"Commitment to inclusion: A review of SEND provision across mainstream secondary schools in Southampton"

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This Independent Study has been completed on behalf of the Southampton Advisory Outreach Service for SEND and Southampton Inclusion Partnership, in partnership with Southampton City Council.

This short piece of action research seeks to identify the strengths of secondary school provision for students with SEND, in order to provide a city wide overview in which good practice and expertise can be shared. It also considers the particular barriers faced by secondary schools and examines how schools are working to overcome these barriers. The research suggests that despite the challenges of reduced funding, some schools are developing innovative ways to maximise resources and provide flexible pathways of provision for pupils with SEND. These include establishing a graduated approach to support with clear mechanisms for early identification of need, ongoing monitoring of progress and robust systems for self evaluation leading to school improvement. In addition, some schools have sought to design a modified and enhanced curriculum for more vulnerable students, with flexible access to short term interventions and alternative provision. However, there is evidence to suggest that an emphasis on summative attainment data with a lack of specificity around target setting, sometimes leaves pupils unclear about the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve. The research suggests that schools should consider how a vision for SEND needs to be driven by senior leadership teams and how the role of the SENCo can be strengthened by adopting the principles of distributed leadership to bring about collective influence. Consideration of how schools can work together to share expertise and develop structured opportunities for continuous professional development, could help to secure positive outcomes for pupils with SEND and create long term sustainability.

Key words: inclusion, integration, distributed leadership, policy and practice, flexible pathways, graduated approach

Introduction

Following outcomes from the *SEND Strategic Review* published in July 2018, Southampton City Council commissioned Southampton Inclusion Partnership to carry out a piece of research into secondary school provision for pupils with SEND and behavioural needs across the city. The purpose of this work was to identify models of working and to highlight examples of good practice that could be shared, as part of the city's planned drive for improvement.

As outlined in the *SEND Strategic Review* (2018), the city of Southampton, with its diverse and ever-changing population, continues to experience high levels of deprivation and to achieve relatively poor educational outcomes. It is within this context, that the city provides mainstream education to students across twelve secondary schools. As identified by school census data, the most common primary areas of need at secondary level are moderate learning difficulties and social, emotional and mental health needs which are above the national average, as well as specific learning difficulties. Whilst awareness of SEND in schools has improved, there are still concerns over the rigidity of the curriculum and challenging environments, which are a particular concern for young people with a range of special educational needs, including those with Autism and social communication difficulties. (Cooke & Robinson, 2018). This report built on findings from a joint local area SEND Inspection carried out by OFSTED in 2017 which highlighted the varied schooling available in secondary schools and the mixed experiences of its students, with too many young people not accessing an education.

Research on secondary school provision for pupils with SEND

The definition of inclusion has changed over time, evolving from a simple notion of pupils with SEND being integrated into mainstream schools, to a direct responsibility placed on schools to accommodate the needs of all students and embrace their diversity (Wedell, 2005; Rix et al, 2009; Landor & Perepa, 2017). Indeed, the heterogeneity of the SEND population as a whole, with its wide range of diverse and often comorbid needs, provide a particular challenge for secondary schools. Runswick-Cole (2011) identifies the conflict for schools in driving up academic results whilst including pupils whose needs fall outside the sphere of test scores, stating that "The standards agenda and the inclusion agenda make uneasy bedfellows" (p.116).

However, as Wedell (2005) points out, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that many schools have continued to overcome barriers to inclusion in a variety of ways. The following research outlines some of the specific challenges faced by secondary schools in relation to inclusion, some approaches to overcoming these challenges and different models of provision being used by secondary schools to support pupils with additional needs.

What are the specific challenges faced by secondary schools?

Research shows that pupils face a number of serious challenges at secondary level (Fletcher-Campbell, 2001; Preece and Timmons, 2004; EADSNE, 2005; Wedell, 2002; Ellins & Porter, 2005; Black, 2012; Landor & Perepa, 2017). These include their desire to feel socially included and their ability to access the curriculum, as well as navigating the complexities of school organisation and meeting academic expectations. For schools and leadership teams, there remains the need to demonstrate the impact of provision on pupil progress and attainment.

Some would argue that a subject led curriculum delivered by subject specialists can be rigid and raise issues of access for some SEND learners. It has also been suggested that there is less understanding of special educational needs amongst the secondary teaching staff population, with not all staff seeing themselves as teachers of pupils with SEND. Indeed, research carried out by Ellins and Porter (2005) indicated that teachers of Maths, English and Science have less positive attitudes towards pupils with SEND than their colleagues, particularly impacting on progress in Science at Key Stage 3. Furthermore, levels of literacy or numeracy required by some subjects determine whether or not they are suitable for pupils with SEND, often reducing opportunities for some pupils to access a broad curriculum or pursue subjects of interest.

Wedell (2005) and Black (2012) suggest that systemic rigidities can create barriers to inclusion and that students with SEND often have difficulty accessing education because of organisational practices. These can include rigid approaches to timetabling, grouping and staffing, as well as transition arrangements for pupils transferring from primary to secondary phases of education. Indeed, for some pupils with Aspergers the school environment can be extremely challenging due to constant changes throughout the day, the complexities of social groupings in adolescents and what can be a noisy and chaotic environment (Landor & Perepa, 2017). Such difficulties require schools to go beyond integrating these pupils into existing

systems and to seriously consider the levels of institutional change needed to achieve equity for this pupil group.

