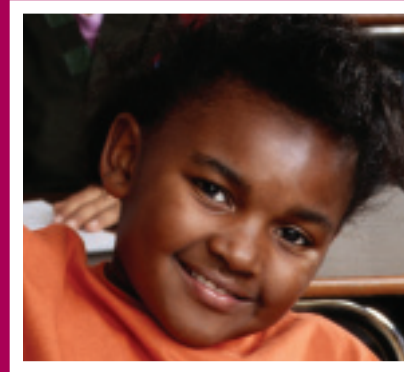# AN EVALUATION OF SPECIAL CLASSES FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIFIC SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DISORDER

A National Report by the
Inspectorate of the
Department of Education and Science

2005

An Evaluation of Special Classes for Pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder

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AN EVALUATION OF SPECIAL CLASSES FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIFIC SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DISORDER

Contents

FOREWORD BY THE CHIEF INSPECTOR

This report describes the evaluation of provision that is made for pupils who attend special classes for specific speech and language disorder (SSLD) throughout the country. While the first classes for pupils with SSLD were established almost twenty years ago, it is only in the last twelve years that there has been significant growth in this form of provision. These pupils are now recognised as having severe language and communication difficulties that can affect their development, particularly their cognitive, social and emotional development. It is accepted that, in the absence of intensive support during their early years in school, they will struggle to make progress and will fail to reach their full potential. That is why the Department of Education and Science has established fifty-four special classes in various locations, and why these classes are each provided with a teacher and speech therapist to support seven pupils in an intensive way over a two-year period.

In this evaluation, all fifty-four special classes were involved. Through questionnaires, data were collected on all fifty-four settings and provided a comprehensive picture of the pupil population and how issues such as admission and discharge were managed. A more detailed study was undertaken of sixteen special classes. This involved classroom observation by inspectors, the review of school and classroom documents, the completion of questionnaires, and separate structured interviews by an inspector with school staff, therapists and parents. A follow-up survey of past pupils of special SSLD classes was conducted, and, to conclude the evaluation, a one-day seminar for professionals was organised with the assistance of staff from the Primary Curriculum Support Programme. The breadth of the evaluation and the professionalism and co-operation of all those who participated add to the reliability of its findings.

Many aspects of best practice are described throughout the report, and these present a menu for the development of the provision that is being made. It gives me great pleasure to record that the great majority of parents were very pleased with the educational and therapeutic services their children received. Weaknesses in provision were also identified and clear recommendations are made as to how to address them. In particular, attention must be given to how admissions committees manage their role and how carefully they adhere to the criteria for SSLD, as described in documentation from the Department of

Education and Science. It is essential that the intensive level of resourcing in these classes is allocated for the population of pupils for whom it is intended.

I would like to acknowledge the successful contribution that these classes, through their teachers and speech and language therapists, make to the delivery of a meaningful and effective education experience to the pupils. The inspectors who conducted the evaluation are to be complimented for the professional and thorough approach to evaluation that they adopted. The principals of the schools, the parents of the pupils and, in particular, the staff of the special classes, both teachers and speech and language therapists, deserve our gratitude and praise for the very high level of co-operation they afforded the evaluation, as do the staff of the PCSP who facilitated the seminar for professionals.

I hope that you will find this report of benefit and that it will act as a useful resource for all those who are involved in developing the provision that is made for pupils with SSLD.

Eamon Stack

Chief Inspector

July 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: ORGANISATION OF PROVISION

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1.1   Introduction

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the provision of education for pupils with specific speech and language disorder (SSLD) in special classes in mainstream primary schools. The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science (DES) conducted the evaluation in 2002.

In the report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC), pupils with SSLD are described as those whose non–verbal ability is in the average band or higher but whose skill in understanding or expressing themselves through the medium of spoken language is severely impaired (DES 1993).

The needs of children with SSLD are identified and described as follows:

■ placement in small classes;

■ early identification and intervention;

■ a curriculum that is taught through the medium of the language of the home, which does not include a second language and, while similar to that followed by their peers in mainstream classes, has a particular and constant emphasis on the language involved in each subject area;

■ a structured language programme matched to identified needs;

■ intensive speech and language therapy;

■ opportunities to interact with other children in ordinary classes; and

■ the adoption of a co-ordinated approach by parents and teachers in relation to the child's language development.

(DES 1993)

1.2   Special classes for pupils with specific speech and language disorder

Special classes for pupils with SSLD are attached to mainstream primary schools. A full-time teacher is assigned to each class, and the classes operate with a reduced pupil–teacher ratio of 7:1 (DES 1993). It is expected that speech and language therapists employed by local health boards will provide speech and language therapy for the children in the classes, usually for a minimum of four hours per day. The DES pays enhanced capitation grants in respect of each child enrolled in the classes and funds the provision of daily transport to schools for children who require it. Psychologists employed by health boards or, in some instances, by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provide psychological support services for the classes. Special–needs assistants (SNAs) are not assigned automatically to a class; however, the DES has allocated SNAs to a number of individual children enrolled in classes, under the terms of recent special education circulars (DES 2002a).

