2. to respond authoritatively to queries from parents and professionals on issues pertaining to the education of pupils with disabilities;
3. to identify developmental and educational goals, and expectations...
and to develop strategies for their attainment;

to employ specialist teaching skills with their pupils and to share their skills with classroom teachers;

to explore with parents the educational options available and to assist their decision making with non-directional advice;

to facilitate the smooth transition into an initial or alternative educational placement.

The caseload of each individual visiting teacher differs according to the severity of disability concerned, the variety of disabilities involved, the geographical location of the pupils and the frequency with which visits are expected. The smallest caseload is 13 children and the largest caseloads consist of over 100 children.

The following are examples of caseloads of the visiting teachers during the school year 1995/96.

Caseload A

This visiting teacher has a total caseload of 63 children, thirty-eight of whom are visited frequently. This visiting teacher holds the Special Education Diploma in Mental and Physical handicap. The caseload includes 2 blind children, one of whom is attending primary school and the other receives home tuition; 18 pupils with severe visual impairment, 9 of whom attend primary school, seven who attend post-primary school and 2 who attend third level; 19 children with moderate visual impairment, 8 of whom attend primary school and 11 who attend post-primary school; 5 children with moderate mental handicap, all of whom are in primary school; 7 children with Down Syndrome attending primary school; 7 children with mental handicap in addition to other disabilities, four of whom are in primary school and three in a special school; 2 children with physical handicap who are enrolled in a special class in a primary school; 2 children with a language disorder attending primary school and 1 child with autism also attending a primary school.

Table 8  Total Caseload 63, Frequently visited 38

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-School</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>Post Prim. School</th>
<th>Special School</th>
<th>3rd Level Tr.</th>
<th>Private School</th>
<th>Home Tuition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blind</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Visual Impairment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Visual Impairment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Mental Impairment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Caseload B

This visiting teacher has a total caseload of 95 children, 46 of whom are visited frequently. This visiting teacher caters for children with hearing impairment only and holds the Diploma in Education of the Hearing Impaired. The caseload includes 16 children with profound hearing impairment, 1 of whom attends primary school, 9 of whom are enrolled in a special class in a primary school, 4 at post-primary level and 2 at third level; 16 children with severe hearing impairment, 1 at preschool level, 8 in primary level, 3 who are enrolled in a special class in primary school, 2 at post-primary level and 2 at third level; 36 children with moderate hearing impairment, 1 at preschool level, 17 in primary school, 17 in post-primary school and 2 who are attending a private school; 16 children with mild hearing impairment, 14 of whom attend primary school, 1 at post-primary level and 1 at third level; and finally 11 children with hearing impairment in addition to other disabilities, 3 of whom are at preschool level and 8 of whom are attending a special school for children with general learning disabilities.

Table 9  Total Caseload 95, Frequently Visited 38

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-School</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>Special School</th>
<th>Post Prim School</th>
<th>3rd Level Tr.</th>
<th>Private School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Profound Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impairment &amp; other disabilities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* in special facility in post-primary school.

Caseload C

This visiting teacher has a total caseload of 101 children, the majority of whom have hearing impairment. This visiting teacher holds the Diploma in Education of the Hearing Impaired. The caseload includes
64 children with profound hearing impairment, 6 of whom are at post-primary level and 58 of whom are in third level institutions or Rehab training centres; 6 people with severe hearing impairment at post-primary level; 18 pupils with moderate hearing impairment at post-primary level; 9 children with mild hearing impairment, one of whom attends primary school and 8 of whom attend post-primary school; 2 children with moderate mental handicap who attend primary school and 2 children with Down Syndrome who also attend primary school.
Table 10  **Total Caseload 101**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>Post Primary School</th>
<th>3rd Level or Rehab Training Centres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Profound Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Mental Handicap</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The INTO recommends**

1. that access to the Visiting Teacher Service be available to all children with special needs, as required, regardless of educational placement, until the child leaves the formal educational system or reaches compulsory school leaving age;

2. that size of caseloads not militate against the provision of a comprehensive service for children with disabilities.

**PROVISION FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN**

The importance of early intervention in identifying and remediating learning difficulties has become increasingly recognised in recent years. Early intervention is crucial in providing the best educational opportunities for all pupils. Early diagnosis of disabilities ensures that educational advice and guidelines can be offered to the children and their parents from an early age.

Visiting teachers for the hearing impaired and visiting teachers for the visually impaired have always provided a support and advisory service to children before they enter school. As soon as a child has been diagnosed as having a visual or hearing difficulty, they are referred to the Visiting Teacher Service by the National Rehabilitation Board, the National Council for the Blind, or the Health Board, as appropriate. The visiting teachers work with the families of the child on an educational development programme as soon as the child has been referred and advise the parents on the most appropriate educational placement for the child.

An educational programme which commences in the early years of the child’s life can take advantage of the natural developmental stages of the child. An early intervention programme also facilitates speech, language and auditory training programmes in the case of children with hearing impairment and contributes to their social and
emotional development, enhancing their self-esteem which is crucial to their success in learning in later years. Early intervention programmes also have great benefits for the parents of the children concerned, as ongoing support and reassurance is available, they are kept fully informed of their child’s progress and are provided guidance and assistance in developing and implementing programmes with the child at home. Parents are also facilitated in developing skills in behaviour management and become actively involved in their children’s education.

The relationship between visiting teachers and parents is different to that of most other professionals as visiting teachers operate in the home of the child and must, therefore, develop a relationship with all family members based on openness, informality and trust in order to achieve the goals relating to the child’s special needs. Such a relationship calls for a balance between informality and professional standards in order to maintain honest evaluations of children’s educational progress. Nevertheless, the involvement of parents in the education of their children is critical to their success in school and later on in their chosen careers or workplaces.

A similar support and advisory service is not available to children with other special needs such as mental and/or physical handicap or Down Syndrome. These children do not become entitled to the services of the visiting teacher until the child is enrolled in school. Delaying access to the support and advice of the Visiting Teacher Service may, therefore, lead to unsuitable placement of children in educational establishments, as appropriate information and advice on educational issues are not readily available to parents prior to the child’s enrolment in school. Discrimination against children with special needs other than visual or hearing impairment is unfair in the provision of a preschool service. The INTO believes that all preschool children with special needs should be entitled to receive support and advice from the Visiting Teacher Service as soon as their needs have been identified.

The INTO recommends

1. that all children with special needs be referred to the Visiting Teacher Service as soon as their needs have been assessed and identified;
2. that the visiting teacher be recognised as an essential member of any early intervention team;
3. that all preschool children should be referred to visiting teachers with a specialist qualification;
tion in the child’s main disability.

**PROVISION FOR PUPILS AT PRIMARY LEVEL**

**Support Teacher Service**

The Visiting Teacher Service provides a support service to children with special needs who are integrated into mainstream schools, and to their class teachers. The burden placed on class teachers by even the most able and the least demanding child with special needs has never been sufficiently recognised, particularly in terms of class size and access to support personnel. It must be acknowledged, however, that there have been certain improvements in recent years with the appointment of 46 special needs resource teachers throughout the country to provide teaching support for pupils with special needs other than remedial needs in mainstream national schools.

Special needs resource teachers are appointed as assistant teachers in primary schools. They may serve a single school or a cluster of schools where children with special needs are enrolled. They engage in direct teaching of the pupils concerned in addition to providing advice and support to the class teacher and to the children’s parents. Special needs resource teachers are in a position to provide a more frequent service to pupils as their caseloads normally consist of approximately 14 pupils in a single school or in a small cluster of schools. A frequent and regular service is particularly important for children with Down Syndrome and other general learning disabilities. Special needs resource teachers also liaise with other professionals, including visiting teachers, who are also supporting the children. The scope of the special needs resource teacher to develop such liaison would probably be less than that of the visiting teachers.

The Visiting Teacher Service offers a service to a larger number of schools over a wide geographical area and, as outlined above, their caseloads vary. The visiting teacher engages in continuous liaison with other professionals dealing with the child, in addition to the child’s family. The visiting teacher may also work with preschool children, though this type of service has yet to be extended to preschool children with general learning disabilities and/or physical disabilities. The visiting teachers can offer a continuous service to a child with special needs as s/he progresses from preschool through third level education. Visiting teachers also assist schools in preparing for the enrolment of children with special needs.

The visiting teachers provide a direct teaching service to pupils in
primary schools in addition to providing advice and support to the class teacher and to parents. The visiting teacher does not work in isolation from the class teacher but as part of a team. Whereas the visiting teacher may remove a particular child for individual tuition, this is done as part of the overall programme of work with the child which is being carried out by the class teacher based on guidelines and advice provided by the visiting teacher. Individual programmes for pupils with special needs are continuously reviewed by the visiting teacher and the class teacher in consultation with one another.

Table 11 (p. 105) from the Special Education Review Committee (SERC 1993) report outlines the responsibilities of the various support teacher services.

It is unusual for children with special needs who are attending mainstream schools to have access to both the Visiting Teacher Service and a special needs resource teacher. However, where this does occur a team approach is developed between the class teacher, the special needs resource teacher who teaches the child two or three times weekly depending on nature of disability, and the visiting teacher who visits the child either weekly, monthly or each term depending on nature of disability. This team approach with class teachers and special needs resource teachers is based on establishing a relationship which promotes mutual respect and a two or three way exchange of information, ideas and programme suggestions. A team approach may also involve other professionals as required such as speech therapists, social workers, audiologists and psychologists.

Pupils with Down Syndrome have been provided support from the Visiting Teacher Service since 1992. Additional support for these pupils is often provided by remedial and/or special needs resource teachers. The Visiting Teacher Service may not be the most appropriate support for pupils with Down Syndrome as such children need a more regular systematic support service. This type of service is usually provided by special needs resource teachers who engage in direct teaching with each child in their caseload, sometimes daily, and more often two or three times a week. The Visiting Teacher Service, because of the remit of the service cannot always provide the support required. However, it must be noted that two of the visiting teachers work mainly with children with Down Syndrome. Their caseloads consist of approximately 13 pupils and visits are much more frequent than normally associated with visiting teachers. Their caseloads consist of pupils who attend private schools and mainstream
primary and post-primary schools.

Pupils in primary schools with severe or profound hearing impairment are generally visited once a week by the visiting teachers. Pupils with mild or moderate hearing impairment are visited less frequently. However, some pupils need to be visited more frequently than they are at present but current caseloads do not always facilitate this. Frequency of visits to pupils with visual impairment range from weekly visits, to termly, as needs determine.

Class Size

Access to a special needs resource teacher or to the Visiting Teacher Service is not guaranteed to all pupils with special needs who are enrolled in mainstream schools. There are no attempts either to adjust class size when children with special needs are enrolled. Class teachers are expected to cope with each child with special needs in addition to a normal class workload. A weighting system for each child with a special need should be introduced immediately thereby reducing the maximum class size where children with special needs are enrolled. The INTO supports the following weighting allocation to pupils with disabilities as outlined in the Special Review Committee Report (SERC, 1993).

Table 12 Example of support-teacher allocation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Assumed Ratio</th>
<th>Proportion of Teacher-Post per Pupil</th>
<th>Weighting (Normal Pupil Equivalents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary class (hypothetical ratio)</td>
<td>30:1</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild Mental Handicap</td>
<td>15:1</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Mental Handicap</td>
<td>11:1</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing-impaired</td>
<td>8:1</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profoundly Deaf</td>
<td>6:1</td>
<td>0.166</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial</td>
<td>40:1</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special Needs Assistants

It is regrettable that special needs assistants are not always available when pupils need additional support other than teaching support. The Special Education Review Committee Report (SERC, 1993) recommends the appointment of a special needs assistant in special schools and classes. Mainstream schools who cater for pupils with disabilities should also be entitled to the support of a special needs assistant if recommended by the class teacher and/or the visiting teacher. In reality, assistance in the classroom is often provided to
the teacher through the appointment of classroom assistants under the community employment scheme. While welcoming the support provided by such schemes, the real needs of the children are not met unless special needs assistants with appropriate qualifications are available to assist the teachers.