A review of the literature raises the need for schools to consider the importance of social inclusion, since there are a number of ways in which pupils can feel excluded (Fletcher-Campbell, 2001; Visser, 2002; Preece and Timmons, 2004; Rogers, 2007; Landor & Perepa, 2017). Indeed, research carried out by Fletcher-Campbell (2001) and Preece and Timmons (2004) outline pupils' perceptions of their behaviour and what they felt led to their exclusion. These include:

- challenging or irrelevant curricula, exposing their learning difficulties

- quality of teacher-pupil relationships e.g. not feeling listened to, being blamed unjustly

- bullying

- class sizes and distracting environments

- quality of teaching such as work not being explained clearly.

As described by Rogers (2007), pupils can feel both intellectually excluded when they are not able to access the curriculum, as well as emotionally excluded, such as experiencing difficulties in engaging socially with others and making friendships. Furthermore, well-meaning attempts to include, often lead to practical forms of exclusion, such as removing students from class to provide additional learning support. Indeed, as explained by Visser (2002), it is important that provision enables adults to build positive relationships with pupils, provides emotional safety and protection and allows staff to be personally involved with pupils in a context of trust and acceptance.

It is also important to place these challenges in a context of school accountability, where school leaders are expected to demonstrate the impact of provision on pupil progress (Farrell, 2007; Devecchi and Rouse, 2010; Landor and Perepa, 2017). As Landor and Perepa (2017) point out, in establishing inclusive practices, a school needs to be able to evaluate its provision and demonstrate its impact. This raises the question of how schools measure the outcomes of inclusive practice and what criteria is used to measure success. For some secondary schools, success is often based on academic achievement and this is where staff are often encouraged

to focus their efforts (Farrell et al, 2007). Devecchi & Rouse (2010) argue that inclusion needs to be evaluated not just in terms of academic outcomes, but also in broader terms of collective experience and well-being. This raises a challenge for schools in terms of creating a broader definition of positive outcomes for pupils with SEND and considering how this can be evidenced.

As Black (2012) suggests, there is clearly a need to explore how secondary schools can become more accessible to a diverse student body with its wide range of needs. Indeed, it is important to ensure that inclusion is not simply a version of integration, where students with diverse needs are expected to comply with already established routines and expectations. This may require a level of structural and cultural reform (Gilmore, 2012). There is no single intervention that can meet the varying needs of all students and this means schools are called upon to offer a wide range of alternative intervention and provision (Jones et al, 2008; Landor & Perepa, 2017). However, such challenges sit within a context of tension for schools, where there is a willingness to include pupils with SEND whilst striving to achieve higher academic achievement.

What principles underpin an approach to overcoming challenges at secondary level?

The research indicates that a number of principles need to underpin the development of inclusive practice within secondary schools (Farrell, 2001; Lingard, 2001; Carrington and Elkins, 2002; Ellins and Porter, 2005; Wedell, 2005; Oldham and Radford, 2011). These include a commitment to the following:

- collaborative problem solving driven by a clearly articulated vision
- flexibility in terms of curriculum and organisational practices
- continuing professional development for staff at all levels
- development of the roles and responsibilities of the SENCo
- refinement of target setting in order to demonstrate progress.

Carrington & Elkins (2002) identify the challenges of meeting the needs of such a diverse group of learners and describe the current gap between policy and practice. They suggest that a collaborative problem solving approach is required, based on a commitment to vision and change. This requires a school to be clear in its vision for inclusive practice, be able to examine

and analyse the rationale behind agreed practices and evaluate the effectiveness of its provision. As Farrell (2001) argues, successful inclusion requires a commitment from all staff and recognition of each person's responsibility to make it work.

Wedell (2005) argues that greater flexibility is needed to facilitate change, development and innovation which has implications for policy and practice. In this respect, diversity needs to determine how schools plan provision for all students, rather than creating an add-on for those with special educational needs. This may require greater flexibility of pupil grouping and location of learning for all learners, matching the needs of the learner with the demands of the curriculum. Furthermore, the curriculum may need to be modified and adapted with learners becoming the focus of teacher planning, rather than content. In this respect, schools should not adopt a rigid regime of in-class inclusion but use flexible grouping, including opportunities for withdrawal for those who need it. Flexible approaches such as these help to value pupils, optimise resources and reduce associated stigmas. This may also require an examination of the needs of specific groups of pupils, such as those with autistic spectrum condition. Research carried out by Landor & Perepa (2017) explored the factors that provide a positive social experience within school for pupils with autistic spectrum condition. These included the explicit and additional teaching of social skills, the provision of a safe place for students to go to in times of difficulty and additional support provided by learning support assistants at an individual level.

The *SEND Code of Practice* (2015) places the responsibility for meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs firmly with class and subject teachers. This necessitates the need for schools and leadership teams to look carefully at levels of expertise within its staff population and provide the necessary training and continuing professional development required for them to carry out their roles effectively (Farrell, 2001; Ellins and Porter, 2005; Wedell, 2005; Mittler, 2008). Wedell (2005) outlines the need for increasing levels of expertise as pupils become more complex, requiring teachers to adopt a more personalised approach to planning. This requires teachers to understand what determines learning at different ages and in different circumstances and be able to use a pupil's response to decide how to adapt teaching approaches. Furthermore, Farrell (2001) indicates that schools need resources for training and mentoring a whole range of support staff. This is reinforced by Ellins and Porter (2005) who

argue the need to employ properly trained, subject specialist teaching assistants to improve the quality of additional support for SEND learners (Ellins & Porter, 2005). It is important to note that this approach should not lead to teachers delegating responsibility for the progress of SEND learners to teaching assistants. The development of the whole workforce in relation to adaptive and responsive teaching approaches, needs a focus on professional development for all staff, as well as collaboration with professionals from other services. As Mittler (2008) suggests, at a time when staff are being asked to work across professional boundaries, training opportunities would benefit from collaboration across different agencies and disciplines.