The aim of the classes is to address the pupils' speech and language disorder through appropriate education and intensive speech and language therapy within the context of a broad and balanced primary school curriculum. The

emphasis is placed on early intervention, and children are generally placed in these special classes when at infant or first-class level. A few primary schools operate two classes, a junior and a senior class, and some children transfer to the senior class following a placement in the junior class.

The great majority of children spend one or two years in their local primary school before transferring to a class. After a period of two years in the special class most of the children are returned to their local school, having been deemed to have improved and to be no longer in need of special class provision. A significant number of these children continue to receive speech and language therapy in a local clinic after they return to their local school, and many are allocated resource teaching hours under the terms of special education circulars issued by the DES (DES 1999, 2002b, 2003).

1.3   The report of the Special Education Review Committee

The SERC Report stresses that, before a child can be formally identified as having a specific speech and language disorder, a psychological assessment is required to confirm that his or her level of intellectual ability has at least the potential to be in the average range. Also, the child's performance in one or more aspects of language must be confirmed by a speech therapist as being at a markedly lower level. In addition, a hearing impairment, a physical impairment or an emotional or behavioural problem cannot be the primary cause of the speech or language impairment.

The SERC Report advises that the approaches adopted by those involved in the children's language development, including parents, should be co-ordinated. It is noted that those children who transfer to mainstream provision from classes for children with SSLD can be expected to have residual difficulties, mainly in the understanding and use of written language.

Early identification
The importance of the early identification of children with SSLD is emphasised, and the involvement of professionally qualified and skilled personnel in early intervention programmes is stressed. In addition to prescribing criteria for the identification of children with SSLD, the SERC Report specifically recommends that provision be made for children identified as having SSLD at pre-school level. It suggests that, where appropriate, pre-school provision be established in association with schools in which classes for children with SSLD have been previously established.

The report further recommends that children who are placed in these special classes should participate in ordinary classes for some activities, as appropriate. It advises that the need for the provision of classes in post-primary schools should be investigated, and that special provision for children with SSLD in primary or post-primary schools should be made with the assistance of support teachers and speech and language therapists, the latter to be provided by the health boards.

1.4   Origin, development and distribution of special classes

Although the first special class for pupils with SSLD was set up twenty years ago, most of the classes have been established since 1990. In 1993 the SERC

Report identified a total of nine classes in seven schools, six of which were in Dublin and one each in Galway, Limerick, and Ennis.

The basis for the setting up of the earlier classes is unclear, and no evidence is available of an agreed policy involving the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Education and Science regarding the establishment of this type of special education provision. In brief, it appears that the setting up of the earlier classes was initiated by individual speech and language therapists employed by local health boards, who sought the co-operation of local schools in setting up the classes. The classes were intended to provide a focused speech and language therapy service for children with SSLD in an educational context. This type of service was envisaged as being a more effective means of meeting the particular needs of the children than clinic-based speech and language therapy. In general, the establishment of the classes involved co-operation between speech and language therapy services, health board officials, school staffs, boards of management of schools and the Inspectorate of the DES, with the Inspectorate providing a link between administrative sections of the department and local agencies.

At present there are fifty-four classes for children with SSLD. These classes are unevenly distributed between geographical areas. (See fig. 1.)
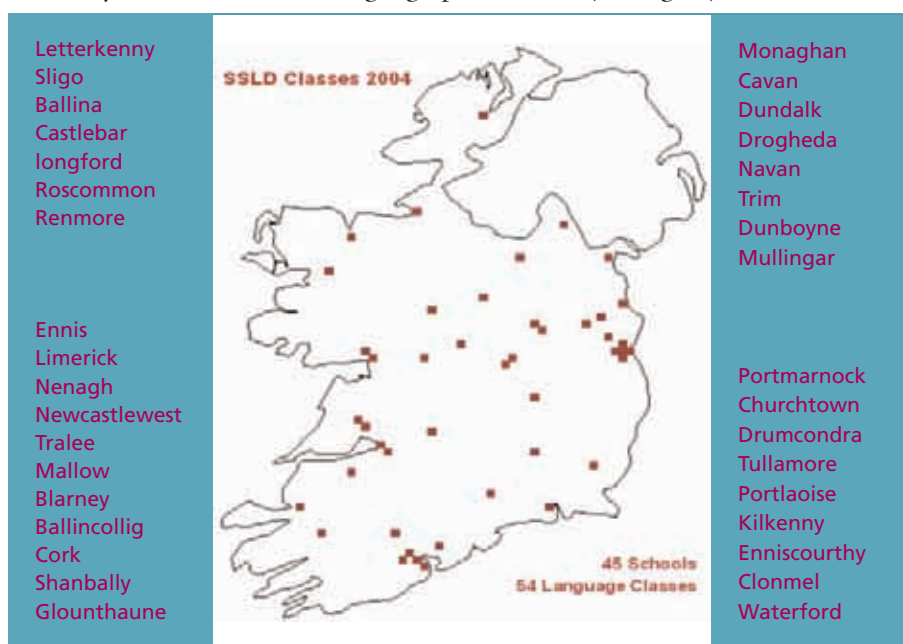
Fig. 1: Distribution of classes for children with SSLD, 2004

The fifty-four classes are in forty-five different primary schools. (See table 1.) More than half the classes have been established within the last few years. Of the total, forty (approximately 75 per cent) are designated as junior classes, catering for children aged from five to eight; the remaining classes are designated as senior classes, catering for older children.