**The INTO recommends**

1. that class size be adjusted by the weighting of children with special needs who are integrated in mainstream classes;
2. that children with general learning disabilities or Down Syndrome be given access to special needs resource teachers where possible with a view to offering such pupils a more regular and frequent service;
3. that special needs assistants (SNAs) be appointed as required to assist pupils who are integrated in mainstream education;
4. that a whole team approach be adopted by visiting teachers, special needs resource teachers and class teachers to the education of children with special needs as appropriate;
5. that information regarding the role and function of the Visiting Teacher Service be made available to primary schools.

**PROVISION AT POST PRIMARY LEVEL**

The role of the visiting teacher at post-primary level has evolved as primary school pupils with special needs have opted to continue their education in mainstream schools. The multi-subject nature of the post-primary curriculum means that a number of teachers are engaged with each pupil in the school. Liaison between the visiting teachers and class teachers is, therefore, more problematic at post-primary level because of the number of teachers involved and the issue of timetabling. As visiting teachers can often only consult teachers at break times, consideration needs to be given to developing mechanisms for improving communications between post-primary teachers and the Visiting Teacher Service. In some cases too, there is a lack of awareness among principals and post-primary teachers of the existence of the Visiting Teacher Service and of its role and function in the education of children with special needs.

At post-primary level there is a change of emphasis from individual tuition to an advisory service involving occasional visits to schools although some pupils continue to receive individual tuition from visiting teachers. Other pupils receive extra tuition in curricular areas which is funded by the Department of Education and Science. Visiting teachers require more opportunities to provide individual sessions with pupils in
their caseload, and to liaise, advise and consult with the subject teachers involved with the student. Visiting teachers also ensure that visually impaired or hearing impaired students are facilitated in state examinations. Their role mainly centres around assessing the needs of the students regarding the examinations, for example, whether additional time would be required or what equipment needs arise. This involvement is essential in order to avoid misunderstandings between pupils and exam supervisors. Curricular issues will also arise as children with Down Syndrome progress from primary schools to post-primary mainstream schools. The current academic orientation of most post-primary school programmes may be unsuitable for pupils with Down Syndrome or other general learning disabilities. An appropriate curriculum for such students would need to be developed in consultation with the Visiting Teacher Service.

The situation pertaining to the service at post-primary level is less than satisfactory. There is a need to inform schools of the work of the Visiting Teacher Service and to open up communication between post-primary teachers and visiting teachers. There is an additional need, at this level too, to provide a career guidance service for pupils with special needs. Due to constraints such as caseload numbers and lack of career guidance training many visiting teachers believe that pupils with special needs are not receiving adequate guidance concerning further education or career options.

**The INTO recommends**

1. that visiting teachers be consulted and informed concerning all aspects of the education of post-primary children with special needs who are on their caseload;
1. that incareer development be provided for visiting teachers in the area of career guidance for pupils with special needs;
1. that information regarding the role and function of the Visiting Teacher Service be made available to all post-primary schools;
1. that a whole team approach be adopted by the visiting teachers, special needs resource teachers and curricular subject teachers to education for children with special needs.

**PROVISION AT THIRD LEVEL**

There is an increasing number of pupils with special needs attending third level institutions. As a result, the visiting teachers have also begun to provide an advisory service at third level. Approximately eighty third level students are in receipt of support from the Visiting Teacher Service. Further problems arise for students at third level
concerning lecture note taking, library facilities and the need for extra tuition. Visiting teachers who have worked with and supported students throughout their years in the educational system are in an ideal position to continue their support and to advise the educational authorities at third level regarding the students’ needs.

**The INTO recommends**

1. that extra tuition be provided as required for students with special needs attending third level institutions;
2. that facilities and equipment required by students with special needs be provided as necessary at no extra cost to the school.

**Management of the Visiting Teacher Service**

**MONITORING OF SERVICE**

The Department of Education proposed, as part of the expansion and restructuring of the Visiting Teacher Service that a Special Advisory Group, comprised of representatives of the visiting teachers, the INTO and the Department of Education be established in order to keep the operation of the service under review during the trial period and to advise the Department on any adjustments that are necessary for the more effective delivery of the service. An advisory committee has not, to date, been established nor has the operation of the service been reviewed. The establishment of an advisory committee or a steering committee would provide a forum in which issues pertaining to the operation and development of the Visiting Teacher Service could be discussed and where problems and difficulties can be resolved.

**The INTO recommends**

1. that an advisory or steering committee be established whose function it would be to oversee the operation of the Visiting Teacher Service and to form proposals concerning the future development of the service;
2. that the advisory/steering committee comprise of representatives from the Department of Education and Science, the Visiting Teacher Service and the INTO;
3. that the committee set up to review the Report on the Education of Children who are Handicapped by Impaired Hearing (Department of Education 1972), which was put into abeyance in 1991 pending the completion of the Report of the Special Educational Review Committee, be reconvened, its terms of reference amended, requiring it to take account of the principles, proposals and recommendations of the Special Education Review Committee.
Report (as recommended by the Special Education Review Committee) (SERC 1993).

THE ROLE OF THE INSPECTORATE

Prior to 1992, the Visiting Teacher Service was managed by two inspectors in the Department of Education. There were twenty-seven (27) visiting teachers of the hearing impaired and three (3) visiting teachers of the visually impaired employed by the service, each managed by an individual inspector. Since the service has been expanded and restructured and an additional six visiting teachers appointed, six (6) inspectors in the Department of Education and Science have been appointed as managers of the service on a regional basis. The six managers are responsible for regions, geographically defined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 North West and North Midlands</td>
<td>Sligo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 South West</td>
<td>Cork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 South and South East</td>
<td>Cork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Dublin and North Leinster</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Dublin and Midlands</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Dublin and South East</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relationship between each manager and each visiting teacher varies in each region. Two thirds of the visiting teachers did not have regular contact with their respective managers. Of those who do have regular contact, this was normally done by phone or through correspondence. Two visiting teachers regularly meet their manager. The frequency of contact with managers does not appear to be a problem as the visiting teachers can contact their managers as needs arise. The fact that the visiting teachers do not get an opportunity to meet formally as a Visiting Teacher Service is of greater concern to the visiting teachers.

The implications for the Visiting Teacher Service arising from the establishment of Regional Education Boards is not clear. The visiting teachers are currently employed by the Department of Education and Science, though the location of the regional managers bears no relation to the proposed regions under the Regional Education Boards as outlined in the White Paper on Education Charting our Education Future". The INTO is of the view that the visiting teachers should continue to be employed on a national basis by the Department of Education and Science.
The INTO recommends

1. that regular contact be maintained between the managers and the visiting teachers;
2. that managers and visiting teachers continue to liaise with each other concerning caseload, equipment and conditions of service.

**CO-ORDINATION**

Identifying the Need

At present there is little or no co-ordination of the Visiting Teacher Service. As part of its proposals to expand the Visiting Teacher Service, the Department of Education envisaged that the visiting teachers would meet on a regional basis from time to time and that an annual conference of the national service would be held. To date, neither event has occurred, resulting in a situation where visiting teachers work very much in isolation with occasional contact with their managers and limited informal contact with colleagues. There is a great need among the teachers to meet their colleagues, to discuss professional issues and to share their common concerns and expertise. Such meetings had been the practice prior to the restructuring and expansion of the service. An annual conference would provide an ideal opportunity for the visiting teachers to meet as a group to discuss the overall work of the service, to examine provision on a regional basis and to discuss issues of common concern within each specialist area.

Prior to the expansion of the service, a senior visiting teacher of the hearing impaired had been responsible for some level of co-ordination in the Visiting Teacher Service for the hearing impaired. The senior visiting teacher was in receipt of an annual allowance of €126.97. However, since the retirement of the Senior Visiting Teacher, there has been no replacement. The Department of Education and Science had proposed that six regional co-ordinators would be appointed from amongst the visiting teachers to enable the service to be co-ordinated and to provide promotional opportunities within the service. This proposal has yet to be implemented.

There are mixed views amongst the visiting teachers themselves concerning the issues of co-ordination and the appointment of co-ordinators. Approximately one third of the visiting teachers are open to the idea of the appointment of a National Co-ordinator, another third support the appointment of Regional Co-ordinators and another third would support the appointment of both National
and Regional Co-ordinators. One visiting teacher does not see the need for the appointment of any co-ordinator. The role, function and responsibilities of such co-ordinators would need to be clarified, as would the relationships between the co-ordinators and the visiting teachers and between the co-ordinators and management.

One clearly expressed need of the visiting teachers is the need for an opportunity to meet with one another, to share information and expertise and to discuss professional issues. Opportunities for professional development and inservice are also required. Visiting teachers also miss out on the various communications normally found on staff room notice boards such as Departmental circulars, information on incareer development courses, teacher centres’ communications, and other useful information available to teachers. Because of the isolated nature of the role of the visiting teacher, procedures are required to be put in place to enable regular formal and informal contact between the visiting teachers. The organisation of an annual conference and the implementation of a programme of incareer development may provide a suitable opportunity to meet these needs. The INTO is of the view that the visiting teachers themselves should be given the responsibility for developing an appropriate incareer development programme, organising consultative conferences and developing communication mechanisms within the service. Given the length of time that many teachers are in the Visiting Teacher Service, there is no doubt that a wealth of expertise has been accumulated by the individuals concerned. A mechanism needs to be developed which would enable this expertise to be collated and shared.

A National Co-ordinator

Consideration needs to be given to the appointment of a National Co-ordinator of the Visiting Teacher Service. A precedent already exists where a National Education Officer who works with the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers has been appointed. The National Education Officer performs a co-ordinating function for the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers and is responsible for organising an annual conference and for the development of an incareer programme for the support teachers of Travellers. There is also a need in the Visiting Teacher Service for pupils with disabilities for an annual conference. The organisation of these conferences could be a func-
tion of the national co-ordinator, who would prepare a programme in consultation with his/her colleagues. The national co-ordinator could also assume responsibility for the development and implementation of an in-career development programme. A national co-ordinator could also act as a liaison person between managers and individual visiting teachers when problems arise between them. Procedures to resolve disputes or difficulties between individual visiting teachers and managers would have to be negotiated between the INTO representing the visiting teachers and the Department of Education and Science.

The national co-ordinator would also have a role in the following areas:

1. carrying out research relevant to the development of the Visiting Teacher Service;
2. the organisation of an induction programme for newly appointed visiting teachers;
3. the appointment of new visiting teachers;
4. the development of internal communication mechanisms within the Visiting Teacher Service;
5. the co-ordination of equipment supply;
6. liaison with the Department of Education and Science concerning negotiated procedures;
7. liaison with other agencies and institutions as required.

The national co-ordinator would consult with the assistant national co-ordinators (see below) as appropriate and would be facilitated in carrying out the above by being responsible for a reduced caseload. The national co-ordinator would not have a management function in relation to his/her colleagues.