Research by Oldham & Radford (2011) emphasises the importance of SENCos as leaders, in being assertive advocates of pupils with SEND, with the capacity to impact on whole school universal inclusive practice. Since there is no statutory requirement for SENCos to be appointed to senior leadership teams, some SENCos feel restricted in their capacity to influence practice across the whole school. In this respect, the person appointed to lead inclusion at a universal level, needs to have a clear vision for SEND and the capacity to bring about improvement. This necessitates very clearly defined roles and responsibilities and inclusion to be part of the whole school agenda.

Target setting is also recognised as a principle by which pupils and teachers can demonstrate progress and evidence the impact of provision and intervention. However, Lingard (2001) identifies concerns expressed by SENCos in relation to setting SMART targets and predicting how much progress a pupil should make within a given time frame. Furthermore, SENCos voiced the fact that putting targets on paper and communicating them to subject leaders did not necessarily mean the pupil's learning needs were met. Lingard suggests that if targets are to help pupils engage positively with priorities for learning, targets need to be set by the pupil's teacher in collaboration with the pupil and be regularly embedded in and emphasised within the teaching that is taking place across lessons. Again, this requires training in the skill of target setting, implementation, monitoring and review, to ensure that targets identify for pupils how they can be successful.

What are the different approaches to SEND provision at secondary school?

There is a wide array of approaches to provision for pupils with SEND at secondary level. These range from pupils remaining in mainstream lessons with subject teachers, often with access to additional support or intervention, to the withdrawal of pupils to separate provision in the form of inclusion centres or bases for all or part of the week. Furthermore, as Black (2012) points out, it is important to identify successful examples of inclusion at secondary level in order to share good practice. The following research outlines the use of separate provisions within mainstream schools and the benefits of taking a flexible and multi-faceted approach to provision.

One approach to accommodating a wide range of diverse learners is to establish additional, different and separate provision (Preece and Timmins, 2004; Black, 2012; Gilmore, 2012). Preece and Timmins (2004) outline positive outcomes from mainstream secondary inclusion centres which provide a number of benefits for pupils, particularly those with behavioural or social, emotional and mental health needs. They describe how a separate base for pupils can provide a calm environment and respite from perceived social and academic pressures, as well as the opportunity to talk to staff about their difficulties and reflect on their behaviour in a safe environment. Furthermore, such provision can enable staff to provide support in small teaching groups, facilitate the effective coordination of external agencies, provide advice to pupils on how they can modify their behaviour and develop social skills and enable pupils to keep in touch with the mainstream curriculum.

However, Preece and Timmins (2004) also highlight the importance of considering inclusion centres within the context of a whole school approach. This means having a clear vision and aims for the centre, with an appropriate referral system and entry criteria and the ultimate goal of returning pupils to full time participation in mainstream lessons. In this respect there need to be clear principles for staffing to ensure that centres are led and overseen by appropriately skilled teachers and consistently staffed to enable pupils to build relationships. In addition, expecting work to be set by subject teachers for completion within the centre and providing training on behaviour management to all staff, ensures that teachers remain responsible for the progress of pupils.

Gilmore (2012) also presents research into the use of inclusion rooms, planned as part of a whole school strategy for behaviour, in an effort to reduce fixed term exclusion. In the examples studied, the use of this strategy was time limited and spaces were physically uninviting, with students sitting in individual booths. Key to implementation of the strategy was the formulation of a clear purpose and outcome for the provision, which was communicated and reinforced to staff on an ongoing basis through professional development meetings. The strategy was also reviewed regularly by both staff and pupils. The research demonstrated that whilst the provision was not a 'quick fix' for students, it gave students opportunities for negotiated consequences and time to make sense of their school culture.

However, many would argue that a more flexible approach to school structure and organisation is required as an alternative to separate and different provision (Black, 2012; Farrell, 2007). Research carried out by Farrell (2007) highlights a number of factors that enable schools to be both highly achieving and inclusive and makes further suggestions as to how provision for SEND can be flexibly managed. Farrell (2007) emphasises the importance of using a range of strategies to raise achievement, including a focus on high quality teaching within both mainstream classrooms and alternative provision. This approach may need to consider how SEND provision is supported by other forms of provision, how pupils are grouped and timetabled in relation to individual assessment and monitoring and where strategies are adapted to meet the needs of different students at different times. This would also require careful consideration of how the SENCO's role is constructed and how responsibilities for SEND are distributed. Such an approach requires a commitment to inclusion from staff at all levels, who see the education of pupils with SEND as part of their normal responsibilities.

In conclusion, it is clearly a priority for secondary schools to continue to explore different models of inclusion to ensure that all learners achieve. This begins with having a clearly articulated vision, underpinned by principles that advocate for the rights of pupils with special educational needs to access a curriculum that meets their social, emotional and academic needs. Schools can then to work to establish flexible and whole school inclusive practices that are nurtured within a context of ongoing self-evaluation and improvement.