Growth in the spread of the classes reached a peak in the years 1994–2001, when forty-six classes were established. No classes have been set up since then, and it is likely that the difficulties experienced by health boards in recruiting speech and language therapists to support the setting up of additional classes are a factor contributing to this situation.

Roll no.	School	County or city	SSLD classes
17326B	Scoil Naomh Feidhlim, Cavan	Co. Cavan	1
16677C	Bunscoil na mBráithre, Ennis	Co. Clare	1
17957N	Ennis Convent Infant NS, Ennis	Co. Clare	1
12473M	Greenmount Monastery NS	Cork (city)	2
13889C	Shanbally NS, Rinn an Scidígh	Co. Cork	1
15011M	Scoil Náisiúnta na Blarna	Co. Cork	1
15484J	Glounthaune Mixed NS	Co. Cork	1
19256Q	Scoil Ghobnatan, Mallow	Co. Cork	1
19771J	Scoil Bharra, Ballincollig	Co. Cork	1
17728V	Scoil Náisiúnta Thalamh na Coille, Letterkenny	Co. Donegal	1
19472W	St Mark's Junior NS, Springfield, Tallaght	South Dublin	2
19541P	Scoil Ard Mhuire, Belgard Heights, Tallaght	South Dublin	1
11525A	St Patrick's NS, Drumcondra	Dublin (city)	2
10296G	Scoil Naomh Mearnóg, Strand Road, Portmarnock	Fingal	1
19939V	Scoil Náisiúnta an Dea-Aoire, Churchtown	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	2
19401W	Scoil Náisiúnta Chaitríona Shóisearach, Renmore	Galway (city)	1
19468I	Scoil Náisiúnta Chaitríona Shinsearach, Renmore	Galway (city)	1
20042E	Scoil an Chroí Naofa, Ballinasloe	Co. Galway	1
13530D	Scoil Mhuire, Tobar Mhuiire, Trá Lí	Co. Kerry	1
19512I	St Oliver's NS, Ballycasheen, Killarney	Co. Kerry	1
19925K	Scoil Mhuire, Presentation Convent, Parnell Street	Co. Kilkenny	2
13386W	Scoil Náisiúnta an Chroí Rónaofa, Port Laoise	Co. Laois	1
06936R	St John's Convent, Cathedral Place	Limerick (city)	1
18677M	Scoil Mháthair Dé, Cuarbhóthar Theas	Limerick (city)	2
17951B	Scoil Ó Curáin B, Newcastle	Co. Limerick	1
18178R	St Joseph's Convent	Co. Longford	2
19479N	Rathmullan NS, Rathmullan, Drogheda	Co. Louth	1
19673J	St Joseph's NS, Avenue Road, Dundalk	Co. Louth	1
05215W	Scoil Náisiúnta Chroí Íosa, Ballina	Co. Mayo	1
18542M	Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Pádraig, Castlebar	Co. Mayo	1
00883P	Áine Naofa NS, Navan	Co. Meath	1
16646O	St Mary's Convent NS, Trim	Co. Meath	2
20032B	Dunboyne Junior NS, Dunboyne	Co. Meath	1
17150N	Scoil Mhuire, Monaghan	Co. Monaghan	1
17746A	Scoil Cholmáin Naofa, an Muclach, an Screagán, Tulach Mhór	Co. Offaly	1
18797W	Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Seosamh, Arden View, Tullamore	Co. Offaly	1
15083O	St Mary's Convent NS, Roscommon	Co. Roscommon	1
19974A	Scoil Eoin Naofa, Sráid an Teampaill	Co. Sligo	2
16344V	St Mary's Junior BNS, Nenagh	Co. Tipperary (NR)	1
12180U	Presentation Primary School, Clonmel	Co. Tipperary (SR)	1
19955T	Scoil Náisiúnta na Toirbhearta, Clochar na Toirbhearta	Waterford (city)	1
00934G	Presentation Convent (Junior), Mullingar	Co. Westmeath	1
17025K	Scoil Náisiúnta na nDún, Mullingar	Co. Westmeath	1
20073P	St Mary's NS, Grace Park Road, Athlone	Co. Westmeath	1
20003R	St Aidan's Parish School, Enniscorthy	Co. Wexford	1

Table 1: Distribution of special classes for pupils with specific speech and language disorder

1.5   Enrolment of pupils in special classes

The enrolment of pupils in special classes is managed locally by an admissions committee that is generally composed of the following personnel: the school principal, the special class teacher, the speech and language therapist attached to the class, a psychologist attached to either the NEPS or the local health board, and the manager of the local speech and language therapy services. In a few instances, psychologists in private practice and paediatricians sit on admissions committees. In most instances a single admissions committee manages the enrolment of children in a class or classes attached to a particular school. Table 2 provides a sample of the membership of thirty-one admissions committees serving single schools.