Assistant National Co-ordinators/Senior Visiting Teachers

The appointment of an assistant co-ordinator in each of the specialist areas i.e. visual impairment, hearing impairment and general learning disabilities and physical disabilities, would facilitate the collation of expertise pertaining to each specialist area. Each assistant co-ordinator would therefore act as an advisor to his/her colleagues on professional matters. Visiting teachers would continue to liaise with their own managers on issues pertaining to their conditions of service and caseload as at present. Professional advice would be available from the assistant co-ordinators who would have developed more expertise than management on professional issues. It would not be
envisaged that the assistant co-ordinators would have a management function in relation to their colleagues.

Assistant co-ordinators may also have a role in developing an in-career programme for the Visiting Teacher Service in consultation with the national co-ordinator. As senior teachers, they would be in a position to assess the need for inservice within the Visiting Teacher Service in consultation with their colleagues. To enable the assistant co-ordinators to develop their expertise and to plan and co-ordinate incareer development programmes, they should be facilitated through a reduction in their caseload.

**The INTO recommends**

1. that a national co-ordinator of the Visiting Teacher Service be appointed from amongst the visiting teachers to act as an advisor for the visiting teachers, to perform a co-ordinating and leadership function and to organise conferences and incareer development programmes as appropriate;
2. that three assistant national co-ordinators one of each specialism, be appointed to assist the national co-ordinator;
3. that an annual conference be held for the Visiting Teacher Service, at which regional issues and issues pertaining to each specialism would be discussed;
4. that an incareer development programme be designed and delivered by the Visiting Teacher Service, organised and co-ordinated by the National and assistant co-ordinators and funded by the Incareer Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science.

**Promotion**

Opportunities for the development of promotional positions in teaching were negotiated as part of the Programme for Competitiveness and Work (PCW, 1996). It is envisaged that, in the future, one in two primary teachers would be in a promoted position. The INTO is of the view that the Visiting Teacher Service should also have a number of promoted positions to which each visiting teacher could aspire. Each visiting teacher is currently in receipt of an A-post allowance. The INTO would envisage that a national co-ordinator would receive remuneration equivalent to that of a principal teacher, that the senior visiting teachers/assistant national co-ordinators would receive remuneration equivalent to that of vice principal teacher. The INTO also proposes that additional promotional posts should be available to the Visiting Teacher Service. During initial discussions between the INTO and the Department of Education and Science it was proposed that there would be six promoted posts in the Visiting Teacher Service.
Service, i.e. one promoted visiting teacher in each management region. In addition to the appointment of a national co-ordinator and assistant national co-ordinators the INTO would propose that six additional promoted posts be created, not on a regional basis as originally proposed, but to allow for the development of special responsibilities in the Visiting Teacher Service. Promoted visiting teachers with specialist responsibilities would be offered an allowance of €1,270 in addition to their A-post allowance, as originally proposed by the Department of Education and Science. The level of allowances for the co-ordinators concerned would relate to those of a school with a similar number of teachers.

### Promotion Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Co-ordinator (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Co-ordinator (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impaired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Impaired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Learning and Physical Disabilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Promoted Posts/Specialist Responsibilities (6)

#### Mobility Officers

Given the increase in the number of pupils with visual impairment who are attending mainstream schools, a need has arisen where mobility training is required for these pupils. The appointment of a Mobility Officer from amongst the Visiting Teacher Service who would be provided with appropriate training would meet this need.

#### Technical Officers

Another position could be that of Technical Officer, who could advise the visiting teachers on the issue of specialist equipment, for example sourcing the most suitable equipment, providing initial set-up training, ongoing technical support, and advising in relation to adaptation where necessary.

#### Career Guidance Officers

As more students with special needs complete second level education, there is a need to ensure that career guidance information is available to the students, their families and their teachers regarding opportunities available to them following their second level or even third level education.

#### Counselling Officers

Counselling Officers would develop specialist skills in the area of counselling, with a view to providing a support service to their colleagues when dealing with parents and students.
There is a need to develop expert knowledge in the field of computers and software packages which would be suitable for pupils with special needs.

Assessment Officers

Assessment Officers would develop expertise in assessment and testing methods and would act as advisors to their colleagues in these areas.

Additional promoted positions could be created, as required, offering additional promotional opportunities to the visiting teachers.

**Appointment, Recruitment and Selection Procedures**

**Appointment of National Co-Ordinator and Senior Visiting Teachers**

The national co-ordinator and the assistant co-ordinators should be appointed through open competition. Each post should be advertised within the service, applications invited, a selection board appointed and interviews held. The selection board should comprise a representative of Management and two independent persons with appropriate expertise. The successful candidate appointed as national co-ordinator should then be involved in the appointment procedure of the assistant co-ordinators, and other promoted positions.

**The INTO recommends**

1. that all promotional posts should be advertised internally among all teachers of the Visiting Teacher Service;
2. that selection boards should comprise a representative from Management and two independent assessors in the case of the appointment of a national co-ordinator;
3. that the selection board, for the appointment of the assistant national co-ordinators, should comprise of a representative from Management, the national co-ordinator, and an independent assessor.

**The Visiting Teachers**

The visiting teachers are employed directly by the Department of Education and Science. Primary school teachers whose qualifications are recognised by the Department of Education and Science and who hold the Diploma for Hearing Impairment, Diploma for Visual Impairment or the Special Education Diploma or equivalent, are eligible for appointment to the Visiting Teacher Service. Positions are advertised in the national press. Prior to the expansion and restruc-
The INTO recommends

1. that the national co-ordinator of the Visiting Teacher Service and the assistant co-ordinators be involved in the recruitment, selection and appointment procedure;
2. that all future vacancies within the Visiting Teacher Service be advertised internally prior to being advertised in the national press.

Assessment and Referral Procedures

In general, the assessment and referral procedures for children with hearing impairment and visual impairment are quite satisfactory. A visual or a hearing impairment is usually detected soon after birth. Children with hearing impairment are usually referred by the National Rehabilitation Board (NRB) to the visiting teacher in the appropriate area. The Department of Education and Science is usually informed by the visiting teachers/the NRB of referrals made.

Children with visual impairment are usually assessed initially by the
National Council for the Blind (NCB) and then referred to the visiting teachers. Since 1992, however, many referrals are made by the NCB to the Department of Education and Science who then refer them on to the visiting teachers through the appropriate managers. Occasionally, referrals have been made by social workers for the blind, psychologists, ophthalmologists and sometimes schools.

Referrals of children with Down Syndrome and other general learning disabilities are generally made by the Department of Education and Science, through the managers, to the visiting teachers. Children with Down Syndrome have not usually been assessed before they are enrolled in school. Teachers are generally unhappy with the level of assessment available to children with Down Syndrome and general learning disabilities. The School Psychological Service which has been established by the Department of Education and Science does not yet offer an adequate service as it is limited to certain geographical areas. A small number of children with Down Syndrome had been in receipt of a support service by the Down Syndrome Association prior to the restructuring and expansion of the Visiting Teacher Service of the Department of Education and Science. There are one or two cases where children with Down Syndrome continue to receive a support service from the Down Syndrome Association in addition to receiving support from the Visiting Teacher Service. There are also a number of children with Down Syndrome who are attending mainstream primary schools who are not in receipt of additional support either from the visiting teacher service or from special needs resource teachers. Such provision is unsatisfactory.

The visiting teachers of the hearing impaired are generally satisfied with the assessment facilities available for pupils with hearing impairment. There are delays, however, in referring new pupils and in receiving reports in some areas and this is regrettable. Both local health board psychologists and the NRB psychologists are involved in assessments of pupils with hearing losses.

Pupils with visual impairment used to be assessed by a psychologist with specialist knowledge of visual impairment employed by the National Rehabilitation Board. However, this position is vacant at present and is creating difficulties in the assessment of pupils with visual impairment.

The assessment procedures tend to be informal and unstructured, and whereas such an approach often facilitates flexibility, a more systematic approach may be more efficient. The involvement of the
visiting teachers in the assessment process is crucial as is the involvement of the class teachers and principals concerned.

Placements of children are reviewed by the visiting teachers informally and continuously in consultation with their professional colleagues and with parents. There are no formal procedures for the review of placements and practice varies from area to area.

**The INTO recommends**

1. that visiting teachers be involved in the continuous assessment of pupils in their care;
2. that placements of children be periodically reviewed by the visiting teachers in consultation with the school principal, the class teachers and other professionals as appropriate;
3. that the school psychological service be expanded without delay to provide a service to all children requiring same;
4. that educational psychologists with specialist knowledge of hearing impairment and visual impairment also be available through the school psychological service;
5. that psychological reports be available to the parents of the children concerned, the visiting teacher, the class teacher and the principal teacher of the school which the child is attending;
6. that children with special needs be referred to the Visiting Teacher Service or to a special needs resource teacher as soon as their special needs have been identified;
7. that all blind children be referred to a visiting teacher with specialist qualification in visual impairment.

**Resources and Equipment**

Due to the nature of their work visiting teachers require equipment and resources, much of it specialised, in order to carry out their duties and responsibilities. They are not in receipt of grants for this purpose. There appears to be no policy in the Department of Education and Science in regard to the purchase of equipment, books and educational materials for the Visiting Teacher Service. Practice differs, therefore, in each management region. Some visiting teachers have no difficulty in being reimbursed for expenses occurred by them in purchasing equipment on production of receipts. However, no visiting teacher is allocated a budget for the purchase of resources. The lack of policy or guidelines on funding for equipment and resources is extremely unsatisfactory for the visiting teachers.

There is an urgent need to streamline the provision of equipment. Many children with hearing impairment or visual impairment require specialised equipment to assist them in their education. The current system of providing such equipment is too cumbersome and doesn’t
allow for prioritisation. There are times when the provision of the required equipment is delayed, thereby, creating an unsatisfactory situation for both the visiting teachers and their pupils. Expensive equipment is sometimes recommended by people without expertise on the advice of agents with a vested interest in sales. A Departmental policy and clear guidelines on the purchase and replacement of equipment is required in order to avoid such situations and to overcome the difficulties currently being faced by the visiting teachers.

It is usually the visiting teacher who decides what equipment is required by the child and what type of equipment is most suitable. In some cases the visiting teacher would consult with other specialists such as optometrists from the National Council for the Blind where magnifiers are involved. However, it is not clear who has ownership of the equipment once it has been purchased. The equipment is used by individual children, but once the child moves on, e.g. to post-primary school, the equipment is often left in the school and may be lost to the Visiting Teacher Service. At present, there is no inventory kept of equipment purchased for the use of individual children within the service. Situations are sometimes created where equipment lies redundant in schools when pupils leave the school and where the same item of equipment may have to be purchased for the child in his/her new school. If all items of specialised equipment were to become the responsibility of the Visiting Teacher Service, equipment could be transferred to schools and pupils as required. The co-ordination of an equipment inventory, and the organisation of equipment use, repairs and replacement could be a function of the national co-ordinator and/or the assistant national co-ordinators.

In view of the increasing emphasis on technology in education, advice and assistance will be required by the visiting teachers in order to be in a position to take advantage of modern technology. The use of technology would greatly assist pupils with special needs who opt for mainstream placement. A ‘whole team’ approach to assessing their needs would be required, involving the visiting teacher, the class teacher and others with specialist knowledge such as technical advisers and mobility officers.

Given the importance of record keeping and communications within the Visiting Teacher Service, consideration should also be given by the Department of Education and Science to providing home computer facilities to all visiting teachers. Such computer facilities
would facilitate the collation of data concerning the Visiting Teacher Service and the centralisation and transfer of pupil records as required.