Aims of this research

The following research therefore seeks to identify the strengths of secondary school provision for students with SEND, in order to provide a city wide overview in which good practice and expertise can be shared. It also considers the particular barriers faced by secondary schools and examines how some secondary schools are seeking to overcome these barriers.

The following key questions will be explored:

1. What are the strengths of secondary school practice in providing for pupils with SEND and behavioural needs?
2. What are the specific barriers faced by secondary schools in providing for pupils with SEND and behavioural needs?

Methods

The research was led by an experienced researcher and carried out by a small team of Specialist Leaders of Education and Outreach Teachers. Lead specialists worked with schools to carry out a whole school review of SEND provision, supported by self-evaluation.

The following data sets were used as part of the research:

- Individual school reviews and written reports, detailing strengths and areas for development in relation to whole school provision for SEND, using areas of focus identified within the *SEND Review Guide* (London Leadership Strategy).
- Structured interviews related to the key research questions
- A questionnaire relating to the role of the SENCo
- Mapping and analysis of provision models across the city

Themes from the research were then drawn together anonymously in order to provide the city with examples of good practice that could be shared.

Ethical Considerations

In order to comply with guidelines for ethical research (BERA, 2011) an Ethics Statement was completed. This used a checklist to highlight ethical considerations and support the drawing up of specific procedures to handle the collection and dissemination of data. The following procedures were then followed to ensure data remained confidential and schools remained anonymous:

- Permission to use the data was gathered from schools.

- Schools were allocated a reference number for the purposes of data collection.

- No reference to the name of any school was included within any of the written research.

Findings

INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL REVIEWS

Written reviews of SEND provision across all secondary schools taking part in the research identified a number of emerging themes relating to the leadership and management of SEND, the quality of teaching and learning for pupils with SEND and systems in place to support assessment, identification and monitoring of pupil progress.

Leadership and management of SEND

In a number of schools the vision and aims for SEND provision were clearly driven by the Headteacher, in partnership with the whole senior leadership team and the SENCo. In these schools there was a strong emphasis on the progress of pupils with SEND as a shared responsibility. Examples of proactive steps taken to ensure that this notion of distributed leadership and accountability was embedded within school practices included: i) access to support for SEND from a range of leaders across the school including Heads of Department, progress leads and leading practitioners ii) the setting up of a SEND working group, represented by a range of stakeholders, including staff, governors, parents and pupils, to support the development of SEND provision across the school iii) the identification and training of a staff 'SEND Champion' within all departments, providing advice and support for pupils with SEND in relation to the specific demands of their subject. These approaches further supported the school's response to succession planning and change, so that in contexts where an individual SENCo was moving on, provision for SEND pupils remained uninterrupted.

Approaches to development for SEND in some schools were clearly rooted in whole school culture and practice. A 'key lines of enquiry' approach to action planning in one school, provided a clear rationale for whole school improvement which was impacting positively on SEND provision. For example, an enquiry into how effectively teaching assistants were deployed to increase pupil progress, led to improvements in how subject teachers directed support staff during lessons. Furthermore, some schools were able to identify when changes to SEND provision needed to be implemented at a fast pace and when a more measured approach was required. In one school 'test and learn' methods were used to inform decision making, ensuring a considered and collaborative approach to improvement. In addition, for some settings, strategic development was underpinned by thorough self evaluation, often engaging an external perspective and collaboration with other services to validate systems and processes in place.

However, whilst many schools demonstrated a focus on whole school accountability for SEND provision, SENCos who were not part of senior leadership teams, often struggled to communicate whole school responsibility for the outcomes of SEND learners and appeared to have less impact on improving provision at a classroom level. This was sometimes exacerbated by school policies for SEND that did not sufficiently outline systems and practices for staff to follow, including the reasonable adjustments that needed to be in place to support pupils with SEND. In these schools, systems intended to support pupils with SEND, were not always consistent or robust enough to remain intact during unanticipated periods of change.

Finally, whilst the majority of schools had action plans in place to support the development of SEND provision, not all schools had a planned, rigorous cycle of self- evaluation to inform ongoing development. This meant that in some contexts, schools could not always articulate the impact of actions taken on outcomes for pupils with SEND. For example, some schools were not able to evidence the difference an intervention had made on pupil progress or provide a robust rationale for allocation of these resources within the school budget. Furthermore, outcomes for measuring impact were not always made evident at the preliminary stages of action planning and decision making.

Quality of teaching and learning for pupils with SEND

Many schools employed a wide range of interventions, with flexible pathways that did not reduce opportunities for pupils with SEND. For example in one school, year 7 and 8 'nurture groups' allowed students to stay together for most lessons and provided consistent and targeted support for SEND pupils, focusing on pastoral care as well as academic attainment. In another school, additional interventions were timetabled so that students did not miss out on mainstream lessons. In other settings, where forms of alternative provision provided a base for pupils with behavioural and social interaction needs, students were taught by subject specialists, as well as having the opportunity to access mainstream lessons where they could achieve success.

A number of SEND departments had securely established written communication systems so that subject teachers could access key information about pupils, enabling them to understand the strategies needed to include them within mainstream lessons. In some schools, 'good practice guides', 'pupil support plans' or 'student information profiles' disseminated good practice and inclusive strategies that supported pupils across the different areas of need. Moreover, some schools went beyond identifying need and barriers to learning, to specifically teaching new skills to bring about progress in both learning and behaviour. Furthermore, some schools were working to address teacher workload by streamlining record keeping systems, ensuring that information about pupils was easily accessible and not duplicated.