Admissions committee membership	Principal	Teacher	Health board psychologist	NEPS psychologist	SLT	Inspector*
	31	31	25	9	31	30

Table 2: Membership of a sample of thirty-one admissions committees serving single schools

In some instances, where there are classes in the same general area, a joint admissions committee manages the admission of children to all the classes. All admissions committees operate in an advisory capacity only to their boards of management: the ultimate responsibility for the enrolment of children in special classes rests with the boards of management of schools.

When enrolling children, admissions committees generally operate in accordance with the guidelines of the SERC Report and the admissions criteria laid down by DES circulars (DES 1999, 2002b). Appendix 2 of circular 08/02 states that such children should meet each of the following criteria:

■ Assessment by a psychologist on a standardised test of intelligence which places non-verbal or performance ability within the average range or above;

■ 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 language development at two standard deviations or more below the mean, or at a generally equivalent level.

■ The child's difficulties are not attributable to hearing impairment; where the child is affected to some degree by hearing impairment the hearing threshold for the speech-related frequencies should be 40 db.

■ Emotional and behavioural disorders or a physical disability are not considered to be primary causes.

■ Children with speech and language delays and difficulties are not to be considered under this category.

(DES 2000b)[1]

Where the demand for places exceeds the available supply, some admissions committees have developed a system to assist them in making decisions on the relative merits of individual applications.

[1] Inspectors have withdrawn from membership of admissions committees to concentrate on their core work of inspection.

Estimating numbers of pupils eligible for enrolment

Figures provided in 2002 by 31 of the schools catering for 37 special classes are used here to give an indication of the demand for places. Applications were made on behalf of more than 300 pupils for the 137 vacancies in the 37 special classes. The admissions committees determined that 250 pupils were eligible. (See fig. 2.) 113 eligible pupils did not secure places.
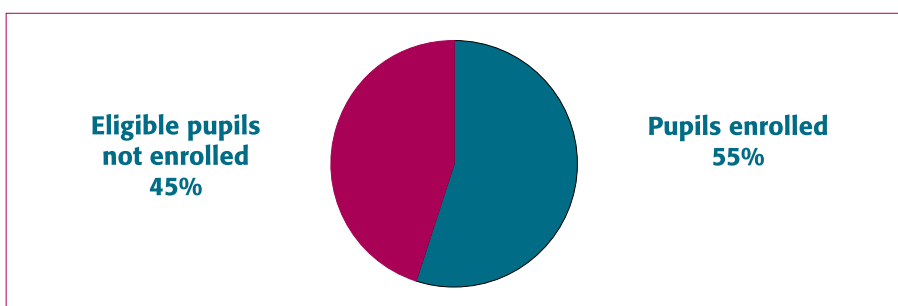
Fig. 2: Numbers of eligible pupils accommodated in classes

The demand for placement in these classes significantly exceeds the number of places available at present. This trend is likely to continue, in the medium term at least, until shortfalls in the supply of speech and language therapy services are addressed so that additional special classes can be established, or until effective alternative models of provision of speech and language therapy for children with SSLD are developed.

1.6 The Inspectorate's evaluation of classes for children with SSLD

The Inspectorate conducted an evaluation of the provision for children with SSLD during the period January–June 2002. The evaluation was organised and co-ordinated by a steering group drawn from two Inspectorate business units, the Evaluation Support and Research Unit (ESRU) and Business Unit 9 (Special Education). The steering group developed a four-strand evaluation model that consisted of the following elements:

■ the collection of data relating to pupils in 54 special classes in 45 schools;

■ observation by an inspector of classroom activities in a sample of 16 special classes;

■ a review by the inspector of school and classroom documents, including planning documents;

■ the completion by principal teachers, special class teachers, and parents of questionnaires relating to the provision of education for children with SSLD;

■ structured interviews by an inspector with principal teachers, special class teachers, parents, and the relevant speech and language therapists;

■ a one-day post-evaluation seminar for professionals, including special class teachers and speech and language therapists, on issues relating to the provision of education for children with SSLD;

■ a follow-up survey of selected year cohorts of past pupils of the sixteen special classes that were evaluated.

1.7 Outline of the report

This report consists of nine chapters. In chapter 2 a review of research literature is presented that provides an informed framework within which the findings of the evaluation may be considered. Chapter 3 describes the methods used in the collection, analysis and synthesis of the data. A profile of the children enrolled in the classes is described in chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides a combined analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaires and the structured interviews, while chapter 6 describes the school-based evaluation process. The data obtained from the follow-up survey of selected year cohorts of past pupils is presented in chapter 7. Chapter 8 provides a summary of the one-day seminar for professionals that examined issues relating to the provision of education for children with SSLD. Finally, chapter 9 outlines the conclusions and recommendations stemming from the composite analysis of all the data generated by the evaluation. A selection of the instruments used in conducting the evaluation is included in the appendixes.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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2.1   Introduction

A comprehensive range of literature relating to the provision of education for pupils with specific speech and language disorder (SSLD) was reviewed in order to provide an informed rationale for the evaluation. The findings of the literature review are presented under the following headings: definition, causes. prevalence, effects, approaches to intervention, forms of educational provision, transfer to mainstream provision, and training and professional development.