The INTO recommends

1. that all visiting teachers receive an annual grant of £254 (same as remedial teachers) for the purchase of routine teaching materials;
2. that the purchase of more expensive items of equipment, e.g. audimeter, video recording equipment, speech software, be negotiated by individual visiting teachers and their managers in consultation with the assistant national co-ordinators;
3. that an inventory of all equipment purchased be retained by the Visiting Teacher Service and that ownership of equipment be retained by the Department of Education and Science for the use of the Visiting Teacher Service and that records be kept regarding date of purchase, the location of equipment, and whether or not the equipment is in use;
4. that the Department of Education and Science, assume responsibility for the repair of equipment and procedures be put in place and funding made available to ensure the speedy repair of equipment as required;
5. that the Department of Education and Science facilitate the introduction and development of modern technology in the Visiting Teacher Service, through providing grants for the purchase and maintenance of equipment, through the organisation of in-career development opportunities for teachers and through the provision of home computer facilities for all visiting teachers.

Conditions of Service

GENERAL CONDITIONS

Visiting teachers work for 183 days per year which is equivalent to the school year of their colleagues in primary schools. Their working day tends to be longer than a primary school teacher’s day as their work involves travel. The scheduling of their school year is negotiated between the individual visiting teachers and their managers. Visiting teachers receive travel expenses and subsistence allowances at public service rates. Visiting teachers also receive an A-post allowance in addition to the common basic salary and qualification allowances. Visiting teachers use their home as a base and receive an oYce allowance from the Department of Education and Science.

There is an element of dissatisfaction, however, among the visiting teachers concerning aspects of their work. This dissatisfaction stems from a sense of isolation and a lack of contact with their colleagues, lack of opportunities for promotion, lack of inservice training, inade-
quate substitute cover, inadequate budgetary provision, after school hours teaching of children who attend private schools, the inadequacies in the psychological services and, for some, the distance between their operational base and their home. There is also a feeling of uncertainty among the teachers concerning the future development of the service.

**SUBSTITUTE COVER**

At present, substitute cover is not provided when visiting teachers are absent on short term certiWed leave. As a result, pupils are left without a service for the period concerned. In some cases, the absent visiting teachers’ colleagues may accept additional responsibilities for the duration of the absence. Substitute cover is provided, however, in the case of maternity leave, long term sick leave and for career breaks, though the responsibility for Wnding a substitute usually rests with the visiting teacher. Consideration needs to be given to facilitating arrangements with special schools for the secondment of experienced teachers to provide long-term substitute cover for the Visiting Teacher Service in order to ensure the continuity of specialists support provision.

**IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

A minimal amount of inservice was provided for the visiting teachers following the expansion and restructuring of the Visiting Teacher Service in 1992. However, there have been no systematic incareer development opportunities provided for the visiting teachers in order to enable them to enhance their skills, expertise and knowledge. It must be acknowledged, however, that some visiting teachers are currently being facilitated by the Department of Education and Science in pursuing the postgraduate qualiWcation in Visual Impairment from the University of Birmingham. The facilitation of visiting teachers to pursue post graduate courses of relevance, is indeed welcome.

**SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE**

The school psychological service at primary level was established on a pilot basis in 1990. The pilot scheme which operated in West Dublin and South Tipperary was very successful. The Department of
Education and Science began to expand the service in 1994. The pilot schemes were made permanent and ten additional psychologists were appointed. A minimal service is now provided in Dublin, Limerick and Cork, concentrated mainly in areas of disadvantage. A public service embargo in 1995 exerted further expansion of the service. As a result, the services are far from comprehensive and do not adequately meet the needs of the schools. It appears too, that the Department of Health has opted out of providing services for schools in areas where the Department of Education and Science service has been established leading to increased frustration among teachers. The School Psychological Service at post-primary level has been in existence since 1965. However, it is difficult for the psychologists to provide a comprehensive service, as the current ratio of psychologists to pupils is 18,000:1.

Children in Private Schools

Prior to the issuing of a directive in 1993 by the Department of Education and Science visiting teachers provided a service to all children on their caseload during school hours. Since the issuing of the directive, children attending private schools can only avail of the Visiting Teacher Service after school hours with the exception of one or two cases. The introduction of the directive is unfair both to the pupils concerned and to the visiting teachers. From the pupils’ point of view, late afternoon is not the most optimum time to engage in educational activities after a long day in school. From the visiting teachers’ point of view, they are not allowed the opportunity to consult with the children’s class teachers or to advise on educational programmes, or equipment needs which may be required in the classroom. The visiting teachers work as a team with class teachers and other support teachers in the case of state funded schools. They are denied this professional opportunity in the case of children who attend private schools. In addition, by providing a service after school hours they are lengthening their own working day, a situation which would become untenable if a visiting teacher had more than one child attending private school in their caseload. The INTO is of the view that all children should be entitled to receive support from the Visiting Teacher Service during school hours.

The visiting teachers have had few opportunities to discuss these issues, contributing to a feeling of low morale amongst the teachers. The implementation of the recommendations in this report would go...
a long way towards creating a dynamic and forward thinking Visiting Teacher Service which is effective and challenging for those who deliver the service, and which at the same time meets the needs of the pupils and teachers whom it is intended to serve.

**The INTO recommends**

1. that an annual conference of the Visiting Teacher Service be organised to enable the visiting teachers to discuss issues of concern in their regions and within their own specialism;
2. that this annual conference be organised and co-ordinated by the national co-ordinator in consultation with the assistant national co-ordinators;
3. that a programme of incareer development be designed and delivered by the visiting teachers, and funded through the Incareer Unit of the Department of Education and Science;
4. that substitute cover be provided for all long term and certified absences of visiting teachers;
5. that consideration should be given to making arrangements with special schools for the secondment of experienced personnel to provide substitute cover for the Visiting Teacher Service in order to ensure the continuity of specialist support;
6. that all children in receipt of support from the Visiting Teacher Service be entitled to same during school hours.

**Conclusions**

The Government’s White Paper on Education *Charting our Education Future* (1995) reiterates the state’s commitment to the right of all students, regardless of their personal circumstances, to access to and participation in the education system, according to their potential and ability. The achievement of full equality of access, participation and benefit for all students will entail positive intervention in favour of students who experience particular difficulties. The Visiting Teacher Service is often the first educational intervention over to children with special needs, in particular children with hearing impairment and/or visual impairment. The provision of early educational intervention must continue as a vital resource to both the parents and children concerned. Intervention at preschool level, therefore, needs to be expanded to include children with general learning disabilities and Down Syndrome.

Visiting teachers continue to provide a support service to pupils with special needs who opt to attend mainstream primary and post-primary schools. They work in consultation with the class teachers concerned and with special needs resource teachers where appropri-
Specialist support is generally welcomed by class teachers. The White Paper supports the continuation of specialist provision within education. Such specialist provision could be anywhere along a continuum of additional support from specialist teachers for pupils who are enrolled in mainstream schools to full time specialist provision in special schools. The Visiting Teacher Service remains a vital link in this continuum. The visiting teachers will provide a service, predominantly for children with special needs related to their specialism. In some cases, they will also provide a service for pupils with other special needs, usually of minor severity. The visiting teachers visit their pupils weekly, fortnightly, monthly or termly, as appropriate. The nature of the Visiting Teacher Service, which covers large geographical areas does not facilitate a more frequent service. Some children, particularly those with general learning disabilities, often require a more frequent service. Where there are a cluster of children in an area, special needs resource teachers are appointed to the staVs of schools with a view to providing additional support to the pupils with special needs.

The need for additional specialist support will continue to increase as the trend towards the integration of pupils with special needs into mainstream schools continues. The White Paper proposes that existing special schools will fulW l an expanded role as schools dealing with a variety of disability and as regional resource centres. Specialist teachers may be based in special schools and provide outreach programmes to pupils with special needs who are attending mainstream schools. It is not evident from the White Paper, however, whether or not it is proposed that visiting teachers would also be based in special schools. Visiting teachers, at present, use their home as their base. They travel to their pupils in order to provide a service and this arrangement suits the visiting teachers at present. The White Paper also proposes that multi-disciplinary consultations would take place, to which parents and students will have a right of access, to review the educational provision for the student. The involvement of both class teachers and visiting teachers in this process is vital.

As outlined in the report the visiting teachers have not had an opportunity to discuss the many issues surrounding the operation of the service since its restructuring and expansion in 1992. The need for such opportunities is more acute since the publication of the White Paper on Education and with impending legislation in education. The implementation of the proposals contained in the report regarding the
appointment of co-ordinators would facilitate discussion and would involve the visiting teachers in the development and direction of future special education provision.
T
ehe Government Report on The Education of Children who are Handicapped by Impaired Hearing, Dublin, (1972), made the following recommendations regarding the establishment of the Visiting Teacher Service:

1. managed by the Department of Education and Science;
2. that the term ‘Visiting Teachers of the Deaf’ be used to describe the teachers engaged in the work of the service;
3. that one of the teachers, as senior visiting teacher, be selected to co-ordinate the work under the general direction of the Inspector of Schools concerned with the education of hearing-impaired children;
4. that representatives from the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Health and the NRB should meet regularly to co-ordinate the work of the Visiting Teacher Service with that of the Hearing Aid and Educational Advisory Service of the NRB.

The Report also proposed that the main duties of visiting teachers of the deaf should be:

1. to provide assistance for children with a hearing impairment who are appropriately placed in ordinary schools, the assistance to include tuition in lip-reading, speech training, help in the use and maintenance of hearing aids and help with school subjects;
2. in co-operation with the regional Health Boards and the NRB to provide guidance for the parents of pre-school and school-going children with defective hearing;
3. to act as liaison officers between the schools for hearing-impaired children and the families of pupils enrolled in these schools;
4. in conjunction with the Youth Employment Advisors of the NRB to provide assistance for employers.
The Visiting Teacher Service for Children with Hearing Impairment was established by the Department of Education and Science in 1972. Currently the service consists of twenty-seven teachers who work throughout the country. The manager of the service is a Divisional Inspector of Schools.

REFERRAL PROCEDURE
When a hearing loss is identified and hearing aids are about to be fitted, the child is referred to the local visiting teacher, who then visits the child and family in the home.

VISITS TO THE HOME
The visiting teacher counsels the family and advises on the management of hearing aids and the satisfactory development of communication skills. These include spoken language skills (auditory training, lip reading, speech) and/or sign language. Home visits take place by mutual agreement on a regular basis. In addition, the visiting teacher discusses with parents the range of educational options available and makes recommendations regarding appropriate placement.

VISITS TO SCHOOL
The involvement of the visiting teacher continues throughout the career in mainstream education of a child with a hearing impairment. At present, approximately 60% of all children with a hearing impairment are enrolled in the ordinary school system. At this level, the visiting teacher continues to visit the children at home and at school on a regular basis, providing advice and guidance on the education of the child. As well as parent counselling, this includes, where appropriate, advice on hearing aids, tuition, educational evaluation and clarification of educational objectives. The visiting teacher plans the frequency of visits taking into account individual needs and other circumstances.
OTHER FUNCTIONS

The visiting teacher is available to advise personnel working with children with hearing impairment who have additional handicaps and who may be attending special school or special facilities for children with other disabilities. S/he is also available to advise staff in third level institutions and post-school training facilities which, from time to time, include young people with hearing impairment in their enrolment. Visiting teachers liaise with other professionals and agencies who provide services for children with hearing impairment in the areas of education, training and health.