The majority of schools recognised the importance of 'adaptive and responsive teaching' as a first response to pupils with special educational needs (Ofsted, 2018) and integral to a school's graduated approach to support. In these schools, the development and application of inclusive teaching checklists were helping to support leaders in monitoring the quality of teaching at a universal level. However, in a minority of schools and lessons, provision for SEND pupils was not always recognised as a whole school responsibility. This led to a greater need for students to access learning support outside of lessons and more reliance on teaching assistants to enable pupils with SEND to access learning, thereby reducing a student's levels of independence and capacity to problem solve.

Furthermore, in a minority of schools, pupils with behavioural needs had limited access to a broad curriculum and were frequently taught in on site alternative provision by unqualified staff. These settings sometimes lacked referral systems with clear entry and exit criteria and interventions were not sufficiently time limited to promote reintegration back to mainstream lessons. Moreover, in some settings, the curriculum was not adequately planned to engage pupils and address gaps in learning.

Assessment, identification and monitoring systems

A number of systems were evidenced in relation to the assessment and identification of pupils with SEND, as well as to monitoring their progress. In some schools robust provision mapping was in place, outlining additional support for pupils and analysing the impact of additional interventions. These systems were used to ensure early identification of pupils with SEND and ongoing monitoring of their progress. Furthermore, provision for SEND was supported and monitored by other school leaders, as well as the SENCo, including Heads of Department and those responsible for overseeing assessment and progress.

In order to ensure that more vulnerable pupils were tracked closely, formalised communication systems were established to support the appropriate sharing of information. For example, in one school, regular 'school inclusion panel meetings' were held between SEND and pastoral departments and other key stakeholders, to support early intervention and ensure pupils with more complex needs were receiving appropriate support. In another school, high quality transition arrangements were planned for these students, including additional visits between secondary and primary schools, as early as year 5. A further example of ongoing support was evidenced by a school that allocated a lead professional, mentor or key worker to all pupils, including those with SEND. These members of staff supported and monitored the pupil's progress against attainment, behaviour and attendance, throughout their time in school.

However, in some schools, a well-defined graduated approach to support with clear levels of accountability was less evident. This meant that the needs of some pupils had the potential not to be identified early enough and timely intervention delayed. Furthermore, not all schools had a formalised cycle of assess, plan, do, review for intervention, leaving the impact of support on pupil progress sometimes unchecked. In addition, the reviews revealed a strong focus by secondary schools on the use of summative attainment data to measure progress. This resulted in some schools being unable to evidence the wider or smaller steps of progress made by pupils with SEND, particularly progress in basic skills or in relation to social interaction and behaviour. For these pupils, there was often a lack of specificity in relation to the targets they needed to achieve and how they could demonstrate success.

SENCo QUESTIONNAIRES

Table i. Responses to key questions about role of SENCo.

Questions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
Is the SENCo a member of the Senior Leadership Team?	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	5 out of 12
How many hours per week are dedicated to the SENCo role?	32.5	14	14	7	13	18	6	19.5	19.5	*	16	19.5	16
How many hours per week is the SENCo timetabled to teach?	8	12	5	14	13	5	19	0	6	6	4	13	9
How many staff does the SENCo line manage?	18	14	6	8	5	6	19	12	6	16	9	11	11

Questionnaires (*Table i*) revealed a number of themes relating to the varied responsibilities of SENCos, their capacity to carry out the role and their impact on provision for SEND, both strategically across the school and at classroom level. Less than half of all secondary SENCos interviewed were a member of the school's Senior Leadership Team. SENCos had an average of 16 hours dedicated to their leadership of SEND, with some having their time fully dedicated to the role and others having as little as six hours per week. Similarly, the amount of hours SENCos were timetabled to teach was variable, with some SENCos teaching as much as nineteen hours and others with no teaching responsibility. Furthermore, the number of staff SENCos were expected to line-manage ranged from as little as five staff to as many as nineteen. SENCos described a wide range of responsibilities which included Designated Safeguarding Lead, subject lead or Head of Department, Head of Year, responsibility for Looked After Children and provider of emergency cover. This varied picture across the city would suggest a need for schools to consider carefully how the SENCo's role is constructed and how leadership for SEND is distributed at all levels.

STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH SENCos

Structured interviews with SENCos (*Table ii*) identified a number of barriers in relation to making appropriate provision for pupils with SEND at secondary level. These related to i) the complexity of a pupil's needs ii) external and internal factors impacting on a pupil's inclusion within school and iii) the challenges of working with external specialist services.