2.2   Definition

The research literature contains a number of terms to describe children's difficulties in this area. Many commentators use the term *speech and language impairment* (SLI), suggesting a constitutional origin. The Queensland Department of Education, Australia, uses the term *speech-language impairment* and describes this as

> a primary impairment of the neurological, cognitive and/or physical structures specific to speech–language processing resulting in a substantial reduction in the student's ability to communicate.

> (State of Queensland 1998: 64)

The Queensland document specifies that the communication disability is a primary impairment and one that cannot be attributed to intellectual impairment, physical impairment, visual impairment, hearing impairment, social or emotional factors, or socio–cultural factors.

In Britain the term *speech-language delay* is used as an umbrella term to cover a range of conditions occurring in early childhood. It is sometimes described as an unexpected and unexplained divergence in language ability where other developmental aptitudes appear robust (Rice 2000). The distinction between such terms as *delay, disorder, disability* and *impairment* is not clearly defined, but the term *specific speech* and *language impairment* is frequently used to characterise children who are assessed as having a significant discrepancy between verbal and performance ability (Haines and Naidoo 1991). Like SSLD, definitions of SLI exclude children with hearing loss, autistic-spectrum disorder, physical disability, and general learning disability.

While a considerable number of authorities describe SLI as the discrepancy between verbal ability and non-verbal ability, there does not appear to be universal agreement about the extent to which the discrepancy constitutes a specific speech and language disorder. Rice (1997) and Leonard (1998) describe SLI as a developmental disorder characterised by a discrepancy between scores obtained on tests of language performance and tests of non–verbal cognitive skills, typically of between 1.5 and 2 standard deviations below the mean.

Pupils with SSLD are defined in the SERC Report as

> those whose non-verbal ability is in the average band or higher and whose skill in understanding or expressing themselves through the medium of spoken language is severely impaired.
>
> (DES 1993: 91)

The authors of the report state that a specific speech and language disorder cannot be attributable to factors such as defective hearing, emotional or behavioural disorders, or a physical condition. The disorders may involve difficulty with one or more of the main components of communication through spoken language, receptive or expressive, such as the patterning and production of speech sounds, the message content, the syntax and grammar, or the use of speech in interacting with other people (DES 1993).

The DES (2002c) adopts a more stringent definition of the discrepancy in an information note on resources for children with special educational needs. The note states that to qualify for special provision a pupil's non-verbal ability must be within the average range, and a speech and language therapist must also have assessed the pupil as being at least two standard deviations below the mean in one or more of the main areas of speech and language development.

2.3 Causes

The aetiology of SSLD is not yet clear. There is a growing body of evidence, based on familial patterns, that a strong genetic component exists. A number of twin studies, for example, have shown that the incidence of SSLD is greater among monozygotic (identical) twins than among dizygotic (non-identical) twins (Bishop, North, and Donlan 1995; Tomblin and Buckwalter 1998). Some clinicians have also noted patterns of SSLD between generations, and differing family patterns have identified higher prevalence in siblings (Tomblin 1989). A higher prevalence was observed in fathers, brothers and sisters (approximately 29 per cent) than in mothers (7 per cent) (Rice, Haney and Wexler 1998; Tallal, Ross and Curtiss 1989). Existing diagnostic technologies have not demonstrated any form of brain abnormality among children with SSLD.

2.4 Prevalence

The difficulty in arriving at precise diagnostic criteria has led to widely differing estimates of the prevalence of SSLD. In the studies reviewed the prevalence figures ranged between approximately 2 and 10 per cent. It is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about prevalence because of lack of agreement between researchers about definitions. A study by Paul, Hernandez, Taylor and Johnson (1996) reported a prevalence of 1.65 per cent for mild, moderate and severe cases but 0.65 per cent for severe cases. Stevenson and Richman (1976) obtained a prevalence rate of 0.6 per cent for SLI, in the absence of other developmental difficulties. This estimate of a prevalence rate in the region of 0.6 per cent for severe SLI recurs in a number of studies.

Other studies, presumably using looser diagnostic criteria, arrive at estimates that suggest a much higher prevalence rate. Tomblin, Smith and Zhang (1997) estimated that 7 per cent of kindergarten children are diagnosed with SLI if all

children are tested. They also found that only a quarter of children with SLI are enrolled in intervention programmes, suggesting that approximately 2 per cent had more serious difficulties.

2.5   Effects

The use of language for the purpose of communication is one of the defining characteristics of humans. The attainment of milestones in the development of oral language is an acknowledged part of the general developmental process. Because all communication disorders can potentially isolate individuals from their social and educational surroundings, appropriate and timely intervention is crucial. Children with a history of delayed language development are at high risk of developing behavioural and psychiatric problems, and often have limited literacy skills (Bishop 1994).