For further information, or to be put in touch with the visiting teacher for any area, contact: Department of Education and Science, Primary Inspectorate Office, Irish Life Building, 1 a South Mall, Cork.
Appointments of Visiting Teachers for the Visually Impaired (1980)

The visiting teacher of the Visually Impaired Service consists of four teachers under the management of an inspector in the Special Education Inspectorate. Each teacher has responsibility for providing the following range of services in a defined geographical region:

(a) Cooperating with other professionals in a multi-disciplinary assessment team to identify and diagnose children with serious visual impairment.

(b) Counselling and advising parents on the early training and education of preschool blind and severely visually impaired children. The teacher is expected to make home visitations as frequently as possible and to spend some time working with the children in the presence of the parents.

(c) Provision of assistance in learning braille and/or the use of low vision aids to children with severe visual impairment who are placed in ordinary and second level schools, and counselling their teachers.

(d) Visiting special schools and centres for handicapped children with additional visual problems to advise members of staff on the management of visual problems.

(e) Liaising with the authorities in the special schools for the visually impaired on the enrolment of particular children from their area and providing a follow up service for children transferred from the special schools to ordinary schools.

(f) Liaising with appropriate Health Board personnel and social workers employed by the National Council for the Blind.

(g) Performing such duties in relation to visually impaired children as may be assigned by the manager of the service.

Qualifications

The person appointed will be a qualified national teacher, will be familiar with the structures of the Irish educational system, and will...
demonstrate that he/she is sensitive to the needs of parents with a handicapped child. Ideally, the appointee will have some experience with the visually impaired and will hold a recognised diploma in the teaching of the visually impaired.

If it proves impossible to recruit a teacher with a recognised qualification in the education of the Visually Handicapped, the Department will consider applications from qualified national teachers who have:

(a) a recognised qualification in the education of the mentally and physically handicapped,

and/or

(b) manifest experience of teaching children with special learning needs.

If a teacher without a recognised qualification in the education of the visually handicapped is appointed, s/he will be expected to spend a period of orientation in a special school of the visually handicapped and to accept a place on the special course on the education of the visually handicapped, University of Birmingham. Secondment on full salary will be arranged, and tuition fees and a grant towards living expenses will be paid.

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

The appointee will be on probation for one year or until satisfactory completion of the University of Birmingham course, whichever is later. Salary and conditions of service will be those appropriate for national teachers. The appointment will carry a Grade A Allowance. Travelling expenses and subsistence allowance will be paid where appropriate at the rates prevailing in the Public Service.

Completed application forms, with copies of inspectors’ reports should be sent to the Department of Education and Science, Special Education Section, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1, not later than Friday 7th March 1980.
Note 4

Visiting Teacher Service for Children with Certain Types of Handicap

JOB DESCRIPTION

This is a copy of the job description for all visiting teachers appointed to the service since 1992.

1. The Work

GENERAL

The visiting teacher shall:

(a) Be directly responsible to a manager of the Visiting Teacher Service who is an Inspector of Schools.

(b) Be allocated work by his/her manager who shall take cognisance of the specialist qualifications and experience of each teacher in the allocation of work.

(c) Be based in Dublin or in other designated geographical areas which may be altered from time to time.

(d) Have responsibility for children with certain handicaps in his/her district, including children with a mental, physical, emotional, hearing and visual handicap.

(e) Be required to maintain regular contact with the parents of all children with a handicap in his/her care.

(f) Use public transport where feasible, or his/her own car where necessary, for the efficient delivery of the service.

PRESCHOOL

The visiting teacher shall:

(a) Be required to work in close harmony with parents of particular preschool children with handicaps visiting their homes and/or meeting them in groups to counsel, advise and offer guidance in matters pertaining to their education.

(b) Give regular tuition to these preschool children, particularly in the areas of language and self-care, and assist them in the acquisition of perceptual, cognitive, social and communication skills. The needs of preschool hearing impaired children with a profound degree of hearing impairment are a particular priority.

SCHOOL
The visiting teacher shall:
(a) Visit ordinary schools on a regular basis to give tuition both within and outside the classroom to children with a handicap.
(b) Work in close harmony with the principal teachers, class teachers and remedial teachers giving advice and guidance on curriculum adaptation, on specialist teaching equipment and materials, on evaluation and assessment and on specific approaches to cognitive, linguistic, physical, social and emotional development.

OTHER
The visiting teacher shall:
(a) be available to advise personnel working with children with handicaps including those attending special schools.
(b) be available to advise staV in third level institutions and post-school training facilities which may have young people with handicaps in their enrolment.
(c) liaise with professionals from other agencies, such as the NRE, the Health Boards and Voluntary Bodies providing assessment, advisory care, training and placement services.
(d) provide such advice and information for the Managers of the service as is necessary for its eYcient management.

2. Educational and other qualifications

In order to be eligible to apply for these posts a teacher must:
(a) be
   (i) a fully qualified National School Teacher, or
   (ii) a Primary School Teacher trained abroad who is already recognised by the Department as qualified to teach in Special National Schools;
(b) hold the Diploma in Special Education or the Diploma for Teachers of the Deaf or the Diploma for Teachers of the Visually Impaired or their equivalent.
(c) have completed his/her period of probation.
(d) have at least two years satisfactory teaching service in a special school or special class/unit/service for children with handicaps.

3. Training
A newly appointed visiting teacher will be required to undergo a period of training in order to become acquainted with the various responsibilities.

4. Pay and conditions

There is a common basic salary scale for all teachers.

In addition, the visiting teacher receives an allowance equal to that of a Grade A Post.

Travelling and Subsistence allowances will be paid within the rates authorised by the Minister for Finance. However, the visiting teacher will be required to provide the most efficient service possible within the constraints of a budget.

Note 5

Provision of Visiting Teacher Service to Children Attending Private Schools

It has been decided that the following arrangements should apply:

(a) all children currently attending private schools and receiving the Visiting Teacher Service in those schools shall continue to receive the service,

(b) the two Down Syndrome children on the original list of 44 submitted by the Down Syndrome Association shall receive a Visiting Teacher Service in their private school, and

(c) henceforth, the support of the Visiting Teacher Service for a child attending a private school shall only be provided outside of school hours.

Special Education Section, 4 March 1993
The Visiting Teacher Service for Special Needs
INTO REPORT (2000)

The Visiting Teacher Service was first established in the 1970s as a support service for children with hearing impairment who were attending mainstream schools. A service for children with visual impairment was established a few years later. DES policy towards increasing integration in the mid-1980s led to a Department of Education and Science decision to restructure the service and to extend the Visiting Teacher service to cater for children with mental handicap notably children with Down Syndrome. In 1992, a new Visiting Teacher Service was established, incorporating the Visiting Teacher Service for the Hearing Impaired, the Visiting Teacher Service for the Visually Impaired and a new service for children of other handicaps.

It has become increasingly evident that the restructuring of the service along with the increasing numbers of special needs resource teachers for children with special needs being appointed has implications for the future operation and direction of the service. With a view to examining these implications the INTO established a committee comprising representatives of the Visiting Teacher Service and the CEC. Views of all the visiting teachers were sought through the issuing of a questionnaire, and these views in addition to the work of the committee are included in this report (Subsection 1). A questionnaire was also issued to schools requesting details of the level of support services available to them (Subsection 2).

The Department of Education and Science originally proposed in 1992 that the restructured service would operate on a trial basis. The Department of Education and Science is responsible for ensuring
the integration of children from special classes into mainstream classes. The Department would remind schools that arrangements must be made for the appropriate integration of children with special educational needs attending special classes into mainstream classes according to their level of needs and attainments. Evidence will be required from time to time that such is happening in respect of individual children.

2. New Procedures

The Chairperson of the Board of Management of a school wishing to establish a special class to cater for children with special educational needs arising from any of the above disabilities should write to the Inspector stating that the school is seeking to establish a special class for children with special educational needs arising from a particular disability and requesting that the Inspector visit the school to review the case for such an appointment.

INFORMATION REQUIRED BY THE INSPECTOR

The school must have the following information available to the Inspector when s/he calls:

1. Type of special class being sought;
2. Name and Date of Birth of each child;
3. Child’s current class level and attainments;
4. Specialist report, e.g. psychological reports or, where appropriate, other reports audiological, speech and language therapy;
5. Confirmation that the children concerned are within reasonable commuting distance of the school – mileage from home to school should be detailed for each child;
6. Confirmation that the school has received parental agreement regarding enrolment in the special class in respect of each child;
7. Confirmation that suitable accommodation is available or can be made available in the event of the establishment of a special class.

CRITERIA FOR APPOINTMENT

Initial criteria to establish a special class include:

1. A sufficient number of eligible children;
2. Availability of suitable accommodation;
1. Distance from home to school for the children concerned is reasonable for commuting purposes;
1. Whether other suitable provision is available in the school and/or in the local area for the children in question.

NOTIFICATION TO SCHOOLS

The Inspector will evaluate the information made available and subsequently notify schools if s/he intends to forward the application to a relevant senior Inspector for further consideration. This should not be construed that the applications have been approved. Alternatively, the Inspector will notify the school concerned that the application has failed to meet the initial criteria for a special class. [In this event, the Inspector may advise the school and the Department in regard to the provision of a full or part-time resource teacher.]

School Authorities may appeal such a decision to the Special Education Section of this Department.

The Department will notify schools when a class has been sanctioned. Schools should allow a minimum of two months’ processing time after the Inspector has advised the school that the application has been forwarded to the relevant senior Inspector. School, which have not heard from the Department within this time, should contact the Special Education Section at the address below.

APPOINTMENT OF A PERMANENT TEACHER

All posts are sanctioned on a temporary basis initially. Posts are sanctioned on a permanent basis when the relevant pupil-teacher-ratio has been achieved in the special class for two consecutive quarters and arrangements have been put into effect for appropriate integration into mainstream classes. The relevant quarterly enrolment dates are the end of March, June, September and December.

The Chairperson of a school seeking a permanent appointment should write accordingly to the School Inspector giving details of the relevant enrolments.

Enquiries about this circular should be made to:
Special Education Section 1
Department of Education and Science
Cornamaddy
Athlone
Co Westmeath
Telephone No. (0902) 74621 or (01) 873 4700
Fax No. (0902) 76939
that sufficient teachers within each specialist area are recruited into the service with a view to overing a comprehensive Visiting Teacher Service for all pupils with special needs. The Department of Education and Science also proposed, as part of the expansion and restructuring of the Visiting Teacher Service that a Special Advisory Group, comprised of representatives of the visiting teachers, the INTO and the Department of Education and Science be established in order to keep the operation of the service under review during the trial period and to advise the Department on any adjustments that would be necessary for the more effective delivery of the service. The increasing numbers of special needs resource teachers currently being appointed makes the establishment of such an advisory committee all the more timely. Special needs resource teachers should be represented on such a committee. An advisory committee would provide a forum in which issues pertaining to the operation and development of both the Visiting Teacher Service and the Special Needs Resource Teacher Service could be discussed and where problems and difficulties can be resolved. An advisory committee has not, to date, been established nor has the operation of the Visiting Teacher Service been reviewed (May, 2000).

**Visiting Teacher: Current Role**

The Visiting Teacher Service provides a support service to children with special needs who are integrated into mainstream schools, to their parents, to their class teachers and/or special needs resource teachers.

This support service is provided by the visiting teachers to parents and children at pre-school, primary, post-primary and, in some cases, third level. The visiting teachers generally visit the children in their schools. In the case of pre-school children visiting teachers visit them in their homes. Children who do not attend school may also receive home tuition, normally during regular school hours. Children enrolled in special schools and classes are also entitled to a support service if required. A number of young people with hearing and/or visual impairment attending third level institutions or training workshops are also in receipt of a support service.