Table ii. SENCos' views on barriers to provision for pupils with SEND

BARRIERS TO MAKING APPROPRIATE PROVISION FOR PUPILS WITH SEND
PUPILS' NEEDS   • *Complexity of pupil's needs*   • *Complex medical conditions*   • *Social, emotional and mental health needs*   • *Unidentified or undiagnosed needs*   • *Risk to safety of pupils and staff e.g. physical assault*   • *Continual high-level disruption e.g. refusal, absconding*   • *Verbal abuse*
EXTERNAL FACTORS   • *Social environment e.g. within the home, within communities*   • *Families' lack of financial resources e.g. transport, clothing*   • *Influences outside school e.g. social media*   • *Challenges of working with external agencies*   • *Parenting needs e.g. engagement, expectations*
INTERNAL SCHOOL FACTORS   • *Available models of provision not meeting pupils' needs*   • *Intolerance of some pupils to others' differences*   • *Changes in staff*   • *Limited resources to support parents*   • *Limited time for SENCo to carry out role*   • *Time needed to commit to intervention delivery*   • *Pupils unable to access whole school policies and systems*   • *Targeted interventions not always successful*   • *Pupils requiring more specialist provision*   • *Relationships between staff and pupils*   • *Influence of other pupils and exposure to poor role models*   • *What to do with pupils who do not meet criteria for external agencies*
WORKING WITH EXTERNAL AGENCIES   • *Waiting lists*   • *Varying or conflicting advice*   • *Lack of clear protocols for accessing services*   • *Lack of funding for services impacting on capacity to deliver*   • *Changes in staff*   • *Lack of equality in accessing support*   • *Difficulties in communicating with other agencies*   • *Timing of appointments*   • *Competing priorities*   • *Pupils being signed off too soon*

It is clear from *Table ii* that SENCos saw the complexity of pupils' needs as a barrier to inclusion, suggesting that schools sometimes felt ill equipped to manage high level needs, especially where they impacted on the safety of pupils and staff. There was also recognition that schools were working within challenging contexts, supporting families from areas of social deprivation, against a backdrop of external influences such as the local community and social media. SENCos also spoke extensively about the difficulties of working with outside agencies who felt similarly under resourced to meet levels of need, sometimes reflected by long waiting periods for pupils to be seen. Their comments highlight the requirement for schools and services to improve systems for partnership working, to ensure that resources are easily accessible and prioritised and that advice is consistent. However, SENCos also recognised that some barriers to inclusion came from within schools themselves, requiring school leaders to consider capacity for change. This may require schools to review the models of provision available to pupils with SEND and to ensure that school policies allow for reasonable adjustments to be made. Furthermore, it may require detailed examination of how interventions are delivered and evaluated and further exploration of alternative pathways where intervention has not had the expected impact.

SENCos were also asked to identify what they felt were priorities for development in relation to provision for SEND within their own schools. The following table (*Table iii*) illustrates the key areas identified and how schools felt they could improve provision, despite the barriers they faced.

Table iii. SENCos' views on how provision for SEND could be improved

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO SEND
COMMUNICATION • *Communicating information about pupils to staff e.g. strategies to support* • *Improving communication between departments e.g. SEND and pastoral/behaviour* • *Joining up communication systems* • *Developing engagement with parents*
TRAINING • *Increased CPD for all staff* • *Improving differentiation within lessons* • *Improving quality first teaching for all learners, including pupils with SEND*
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT • *Distributed leadership for SEND* • *Quality assurance of provision* • *Whole school accountability for SEND e.g. subject teachers, Heads of Department* • *Involvement of SLT in monitoring provision*
MEASURING PROGRESS • *Capturing pupils' wider progress* • *Ensuring pupils know what they need to do to improve* • *Being able to measure small steps of progress through target setting* • *Identifying and measuring the impact of interventions* • *Supporting pupils to apply progress from interventions within class*
CURRICULUM AND PROVISION • *Modification of the curriculum to meet pupils' needs* • *Improving transition arrangements for pupils moving into school* • *Development of alternative provision with clear protocols for entry and exit* • *Development of nurture provision* • *Development of bespoke interventions* • *Development of alternative/personalised curriculum* • *Improving the environment for more vulnerable students*

Firstly, SENCos felt that much could be done to improve communication within their schools, be it with individual subject teachers, across departments or with parents and families. Some SENCos described communication systems, particularly in relation to pupil information and progress data, as onerous for teachers and difficult to access.

This would suggest a need for schools to examine how information is shared to ensure that it is purposeful and impacts directly on pupils' experience of teaching within classrooms. Secondly, SENCos expressed the need to improve training opportunities for staff, not simply in relation to specialist knowledge of SEND, but also in developing inclusive teaching strategies. Indeed, there was clear recognition that pupils with SEND required a differentiated curriculum with the opportunity to access high quality teaching that was adaptive and responsive to their individual needs at a classroom level.

A further area for development identified by SENCos was a need to improve the quality of provision for pupils with SEND, particularly in relation to a modified curriculum. SENCos recognised more could be done to enhance the curriculum for pupils, creating wider flexibility to meet individual pupil needs. This could be in terms of offering an alternative or personalised curriculum for some pupils, enhancing access to specific interventions, including support for mental health needs, as well as improving the environment for more vulnerable students. Linked to curriculum, SENCos also identified the need to explore ways in which the progress of pupils could be measured and captured, ensuring that pupils knew what they had to do to improve and were able to celebrate small steps of progress. Furthermore, SENCos sought ways of measuring the impact of interventions and supporting pupils to apply new learning in different contexts.

Finally, SENCos identified the need to develop distributed leadership for SEND, securing a culture of whole school responsibility for the progress of SEND learners. For some SENCos this required developing an understanding of what quality provision for SEND pupils looks like, enabling all senior leaders to quality assure provision for SEND and feel confident to challenge practice that does not meet individual needs.

PROVISION MODELS

Table iv. Examples of graduated provision identified by secondary schools.