The effects of speech and language difficulties on educational attainment are well documented. Studies reviewed by Law et al. (1998) revealed that between 41 and 75 per cent of children with language difficulties had reading difficulties at the age of eight. Language difficulties and literacy problems therefore have a recursive, interactive effect. Poor language skills affect early literacy achievement. At a later stage, literacy difficulties may in turn influence continuing language development. The ability to read and write is fundamental in providing a child with access to new vocabulary and grammatical knowledge (Bryant, Nunes and Bindman 1998; Catts and Kamhi 1999). A study by Stothard, Snowling, Bishop, Chipchase and Kaplan (1998) records that the vocabulary and verbal comprehension standard scores actually declined steadily between the ages of eight and fifteen for children with persistent SLI, with or without general cognitive delays. It is possible that this is the direct result of their poor literacy skills.

2.6   Approaches to intervention

Early intervention

Because of the nature of brain development, it is easier to learn language and communication skills before the age of five. When children have muscular disorders, hearing problems or developmental delays, their acquisition of speech, language and related skills is often affected (NICHCY 1996). The development of language skills, both receptive and expressive, involves sophisticated cognitive processing and fine motor skills. The earlier children develop these skills, and the more opportunities they have to practise them in early childhood, the more likely it is that they will become competent language users. Randomised controlled trials tracking children from pre-school to primary schooling and beyond revealed that effective early intervention, allied to active parental involvement, resulted in enduring benefits in academic attainment and social adjustment (Ramey and Ramey 1992; Zigler and Muenchow 1992).

Speech and language therapy

Speech and language therapists assist children who have communication disorders in various ways (NICHCY 1996). They provide individual therapy for the child. They consult the child's parents and teachers regarding the most effective ways to facilitate the child's communication, and they work closely

with them to develop goals and techniques for effective therapy in class and at home. Speech and language therapy may continue throughout schooling, either in the form of direct therapy or on a consultative basis.

2.7   Forms of educational provision

An extensive report on provision for these children in England and Wales describe a range of approaches to education, from full integration in a mainstream setting with the support of a speech and language therapist to specialised forms of provision (Law et al., 2000). Specialised forms of provision assign children to language units or resource bases. Language units are defined as a form of provision whereby the children are in a separate class for most of the time, with their own specialist teacher and speech and language therapist. Resource bases are described as a form of provision whereby children are educated in their mainstream year group for most of the time, with specialist teacher and speech and language therapy support available on site for a significant proportion of the week.

Webster and McConnell (1987) argue that children with severe communication needs require a secure, protected environment in which the teacher has time to have a close relationship with each child in the group. They suggest that children also benefit from frequent and intense contact with specialist teachers and therapists, who are able to plan more thoroughly to meet each child's identified individual profile of needs. They suggest that children can benefit from sharing in the community life of the school through the readily available integration opportunities. The Association for All Speech-Impaired Children (AFASIC) and Invalid Children's Aid Nationwide (ICAN) stress that appropriate opportunities for interaction with mainstream peers help children with speech and language impairments to gain the confidence to play their part in society. They also emphasise the fact that effectively planned learning and teaching programmes foster children's independence (AFASIC–ICAN 1996). This view of integration echoes the recommendations of the SERC Report, which state that children enrolled in a special class for pupils with SSLD should participate in ordinary classes for some activities, as appropriate (DES 1993).

A report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland considered what constituted effective provision for pupils with language and communication disorders. The question whether specialised units, special schools or total integration in mainstream schools with support was the most appropriate form of provision led the report to suggest that what was important was not where the pupils were educated but how they were educated (HMI 1996). Fig. 3 illustrates the elements of effective provision identified in this report.

The key to effective provision was stated by the report to be the individualised education programme, which was described as the bridge between the pupil's assessed needs and the strategies employed to meet those needs.

AFASIC–ICAN (1996) emphasise the aim of combining the mainstream school curriculum with a specialised language-teaching approach. They stress the need for children to have access to a wide and varied curriculum, similar

in nature and content to their mainstream peers but with a consistent emphasis on the language involved in each subject area and with specific and structured language teaching supported by regular speech and language therapy input (AFASIC-ICAN 1996).