At present, the caseload of each individual visiting teacher divers according to the severity of disability concerned, the variety of disabilities involved, the geographical location of the pupils and the
frequency with which visits are expected. Results from the INTO questionnaire issued in January 2000 indicate that there is a wide variation in the numbers of children that visiting teachers have on their caseloads, with caseloads ranging from 16 up to 100 children.

Responses to the INTO questionnaire indicate that the majority of visiting teachers are of the view that the current dual role of the visiting teacher in relation to the provision of some direct teaching, and their advisory role to teachers and parents should be continued and developed. While the visiting teachers who responded to the questionnaire expressed a preference to maintain the direct teaching aspect of their role, it is clear that at present there is a need to develop further their advisory role for class teachers, curricular subject teachers at second level, special needs resource teachers and parents. The INTO supports the visiting teacher role suggested in the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC 1993) which outlined the following role for visiting teachers.

“The emphasis in their work also would be on direct teaching, together with providing an advisory and support service for both teachers and parents. They would as necessary, liaise closely with class, remedial, resource and other visiting teachers.” (p.171)

IN SUMMARY

1. There are 40 visiting teachers employed at present.
2. Specialisms include hearing impairment, visual impairment and special education.
3. Children catered for include those with hearing impairment, visual impairment, Down Syndrome and physical disability.
4. The DES describes the current role/s of the visiting teacher as working in close harmony with pre-school children and their parents, working with principal teachers, class teachers and remedial teachers in an advisory capacity and also giving tuition both within/outside the classroom to children with a handicap.
5. To be deployed as a visiting teacher a teacher must be a fully qualified national school teacher, who has been probated, or a primary school teacher trained abroad who is already recognised by the Department as qualified to teach in Special National Schools, and hold the Diploma in Special Education or the Diploma for Teachers of the Deaf or the Diploma for Teachers of the Visually Impaired or their equivalent. They must also have at least two years
teaching service in a special school or special class/unit/service for children with special needs.

A newly appointed visiting teacher is required to undergo training in order to become acquainted with the various responsibilities.

**Special Needs Resource Teacher: Current Role**

Special needs resource teachers are appointed as assistant teachers in primary schools. They may serve a single school or a cluster of schools where children with special needs are enrolled. They primarily engage in direct teaching of the pupils concerned in addition to providing some advice and support to the class teacher and to the child’s parents.

Special needs resource teachers are in a position to provide a more frequent direct teaching service to pupils as their caseloads normally consist of approximately 14 pupils in a single school or in a small cluster of schools.

Special needs resource teachers also liaise with other professionals, including the visiting teachers, where appropriate. The scope of the special needs resource teacher to develop such liaison is often less than that of the visiting teacher.

IN SUMMARY

- During the last year, the number of special needs resource teachers for special needs has increased to over 400.
- It is the role of the special needs resource teachers to provide additional teaching to children with special needs who have been assessed by a psychologist and for whom support was sought from the Department of Education and Science.
- Children who have traditionally received support services from the Visiting Teacher Service have sometimes been included by schools on their application forms for the provision of a special needs resource teacher service, though replies to the questionnaire (Subsection A) indicate that this is not as significant a problem as may have been anticipated.
- Any primary teacher who has been probated may be deployed as a special needs resource teacher for special needs.
- Special needs resource teachers are eligible to apply for the Diploma in Special Education in St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra.
- Some special needs resource teachers deal with a variety of children...
with disabilities.

1 Special needs resource teachers will need professional development and up-skilling in the area of special education.

1 There are over 700 special needs assistants both in special schools and mainstream schools.

**Support for Class Teachers**

The INTO is of the view that the burden placed on class teachers by even the most able and the least demanding child with special needs has never been sufficiently recognised, particularly in terms of class size and access to special needs resource teachers on an hours basis only. Neither is access to a Visiting Teacher Service guaranteed to all pupils with special needs who are enrolled in mainstream schools. Hence, it is often the class teacher who teaches the child with special needs for the greater part of the day.

So far, the Department of Education and Science has refused to adjust class size when children with special needs are enrolled, which means that class teachers are expected to cope with each child with special needs in addition to a normal class workload and without professional support. Many class teachers do not have a qualification in special education or experience of dealing with children with a variety of special needs.

Provision of special needs resource teachers for children with special needs has risen sharply with just over 400 teachers currently appointed. In many cases the special needs resource teachers do not have a special education qualification or experience with special needs children. Any probated teacher can apply for a special needs resource teaching position. These teachers need to be supported in their role.

The expertise which currently exists in the Visiting Teacher Service is a resource existing in the system which is perfectly placed to provide such support to classroom teachers, curricular subject teachers at second level and to special needs resource teachers.

It is evident from the questionnaires received that the majority of visiting teachers hold a specialist qualification in relation to the teaching of the deaf. Some teachers hold a qualification in visual impairment. There are few visiting teachers who held the Diploma in Special Education only.

The visiting teacher should not work in isolation from the class teacher but as part of a team. Depending on the needs of the child,
the visiting teacher may remove a particular child for individual
tuition. However, this should be done as part of the overall
programme of work with the child which is being carried out by the
class teacher, and a special needs resource teacher based on guide-
lines and advice provided by the visiting teacher.

Individual programmes for pupils with special needs should be
continuously reviewed by the visiting teacher, the class teacher,
curricular subject teacher and the special needs resource teacher in
consultation with one another.

Children with special needs who are attending mainstream schools
should have access to both the Visiting Teacher Service and the
Special Needs Resource Teacher Service. A team approach needs to
be developed between the class teacher, the special needs resource
teacher who teaches the child two or three times weekly depending
on nature of disability, and the visiting teacher who visits the child
either weekly, monthly or each term depending on the nature of the
disability. This team approach with class teachers and special needs
resource teachers is based on establishing a relationship which
promotes mutual respect and a three way exchange of information,
ideas and programme suggestions. A team approach may also
involve other professionals as required such as speech therapists,
social workers, audiologists and psychologists.

Information Available to Teachers and Parents

Parents of special needs children can be very vulnerable. Very often,
one of their primary concerns is the appropriate educational place-
ment for their child. They need information and advice which enable
them to make informed choices, for example, the type of school best
suited to the child at particular stages of his/her life. They need
advice in relation to the most appropriate placement at pre-school
level, primary, post-primary and even third level. They also need
professional support in relation to interventions which are of beneW

to the child and also in relation to being updated about modern devel-
opments in technology for example, cochlear implants etc.

Many of the responses to the INTO questionnaire referred to the
fact that the visiting teacher is the professional best placed to
provide this ongoing support and advice. The visiting teacher is the
only constant professional in the child’s life from pre-school to the
end of second or third level education. The visiting teacher can
provide the valuable link between home and school.

**Co-ordination of the Visiting Teachers' Service**

As part of its original proposals to expand the Visiting Teacher Service, the Department of Education and Science envisaged that the visiting teachers would meet on a regular basis and that an annual conference of the national service would be held. To date, neither event has occurred, resulting in a situation where visiting teachers work very much in isolation with occasional contact with their managers and limited informal contact with colleagues. Many of the comments received from visiting teachers indicate that there is a great need among visiting teachers to meet their colleagues, to discuss professional issues and to share their common concerns and expertise. Such meetings had been the practice prior to the restructuring and expansion of the service. Class teachers and special needs resource teachers also need access to professional advice and assistance. The organisation of an annual national conference and regional seminars and the implementation of a programme of incarere development would provide a suitable opportunity to meet the various needs of visiting teachers, special needs resource teachers and class teachers.

Given the length of time that many teachers are in the Visiting Teacher Service, there is no doubt that a wealth of expertise has been accumulated by the individuals concerned, both in terms of specialist qualifications and in terms of length of expertise in special education. A mechanism needs to be developed which would enable this expertise to be shared not only among the Visiting Teachers Service but also among special needs resource teachers and classroom teachers.

The INTO has continuously sought the appointment of six regional co-ordinators to the Visiting Teacher Service to enable the service to be co-ordinated and to provide promotional opportunities within the service. With the increasing number of special needs resource teachers being appointed, leading to the situation at times where two types of teaching support services are available in schools, the need for such overall co-ordination is now acute. Therefore, the INTO welcomes the announcement by the Minister for Education and Science on 15
December 1999 of a budget of €5.40 million to be allocated for this purpose and looks forward to its implementation.

A precedent already exists where a National Education Officer has been appointed as part of the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers. The National Education Officer performs a co-ordinating function for the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers and has responsibility for organising an annual conference and for the development of an in-service programme for the Support Teachers of Travellers. The Support Teacher/Teacher Counsellor Scheme along with the Home School Community Liaison Scheme also have had National Co-ordinators appointed to them.

The National Co-ordinator could also have a role in the following areas:

1. carrying out research relevant to the development of the support services for children with special needs;
2. the organisation of an induction programme for newly appointed visiting teachers;
3. the organisation of an induction programme for newly appointed special needs resource teachers;
4. the development of internal communication mechanisms within the Visiting Teacher Service and the Special Needs Resource Teacher Service;
5. support services in general;
6. the co-ordination of equipment supply;
7. liaison with the Department of Education and Science concerning negotiated procedures;
8. liaison with other agencies and institutions as required;
9. the design and upkeep of a national database on children with disabilities.

The National Co-ordinator would be supported in this work by a team of Regional Co-ordinators (see below) as appropriate. It is not envisaged that the National Co-ordinator would have a management function in relation to his/her colleagues.

**Regional Co-ordinators**

The INTO reiterates its demand for the appointment of Regional Co-ordinators to special education. The Regional Co-ordinators could
assist the National Co-ordinator in the development of an incareer programme for the Visiting Teacher Service and special needs resource teacher service and in the organisation of regional seminars for both visiting teachers and special needs resource teachers. In appointing the Regional Co-ordinators the Department should ensure that at least one teacher within each specialist area is appointed, ie. visual impairment, hearing impairment and general learning disabilities. This would ensure the availability of expertise pertaining to each specialist area. Each Regional Co-ordinator could therefore act as an advisor under the direction of the National Co-ordinator to his/her colleagues on professional matters.

**Specialist Support**

Children with Autism or Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are increasingly being educated in special classes in mainstream schools. The teachers of these children, both in mainstream and in the special classes also need access to professionals who have expertise in this area. A programme of professional development needs to be put in place to develop this expertise within the system. Limited opportunities for children with hearing impairment who wish to learn sign language, and limited opportunities for children with visual impairment who wish to learn braille.

There is a need to retain the existing specialisms within the Visiting Teacher Service so that children with hearing impairment whose parents wish them to learn sign language have adequate opportunities to learn it. Children with visual impairment also need access to adequate opportunities to learn braille. To deny them adequate access to a specialist in these fields is to deny them access to valuable tools for communication and learning.

**Post-Primary and Third Level**

The situation pertaining to the service at post-primary level is less than satisfactory. There is a need to inform schools of the work of the Visiting Teacher Service and to open up communication between post-primary teachers and visiting teachers. There is an additional need, at this level too, to provide a career guidance service for pupils with special needs. Due to constraints such as caseload numbers and lack of career guidance training many visiting teachers believe that
pupils with special needs are not receiving adequate guidance concerning further education or career options.