	In class provision	Targeted group provision	Individual provision	Alternative provision (separate base)	
				Learning as primary need	SEMH and behaviour as primary need
Purpose	-*Access to mainstream lessons taught by subject teachers* -*Access to differentiated learning and inclusive teaching* -*Social integration* -*Positive peer models* -*Broad and balanced curriculum*	-*Subject specific interventions e.g. literacy and numeracy skills* -*Additional provision to support social and emotional health and wellbeing*	*Personalised support e.g. pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan*	-*Support base for assessment, learning intervention, support for or completion of work* -*Base for pupils with Autism* -*Study support base for pupils taking exams at KS4*	-*Access to support and intervention* -*Short term internal exclusion or isolation*
Access	-*Setting by ability e.g. low ability sets for some subjects* -*'Nurture' groups where pupils stay together for most lessons*	-*Before and after school provision* -*Withdrawal from class* -*Time limited interventions*	-*Pupils supported in class* -*Pupils withdrawn from class*	-*Timetabled access to support base* -*Flexible or open access to support base*	-*Short term provision/time limited intervention within support base* -*Long term provision within support base* -*Part time access to support base with phased integration back to mainstream lessons* -*Full time access to support base*
Staffing	-*Additional teaching assistant/ learning mentor support* -*Subject specialist teaching assistants* -*Consistent tutor group* -*Consistent tutor/learning mentor throughout key stages 3 and 4*	-*Interventions delivered by a teacher or subject specialist* -*Interventions delivered by a teaching assistant*	*Teaching Assistants*	-*Support base staffed by teaching assistants/higher level teaching assistants* -*Support base with core lessons delivered by subject teachers*	-*Support base staffed by teaching assistants* -*Support base staffed by teachers*

The range of provision for pupils with special educational needs is varied, with secondary schools managing a complex mix of pupils with comorbidity of need. The extensive range of language used to identify and describe these different models of provision (e.g. inclusion base, learning support centre, internal alternative provision, study support centre etc) illustrates the complexity of the task and the effort made by schools to provide different layers of support whilst not giving students unwanted labels that reinforce segregation and difference. The above table (*Table iv*) attempts to categorise the range of provision models in terms of purpose, access by pupils and delivery by staff.

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For some schools, access to mainstream lessons for all pupils influenced strategic decision making about provision. In these examples, the rationale for provision was determined by a desire for pupils with SEND to be taught a broad and balanced curriculum delivered by subject specialists. This required schools to consider how pupils could be best supported in lessons and how teachers could establish effective pupil-teacher relationships based on an understanding of their needs. Schools were addressing some of these issues by focusing ongoing professional development on skilling all staff to deliver high quality inclusive teaching. For many schools, teaching pupils in ability groups enabled them to teach pupils with special educational needs in smaller classes with higher adult pupil ratios. Other schools structured teaching groups so that more vulnerable pupils could remain together for most lessons, reducing the impact of frequent timetable changes. Further strategies to support in class provision included the use of subject specialist teaching assistants and tutors or learning mentors to follow pupils throughout their school career.

As part of a graduated approach to support, all schools used additional interventions to address pupils' needs, to address gaps in learning and basic skills as well as providing support for social and emotional wellbeing. These were often targeted, time limited interventions, delivered by teaching assistants or sometimes subject specialists. Whilst this often required pupils to be withdrawn from lessons, some schools planned interventions to reduce impact on pupils' mainstream curriculum e.g. limiting the number of interventions that can be accessed by a pupil at any one time or by providing interventions before and after school. Similarly, where pupils received individual interventions, some schools coordinated these to avoid impact on a pupil's access to mainstream lessons.

A number of schools provided additional support for pupils with SEND in the form of access to a separate base or resourced provision, often staffed by teaching assistants but sometimes overseen by teachers. In some cases, they offered open access to pupils with learning needs and in others, pupils were timetabled for specific lessons or interventions. Pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs or challenging behaviour also had access to alternative teaching bases, mostly for time limited interventions, although some pupils remained in these bases full time and long term. Most of these provisions were managed by teaching assistants

although there were some examples of lessons being delivered by subject teachers from different departments. Some schools had clear systems for referral to these provisions with identified entry criteria, usually overseen and monitored by senior leaders within the school and with a clear focus on phased integration back to mainstream lessons. In a minority of schools however, some of these provisions highlighted a number of barriers which limited impact on outcomes for pupils. Some schools found that in order to ensure that the needs of more vulnerable pupils were well met, pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs required different provision to those presenting with challenging behaviour. Indeed, in some schools, separate provisions did not sufficiently differentiate for pupils with differing needs, either in terms of entry criteria, environment or curriculum. Similarly, pupils working in these bases often had little contact with their teachers or tutors, teaching assistants were sometimes not provided with plans and work provided had the potential to be non-engaging and poorly differentiated.

Analysis and discussion

The findings described above serve to demonstrate some of the strengths of secondary school practice in providing for pupils with SEND (Black, 2012), the specific barriers they face and how some secondary schools are working successfully to overcome barriers (Wedell, 2005).

Leadership and management of SEND

A key factor for schools in ensuring high quality provision for pupils with special educational needs is the commitment of the senior leadership team to a vision of inclusion and whole school responsibility for SEND (Farrell, 2001; Carrington & Elkins, 2002; Ellins & Porter, 2005). Distributed leadership, underpinned by clearly articulated roles and responsibilities, whole school systems and an ongoing cycle of self evaluation, ensure consistency for pupils with SEND, particularly at times of transition or change. SENCos who are not part of senior leadership teams, have less impact on school policy and practice and in being able to articulate the reasonable adjustments that need to be made for pupils with SEND.