This is also reflected in the recommendations of the SERC Report, which state that the curriculum to which classes for children with SSLD have access should be similar to that followed by their peers in mainstream classes but with a constant emphasis on the language involved in each subject area (DES 1993). AFASIC (cited by Horgan, 1999) also refers to the importance of addressing the issues of social skills strategies and self-esteem when considering the curriculum for children with SSLD.
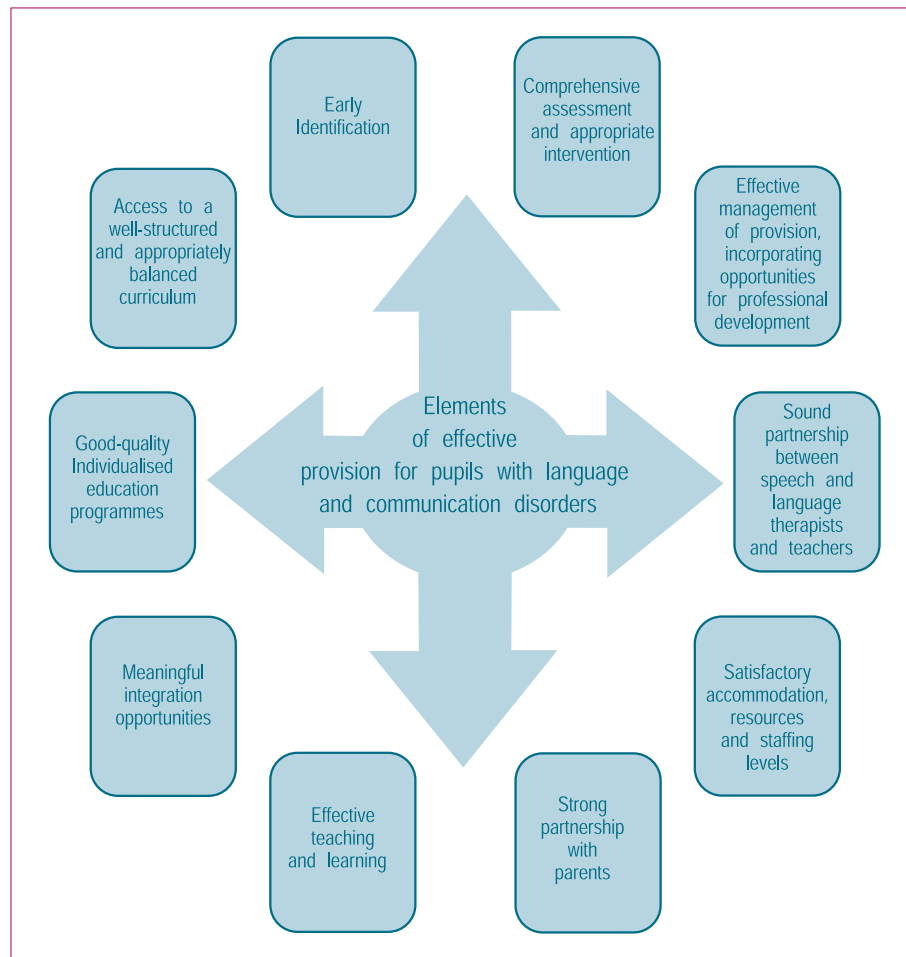
Fig. 3: Elements of effective provision (HMI 1996)

2.8   Transfer to mainstream provision

HMI (1996) emphasises the importance of careful planning with regard to the transfer from special class to mainstream school and describes effective decision-making as involving a multi-disciplinary team and parents. Consultation between staff from the sending and receiving school placements is described as essential in ensuring that information is transferred in an appropriate manner.

AFASIC guidelines (cited by Horgan, 1999) state that the success of reintegration in mainstream schools is dependent on the ability of the

mainstream school to recognise the residual difficulties the children have and to provide appropriate help. A survey by Horgan (1999) shows that there was some dissatisfaction among those teachers questioned in classes for children with SSLD regarding the issue of reintegration. The respondents suggested that time and resources need to be made available to allow for contact between the special classes and the receiving schools.

2.9   Training and professional development

In the study by Law et al. (2000), joint training for teachers and speech and language therapists was seen to have several benefits at an operational level, in that it contributed to a better mutual grasp of complex issues relating to teaching and therapy. A variety of models of training was described for developing expertise in schools, including the shared teaching of courses at a recognised centre. The study found that about 95 per cent of speech and language therapy services offer training to education staff (teachers and classroom assistants), and approximately half the local education authorities offer training to speech and language therapists. Joint training involving teachers and speech and language therapists appears to occur less frequently, with only about 30 to 40 per cent of teachers and speech and language therapists involved. Topics for shared training ranged from understanding pupils' needs, obtaining access to the curriculum, and the use of specialist techniques. Networking between schools was seen to be a useful strategy for disseminating good practice.

Law et al. (2000) found that the provision of speech and language services in schools was most effective when the roles of speech and language therapist and the teacher were defined and were mutually supportive. Kersner (1996) suggested that both teachers and speech and language therapists need to acquire a knowledge and awareness of each other's areas of expertise, and that there is a need for effective collaboration. The benefits of working together are described as contributing to each other's professional development, enabling a sharing of expertise, developing a holistic view of the child, and gaining more realistic expectations of each other (Kersner 1996; Wright and Kersner 2004). HMI (1996) found that in the best examples of collaborative practice teachers and speech and language therapists were observed spending considerable amounts of time working together in the same room with groups of children and with individual children. Effective collaboration was described as being characterised by mutual trust and respect, joint goal-setting, joint training, and parental satisfaction with the provision. AFASIC–ICAN also state that

> it is essential that teachers and therapists discuss, define and understand their complementary roles within an educational setting.
>
> <div align="right">(AFASIC–ICAN 1996: 9)</div>

There is a need for a high skill level on the part of the adults working with children with SSLD, and a need for specialist training for teachers working in classes for children with SSLD. A report published by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO 2001) recommends that a professional development course for teachers be devised, in collaboration with relevant bodies, similar to the current special education diploma courses but with a

greater proportion of time devoted to the teaching and learning of children with SSLD. It proposes that joint attendance by teachers and speech and language therapists be considered, and also recommends that a national forum for teachers, speech and language therapists and other professionals involved with language classes be facilitated. The report draws attention to the need for specific time for liaison between class teacher and speech and language therapist and recommends that in-service training be provided for principals. It further proposes that training for speech and language therapists be facilitated in such areas as collaboration with school personnel, the school curriculum, classroom management, and developing a shared knowledge base with teachers.