There is an increasing number of pupils with special needs attending third level institutions. As a result, the visiting teachers have also begun to provide an advisory service at third level. Typical problems which arise for students at third level concern lecture note taking, library facilities and the need for extra tuition. Visiting teachers who have worked with and supported students throughout their years in the educational system are in an ideal position to continue their support and to advise the educational authorities at third level regarding the students’ needs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The recent passing of the Education Act (1998) establishes in law the state’s commitment to the right of all students, regardless of their personal circumstances, to access to and participation in the education system, according to their potential and ability. The achievement of full equality of access, participation and benefit for all students will entail positive intervention in favour of students who experience particular difficulties. The Visiting Teacher Service is often the first educational intervention offered to children with special needs, in particular children with hearing impairment and/or visual impairment. The provision of early educational intervention must continue as a vital resource to both the parents and children concerned. Visiting teachers should also continue to provide a support service to pupils with special needs who opt to attend mainstream primary and post-primary schools. They should work in consultation with the class teachers concerned and with special needs resource teachers where appropriate. The Report of the Special Education Committee (SERC 1993) recommended that a continuum of services should be provided for children with special educational needs, ranging from full-time education in ordinary classes, with additional support as may be necessary to full time education in special schools. The Visiting Teacher Service remains a vital link in this continuum.

The SERC (1993) report also recommended that all primary and post-primary schools should have access to the services of support teachers, ie. remedial/learning support/special needs resource or visiting teachers, as appropriate to their needs. The need for such
additional specialist support will continue to increase as the trend towards the integration of pupils with special needs into mainstream schools continue.

As outlined in the report the visiting teachers have not had an opportunity to discuss the many issues surrounding the operation of the service since its restructuring and expansion in 1992. The need for such opportunity is acute with the appointment of increasing numbers of special needs resource teachers in the system and the increasing numbers of children with special needs attending mainstream schools. The implementation of the proposals contained in the report regarding the establishment of an advisory committee and the appointment of co-ordinators would facilitate discussion and would involve the visiting teachers in the development and direction of future special education provision.

The INTO recommends

1. that the Department of Education and Science appoint an Advisory Committee to review the overall operation of Teaching Support Services for children with special needs and also the current operation of the Visiting Teacher Service, as a matter of urgency;
2. that the advisory/steering committee comprise of representatives from the Department of Education and Science, the Visiting Teacher Service, Special Needs Resource Teacher Service and the INTO;
3. that the current continuum of service provided by the Visiting Teacher Service, at pre-school, primary, post-primary and third level should continue to be enhanced and developed;
4. that access to the Visiting Teacher Service be available to all children with special needs as required, regardless of educational placement, until the child leaves the formal educational system or reaches compulsory leaving age;
5. that expertise which currently exists in the Visiting Teacher Service be considered in providing support to classroom teachers, curricular subject teachers at second level and also to support special needs resource teachers;
6. that this role of the visiting teacher in providing a valuable link between home and school be further developed;
7. that a whole team approach be adopted by visiting teachers, special needs resource teachers and class teachers/curricular subject teachers to the education of children with special needs as appropriate;
8. that visiting teachers should be given responsibility for developing an appropriate in-career development programme, organising consultative conferences and developing communication mechanisms both within the Visiting Teacher Service and the Special Needs Resource Teacher Service;
1. the immediate appointment of a National Co-ordinator of Special Education Support Services to act as an advisor for the visiting teachers, and to special needs resource teachers, to perform a co-ordinating and leadership function and to organise conferences and incareer development programmes as appropriate;

1. the immediate appointment of six Regional Co-ordinators to Special Education Support Services;

1. that the existing specialisms within the Visiting Teacher Service be maintained and developed so that children with hearing impairment and visual impairment have adequate opportunities to learn sign language and braille as appropriate to their needs;

1. that comprehensive programmes of professional development be put in place to develop expertise within the system in relation to autism and autistic spectrum disorders;

1. that opportunities for career guidance training be given to visiting teachers, in order to better provide a service for children with special needs attending second and third level institutions.
Subsection 1

Summary of Responses to Questionnaire to Visiting Teachers for Special Needs (2000)

Questionnaires were issued to all visiting teachers for special needs (40) in spring 2000, in order to ascertain their views in the context of the emerging resource teaching support service. A total of 29 surveys were returned.

Specialist Qualifications

It is evident from the responses that the visiting teachers have an array of specialist qualifications and a wide range of experience and expertise among them. The majority of respondents indicated that they had a specialist qualification in hearing impairment. A small number indicated that they had a qualification in visual impairment. Two respondents indicated that they had the Diploma in Special Education only. The majority of respondents were appointed to the service between 1975 and 1985, but there are also a significant number who were appointed to the service between 1985 and 1995. There were only two respondents who indicated that they had just been appointed recently (September 1999).

Caseloads and Categories of Disability

Responses received indicate that there is a wide variation in the numbers of children that visiting teachers have on their caseloads, with caseloads ranging from 16 up to 100 children.

The majority of teachers visit between 10 and 20 children on a weekly basis, though some visited as few as seven, and one visiting teacher reported visiting up to 40 children each week. In almost all cases the majority of the children in the caseloads of the Visiting Teacher Service are children with hearing impairment. A few visiting teachers had a majority of children with visual impairment.

Children with Down Syndrome were also provided with a support service by the visiting teachers, though, such children constituted a
small proportion of most teachers’ caseloads. However, there was one noticeable exception where one teacher’s caseload comprised 24 children with Down Syndrome, 6 hearing impaired and once child with visual impairment. One visiting teacher indicated that children with Down Syndrome in her caseload had already been handed over to the special needs resource teacher concerned.

They majority of visiting teachers travelled between 100 and 300 miles weekly, in order to provide a support service to the pupils in their caseload. The number of miles travelled ranged from 90 to 1,000 miles weekly.

**Role of Visiting Teacher vs the Role of the Special Needs Resource Teacher**

According to the responses there were strong views among the visiting teachers that all children benefited from additional support. However, if a choice had to be made between a child receiving one service or another, the majority of answers indicated that the needs of children with hearing impairment and/or visual impairment would be best served by the services of a visiting teacher given their specialist needs and the specialised qualifications and expertise of the visiting teacher. In their view children with visual and/or hearing impairment have particular, specific needs in relation to signing or braille which it was felt should be addressed by a specialist in the field in addition to other support. However, a significant number of respondents stated that children benefited from having access to both visiting teachers and special needs resource teachers. The view was expressed that children and parents benefited from and needed access to a visiting teacher.

However, the number of children who have access to both types of support is very low. The visiting teachers reported that no children or only a small number (1, 2 or 3 children) received support from both the visiting teacher and the special needs resource teacher. As visiting teachers do not visit all the pupils on their caseload every week the degree of overlap between the two services was not significant. Pupils receiving a weekly visit were the pupils who had been assessed by the visiting teacher as requiring 1–2 hours weekly of intensive support.

A significant number of visiting teachers reported that support from a special needs resource teacher only would not be sufficient in
any case. A small number of visiting teachers stated that children with mild hearing loss or children with Down Syndrome who have no additional difficulties, may benefit from the intensive direct teaching type service of a special needs resource teacher only.

The majority of visiting teachers wish to see their present role to be continued and expanded. For example, many visiting teachers stated they should have a role in providing support and advice to special needs resource teachers. This aspect of their role was considered by many as being particularly important at present when many of the newly appointed special needs resource teachers had not had access to professional development in special education or experience of working with special needs children. Many respondents indicated the importance of developing teamwork, between the class teacher, the special needs resource teacher and the visiting teacher.

All the respondents indicated that their direct teaching role should continue. The majority of replies emphasised the importance of the specialised input for children with hearing impairment and/or visual impairment. Areas such as speech training, lip reading, teaching of braille, language programmes, monitoring of equipment were all seen as areas where the specialist input of the visiting teacher was essential.

Support to the Class Teacher

All respondents were in favour of providing support to the class teacher. Visiting teachers saw the support role to the class teacher as being crucial and would like to be involved more in fulfilling this role. The class teacher was seen by many as the key player in the integration of children with special needs as many of the children were taught for the greater part of the day by the class teacher. The visiting teacher would be in the position to advise the teacher in relation to pedagogical and/or technical concerns. It was the view of the visiting teachers that class teachers needed advice and support in relation to language level, seating, lighting, lip reading, hearing aids, and in relation to adjusting size of text and readability of text.

Support to Parents

All the replies received indicated that the visiting teacher was the key person that parents get to know from early diagnosis of their child’s
learning disability right through until completion of formal schooling. This aspect of the role was seen to be vital and according to the visiting teachers needed to be expanded. Many replies emphasised the importance of parents as the prime educators of their child, and that parents of children with special needs were entitled to advice and support in relation to the education of their children. It was considered that there would be a key professional in place to advise and support parents of special needs children from pre-school right through to second and third level. Some respondents indicated that there was a need for training in career guidance, in relation to their advisory role at second and third level.

**Change and Development**

The changes perceived by the visiting teachers indicate that

1. there are more children with a wider diversity of special needs presenting in mainstream schools;
2. the numbers of students with special needs attending second level schools is increasing;
3. there is a wider range of professionals requesting advice;
4. parents are seeking more information, support and counselling;
5. there have been technological developments;
6. that the number of managers has increased but that there was no overall co-ordination of the service.

The isolated nature of the job makes it unappealing to many. Some visiting teachers found that the lack of proper management structures coupled with the isolated nature of the job increased stress levels. For some visiting teachers the long distances to be covered and delays in travel added to the level of stress. Others felt that the lack of a co-ordinated inservice, support structures and the little contact with management added to their stress levels. One teacher commented that stress was not caused by the day-to-day work, but was contributed to by the changes imposed without consultation, the lack of a proper management structure, and the different views held by different managers regarding the role. A small minority indicated that it was no more stressful than any teaching job.

**Concluding Comments**

It is clear from the general comments of the visiting teachers that
there is a need for ongoing professional development for both visiting teachers and special needs resource teachers. Many responses highlighted the need for visiting teachers to constantly keep abreast of new trends. With increasing numbers of children with special needs continuing to second and third level education this aspect of the role needs to be expanded.

Many of the responses indicated that there was a considerable demand that the Service would remain the same. The majority of replies received indicated that children with hearing and/or visual impairment needed specialist input and would continue to do so and that there is a need to maintain the specialisms within the service. Many responses indicated the need for a support structure for the visiting teachers in the service. Most visiting teachers saw the appointment of a Co-ordinator to the service as being important. The co-ordinator would have responsibility for training, ongoing support and advice to the visiting teachers and possibly the special needs resource teachers.

Special needs resource teachers needed support in fulfilling their present role. However, there was also recognition that as special needs resource teachers continued to develop these skills and expertise, this need may lessen in the future.

The questionnaire issued to the visiting teachers outlined the following gaps in the existing service:

1. Limited support and professional development opportunities for special needs resource teachers/mainstream teachers involved in the integration of children with special needs.
2. No overall co-ordination of support services for children with special needs.
3. Limited information available both to teachers and to parents in relation to special needs.
4. No overall co-ordination of Visiting Teacher Service.
5. No formal structures for collegial support for visiting teachers.
6. No specialism in teaching children with Autism or Autistic Spectrum Disorders.
7. Limited opportunities for children with hearing impairment who wish to learn sign language.
8. Limited opportunities for children with visual impairment who wish to learn braille.
9. Lack of support for children with special needs transferring to second level/third level.
1. Difficulties at post-primary and third level.
Subsection 2

Resources for Children with Special Education Needs
Responses to Questionnaire - INTO Report 2000

The purpose of the questionnaire which was sent to all mainstream primary schools in January 2002 was to ascertain:
a) what resources schools had applied for in order to support children with special needs who were integrated in mainstream schools;
b) what resources had been made available to mainstream schools to support the integration of pupils with special needs.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN ASSESSED AS HAVING A SPECIAL NEED
A total of 1,583 (90%) schools responded to this question. A total of 259 (16%) schools stated that no pupil had been assessed as having a special need. Twenty one schools (1.3%) stated that over 30 children had been assessed as having a special need.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No of Children with Special Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>259</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>880</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>039</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>038</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>021</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>30+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN NEED OF ASSESSMENT
A total of 1,465 schools (84%) responded to this question. One fifth of the schools that responded to this question stated that there were no children awaiting assessment and one stated that there were 52 children awaiting assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No of Children Awaiting Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>295</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>702</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>277</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11-15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 1,607 (92%) schools responded to the question asking had they applied for the establishment of a special class. The response was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1,405</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those that stated that they had applied for a special class, and responded to the question on whether or not they had been granted a special class, 136 (74%) had been granted a special class and 47 schools (26%) had not been granted a special class.