A number of schools are seeking innovative ways to enhance distributed leadership for SEND and maximise limited resources. This includes the setting up of SEND working parties to evaluate and plan improvements to SEND provision, establishing SEND 'champions' to develop inclusive provision within every department and using research enquiry methods or external agencies to provide robust evidence for self-evaluation and action planning (Landor & Perepa, 2017). Such developments require schools to consider carefully the responsibilities of the SENCo, how the role is constructed within a context of distributed leadership (Farrell, 2001; Oldham & Radford, 2011) and how partnership working with external services can be maximised (Mittler, 2008).

Quality of provision, teaching and learning

Whilst it is clear that secondary schools face a number of challenges in meeting the needs of an increasing SEND population, the research evidences a number of innovative ways in which schools are seeking to modify and enhance the curriculum for more vulnerable students (Wedell, 2005; Black, 2012).

A number of schools offer a range of flexible provision, firmly rooted in a graduated approach to support. In these schools, inclusive teaching within mainstream lessons as part of a broad and balanced curriculum is a first response to individual needs (Farrell, 2007). School policies identify the reasonable adjustments that are expected to be made for pupils with SEND, supported by effective communication about individual students. As part of this graduated approach, schools offer a range of flexible provision, including access to a variety of pupil groupings, additional adult support and time limited interventions, scheduled to avoid pupils missing out on mainstream curriculum wherever possible (Wedell, 2005; Jones et al, 2008; Black, 2012; Landor & Perepa, 2017). In some schools, alternative provision within school, as well as access to a modified curriculum, is available for pupils with more complex needs, particularly those with behavioural needs (Preece & Timmins, 2004). Many of these alternative pathways provide a safe base for more vulnerable students who require specialist support at specific times (Visser, 2002; Gilmore, 2012). Examples include 'nurture' based provision at Year 7 and 8 where some pupils remain within a small teaching group for the majority of the day.

However, the research also identified examples where alternative school based provision was sometimes less successful and separate learning bases failed to meet the varying needs of the pupils who accessed them. This was often the result of pupils having limited access to support from qualified teachers or being provided with poorly differentiated work (Preece & Timmins, 2004). In addition, where schools placed less of a focus on high quality inclusive teaching and accountability for SEND at a classroom level, there was a greater reliance on learning support outside mainstream lessons, with emphasis on teaching assistants to support pupils' access to learning.

Assessment, identification and monitoring

The research demonstrated a number of strengths in relation to the identification and ongoing monitoring of pupils with special educational needs. These were rooted in a graduated response to support, with systems in place to ensure early identification of need and whole school responsibility for tracking progress as part of a cycle of assess, plan do and review. In some schools robust provision mapping was in place to allocate and evaluate the impact of interventions (Landor & Perepa, 2017), supported by sophisticated communication systems to ensure information was shared efficiently. Schools used a variety of methods to maximise the use of limited resources, support effective communication and provide ongoing support for more vulnerable students (Wedell, 2005; Black, 2012). For example, school inclusion panel meetings were used to support the sharing of information, lead professionals were assigned to provide ongoing guidance to students and robust transition arrangements were planned to ensure more vulnerable students received additional transition support.

In schools where identification of need and ongoing monitoring were less secure, a graduated approach to support was not firmly established. This meant that the needs of pupils were not always identified early enough and intervention was delayed. Furthermore, an emphasis on summative attainment data (Farrell et al, 2007; Runswick-Cole, 2011) with lack of specificity around target setting, sometimes led to pupils not being clear about how to improve and smaller steps of progress not being identified or celebrated (Lingard, 2001; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010).

Conclusions and implications for future practice

It is clear that a number of secondary schools are addressing barriers to inclusion in a variety of ways, providing a range of flexible support pathways for pupils with special educational needs, despite limited resources (Wedell, 2005). This research identifies examples of good practice and suggests aspects for future development in relation to distributed leadership and ongoing professional development (Farrell, 2001; Ellins & Porter, 2005; Wedell, 2005; Mittler, 2008).

Firstly, schools need to examine how a vision for SEND is communicated and driven by senior leadership teams. In order to build capacity for improvement, carefully planned mobilisation of leadership at all levels is required to develop collective influence. Schools need to consider what type of leadership is needed to secure the best outcomes for young people with SEND and how structures can be changed in order to make this happen. This requires a clarification of roles and responsibilities, within a structured graduated approach to support, to ensure that the role of the SENCo is strengthened and leadership and accountability for SEND is distributed.

Secondly, senior leadership teams need to work with staff to clarify expectations in relation to the quality of teaching for pupils with SEND (Farrell, 2007) and ensure that the progress of SEND pupils is everyone's responsibility. Schools need to consider what training, development and support will be required to ensure that all staff can identify and use adaptive and responsive teaching strategies within lessons to ensure pupils with SEND feel included, can access learning and make expected progress. In this respect, senior leaders may require further training to support their ongoing monitoring role.

Finally, schools need to build on current networks and work together as part of wider communities, including partnership working with other services (Mittler, 2008), to identify development needs, share good practice (Black, 2012) and resources and provide structured training for staff at different stages of their professional development. By sharing expertise, schools can begin to embed systems that support positive outcomes for pupils with SEND and create long term sustainability.

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