A total of 342 schools (21%) responded to the question asking how long they had been waiting for a response and responded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Waiting Time for a Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1-3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13-18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24-36 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10+ years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 1,637 schools (93%) responded to the question asking had they applied for a special needs resource teacher. They responded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>717</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those that did apply for a special needs resource teacher, they indicated that they were granted the following provision in response to their request.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>% who applied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No provision</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulltime SN RT</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared SN RT</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time SN RT</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulltime SNA</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time SNA</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SN RT = Special needs resource teacher  SNA = Special needs assistant

A total of 668 (41%) schools responded to the question regarding the length of time they were waiting for a response. They responded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Waiting Time for a Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>145</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1-3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>023</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13-18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24-36 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>031</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>007</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Still waiting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CLUSTERS

A total of 510 schools responded to the question regarding the number of schools that were in the cluster of a shared special needs resource teacher. They responded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools in Cluster</th>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Now included in this document; Part 2.
PART-TIME SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCE TEACHERS

A total of 299 schools responded to the question regarding the number of hours per week that were sanctioned if a part-time special needs resource teacher had been allocated to the school. They responded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No of Hour Allocated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 228 schools responded to the question concerning their ability to appoint a qualified primary school teacher for the part-time post. They responded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 47 schools, out of 83 that responded to the question, indicated that they appointed an unqualified person.

SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS

A total of 1,556 schools (89%) responded to the question asking had they applied for a special needs assistant. They responded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1,058</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those that had applied, 192 schools (39%) stated that they were granted a full-time special needs assistant, and 126 schools (25%) stated that they were granted a part-time special needs assistant.
Those that were granted part-time special needs assistants were allocated the following hours:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No of Hour Allocated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 79 schools stated that they appointed a person with qualifications and 70 schools stated that they appointed a person without qualifications.

A total of 278 schools responded to the question regarding the length of time they were awaiting a response. They responded as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Schools</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Waiting Time for Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1-3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13-18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2-36 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4-6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9-15 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INTO (2000)
CIRCULAR TO BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT AND PRINCIPAL TEACHERS OF NATIONAL SCHOOLS

APPLICATIONS FOR FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME RESOURCE TEACHER SUPPORT TO ADDRESS THE SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

1. Introduction

This Circular replaces certain procedural elements of Circular 8/99. The post of Resource Teacher is an additional post allocated to assist a school or cluster of schools in providing an education which meets the needs of children assessed as having disabilities. Under the direction of the relevant Principal, the role of the Resource Teacher is to provide additional teaching support for these children who have been fully integrated into mainstream schools and who need such support. In addition, s/he should advise and liaise with other teachers, parents and relevant professionals in the children’s interest.

This is a whole school effort and not the responsibility of the resource teacher alone because these children are fully integrated into a mainstream school and will spend most of his/her time with the mainstream teacher.

2. The role of a Resource Teacher

A Resource Teacher assists schools in providing support for children with special educational needs arising from disability by:

(a) Assessing and recording child needs and progress;
(b) Setting specific, time-related targets for each child and agreeing these with the class teacher and principal;
(c) Direct teaching of the children, either in a separate room or within the mainstream class;
(d) Team-teaching – so long as the children concerned are deriving benefit from it;
(e) Advising class teachers in regard to adapting the curriculum, teaching strategies, suitable textbooks, use of Information
Technology and suitable software and a range of other related matters;

(f) Meeting and advising parents, when necessary, accompanied by the class teacher, as necessary;

(g) Short meetings with other relevant professionals, in the children’s interest – e.g. psychologists, speech and language therapists, visiting teachers, special school or special class teachers.

3. **How are Resource Teacher posts allocated?**

Resource teachers are allocated where there are a number of children with special educational needs arising from a disability who are fully integrated into mainstream national schools where there are no other adequate support teaching resources available to the children. Child eligibility and degree of need are established following consideration of reports on assessments carried out by relevant professionals.

Each child is given a weighting which is determined by the nature and degree of disability and the current pupil-teacher-ratio for that particular disability. For example a child with a mild general learning disability would count as 1/11th of a teacher post. A child who is profoundly deaf would count as 1/6th of a teacher post. The current pupil teacher ratios for each disability are listed in Appendix 1.

Schools should read Appendix II when actively considering applying for a resource teacher appointment.

Resource teacher posts may be sanctioned on a full-time basis – either in a single school or in a cluster of schools – provided there are sufficient children with special educational needs arising from a disability to warrant a full-time post. Alternatively, part-time hours may be sanctioned to provide support teaching for individual children where there are insufficient children with special educational needs to warrant the allocation of a full time post or of a second full-time post.

4. **How should an application be made for resource teacher support either on a full-time or part-time basis?**

4.1 Completed applications forms SER1 and SER2 should be sent directly to Special Education 1, Department of Education and Science, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co Westmeath.

4.2 In some cases, individual schools seeking resource teacher
support may already be in receipt of an allocation of such support. In such situations, the Department will sanction a full-time post to replace the school’s part-time hour allocations:
4.2.1 Where the total hours involved, including those now being sought, amount to 22 hours or more, and
4.2.2 Where the hours allocated to the school are not being delivered by way of a full-time post which is shared with other school.
4.3 Alternatively, a school seeking an allocation of part-time hours resource teacher support may wish to enter into a sharing arrangement with adjacent schools, with a view to creating a full-time post through combining part-time hours allocations. The Department will sanction a full-time post to replace the part-time hour allocations:
4.3.1 Where the total hours involved, including those now being sought, amount to 20 hours or more, and
4.3.2 Where the hours already allocated to the schools are not being delivered by way of a full-time post which is operating on a shared basis.
Where it is proposed to create a full-time post on a shared basis through combining part-time hours in a number of schools, the Principal making the application is required to:
1 Confirm that the authorities of all the participating schools are in agreement with the sharing arrangement.
1 Identify the base school for the purpose of the sharing arrangement and confirm that all the participating schools are in agreement with this arrangement.
1 Specify the schools involved in the sharing arrangement.
1 Specify the existing level of resource teacher support in place in each of the participating schools on the basis of which the creation of a full-time post on a shared basis is now proposed.
4.4 Departures from the requirements of 4.2.1 and 4.3.2 above will be considered where supported by a separate submission from the schools involved in the current sharing arrangement and on the basis of agreed alternative proposals endorsed by the schools in question.

Enquiries about this circular should be made to:
February 2002
Circular SPED 08/02: Appendix I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Current Pupil-Teacher Ratio</th>
<th>Number of Hours per Pupil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Disability</td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>7:1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Impairment</td>
<td>8:1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Disturbance and/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Behavioural Problems</td>
<td>8:1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Emotional Disturbance</td>
<td>6:1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borderline/Mild General Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>11:1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate General Learning Disability</td>
<td>8:1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe/Profound General Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>6:1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders</td>
<td>6:1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>11:1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Speech and Language Disorder</td>
<td>7:1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Disabilities</td>
<td>6:1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Department of Education and Science uses the term “general learning disability” rather than “mental handicap”
## Glossary of Terms

**Does the child concerned have special educational needs arising from one of the following disabilities?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Disability</strong></td>
<td>Such children have permanent or protracted disability arising from conditions such as congenital deformities, spina bifida, dyspraxia, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, brittle bones or severe accidental injury. Because of the impairment of their physical function, they require special additional intervention and support if they are to have available to them a level and quality of education appropriate to their needs and abilities. Many require the use of a wheelchair, a mobility or seating aid or other technological support. They may suffer from a lack of muscular control and co-ordination and may have difficulties in communication, particularly in oral articulation e.g. as in the case of severe dyspraxia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hearing Impairment</strong></td>
<td>Such children have a hearing disability which is so serious as to impair significantly their capacity to hear and understand human speech, thus preventing them from participating fully in classroom interaction and from benefiting adequately from school instruction. The vast majority of them have been prescribed hearing aids and are availing of the services of a Visiting Teacher. This category is not intended to include children with mild hearing loss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual Impairment</strong></td>
<td>Such children have a visual disability which is so serious as to impair significantly their capacity to see, thus interfering with their capacity to perceive visually presented materials such as pictures, diagrams and the written word. Some will have been diagnosed as suffering from conditions such as congenital blindness, cataracts, albinism and retinitis pigmentosa. Most require the use of low-vision aids and are availing of the services of a Visiting Teacher. This category is not intended to include those children who visual difficulties are satisfactorily corrected by the wearing of spectacles and/or contact lenses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Disturbance and/or Behavioural Problems</strong></td>
<td>Such children are being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for conditions such as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and conduct disorders. This category is not intended to include children whose conduct or behavioural difficulties are being adequately dealt with in accordance with agreed procedures on discipline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Mild General Learning Disability**

Such children have been assessed by a psychologist as having a mild general learning disability.

**Borderline Mild General Learning Disability**

Such children have been assessed by a psychologist as having a borderline mild general learning disability. A psychologist may recommend such children for additional teaching support or special class placement on account of a special learning problem such as:

1. Mild emotional disturbance associated with persistent failure in the ordinary class (disruptive behaviour on its own, however, would not constitute ground for special class placement or additional teaching support);
2. Immature social behaviour;
3. Poor level of language development in relation to overall intellectual level.

A recommendation to place such a child in a special class or to allocate additional teaching resources to support a school in catering for his/her needs should take into account the extent to which the child is making progress in his/her present learning environment and the other exiting support available to the child in his/her school.

**Moderate General Learning Disability**

Such children have been assessed by a psychologist as having a moderate general learning disability.

**Severe or Profound General Learning Disability**

Such children have been assessed by a psychologist as having a severe or profound general learning disability. In addition, such children may have physical disabilities.

**Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders**

A psychiatrist or psychologist will have assessed and classified such children as having autism or autistic spectrum disorder according to DSM-IV or ICD-10 criteria.

**Specific Learning Disability**

Such children have been assessed by a psychologist as:

1. Being of average intelligence or higher;
2. Having a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics which places them at or below the 2nd percentile on suitable, standardised, norm-referenced tests.

Children who do not meet these criteria and, who in the opinion of the psychologist, have a specific learning disability are more properly the responsibility of the remedial teacher and/or the class teacher.

**Children with special educational needs arising from an assessed syndrome**

The level of additional support to be provided for children who present with a particular syndrome e.g. Down Syndrome, William's Syndrome and Tourette's Syndrome will be determined following consideration of psychological or other specialist reports which details the nature and degree of the child's special educational needs.

**Specific Speech and Language Disorder**

Such children should meet each of the following criteria:

1. Assessment by a psychologist on a standardised test of intelligence which places non-verbal or performance ability within the average range or above;
2. Assessment on a standardised test of language development by a speech therapist which places performance in one or more of the main areas of speech and