2.10 Conclusion

The findings of the literature review suggest that making appropriate educational provision for children with SSLD is a multifaceted task that is characterised by a series of multiple and interrelated variables. The varied approaches to data collection, analysis and synthesis adopted in this evaluation by the Inspectorate reflect the complexity of provision.

Early intervention by speech and language therapists and teachers is stressed. Children should receive intensive therapy and special education in a setting with a low pupil-teacher ratio but with opportunities for integrating with typically developing peers. There should be strong partnership between teacher, therapist and parents in the implementation of an individual education programme that covers a broad curriculum and that also specifies individualised targets for speech and language development.

CHAPTER 3

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY: A FOUR–STRAND EVALUATION MODEL

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3.1 Evaluation objectives

The general purpose of the evaluation of classes for children with specific speech and language disorder was to report on the quality of educational provision in the fifty-four special classes. This overriding goal was translated into six specific objectives, as follows:

■ to gather information on the case load of children enrolled in the classes;

■ to report on the level and quality of resources and to evaluate their use;

■ to report on the quality of teaching and learning in the classes;

■ to gather the views of a sample of parents in relation to the effectiveness of provision;

■ to gather the views of a range of professionals involved with the operation of the classes; and

■ to gather information on children who have returned to a mainstream class.

3.2 Development of the evaluation model

During the period January–March 2002 the steering group developed a four-strand evaluation model that would provide information in relation to each of the evaluation objectives. The four strands were:

Strand 1: Data gathering from all fifty-four classes for children with SSLD

Strand 2: School-based evaluation in a sample of sixteen classes

Strand 3: A seminar for professionals

Strand 4: A pupil follow-up survey

The four strands together provided a balanced evaluation model that encompassed broad data-gathering from all the schools involved, consultation with relevant personnel, and as a focused evaluation of teaching and learning in a sample of sixteen of the classes.

3.3 Communications

In January 2002 the steering group communicated with those groups with an interest in the work of the classes, including the management authorities of the schools, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, and the chairpersons, principals and class teachers in the schools. A letter was sent to each of the health boards to inform the speech and language therapy managers about the evaluation, and letters were also sent to the speech and language therapists working directly with the classes.

3.4 Strand 1: Data-gathering from all fifty-four classes for children with SSLD

The purpose of this evaluation strand was to survey the forty-five schools that had one or more classes, in order to gather factual information about the operation of the classes and to gather the views of principals and class teachers regarding the benefits to children and the quality of the available resources and supports. A comprehensive pupil profiling exercise was also undertaken.

School principals' questionnaire

The Evaluation Support and Research Unit prepared and administered a series of surveys and questionnaires. The first of these was a detailed school questionnaire for the principals of the forty-five schools in the study. (See appendix 1.) This questionnaire yielded quantitative information concerning the range and quality of resources and the general administration of the classes. The questionnaire also elicited the principals' views on the quality of specific aspects of provision and provided them with an opportunity to identify the priority issues for development at school and system levels. The completed questionnaires provided a substantial information base in relation to the establishment of the classes in the school, class timetabling, staffing, provision of speech and language therapy, accommodation, quality of support services, and operation of admissions committees. The response rate from the survey of school principals was 100 per cent.

Class teachers' questionnaire

A class teacher's questionnaire was issued to all fifty-four teachers in the classes for children with SSLD. (See Appendix 1.) The survey instrument gathered information on the professional experience of teachers, training opportunities availed of, resources provided for the class, and approaches to organisation of children for class teaching and for speech and language therapy. Information was also gathered about the programme planning process, the availability of support services, and policy on homework. The teachers' questionnaire also provided an opportunity for teachers to express their views on the operation of the language classes in general. All class teachers surveyed returned a questionnaire.

Pupil profile

The class teacher's questionnaire incorporated a pupil profile grid to gather information on the children enrolled in each class. A numerical identifier was used for this information-gathering procedure in order to ensure confidentiality. Information was gathered on each child's age, sex, class level, academic performance, travelling time to school, and disability. The 100 per cent response rate to this questionnaire facilitated the compiling of profile data on the entire cohort of children enrolled in the classes throughout the country in March 2002.

3.5 Strand 2: School-based evaluation in a sample of sixteen classes

A central element of the evaluation of classes for children with SSLD was the evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning. Early in 2002 the steering

group devised a framework of evaluation questions that DES inspectors addressed during a two-day evaluation visit to each of the sixteen language classes selected for focused inspection. The selection procedure involved clustering the forty-five schools according to health board area and Inspectorate region in order to ensure a geographical spread in the random sample selected. During March 2002 two pilot evaluations were successfully completed, and the experience was drawn on in refining the evaluation materials. Following this, a two-day orientation seminar was organised for a team of eight inspectors assigned to the school-based evaluation work.

A framework for evaluation of classes in sixteen schools

The framework for the class-based evaluation incorporated observation and document review schedules to facilitate the evidence-gathering by inspectors and to promote consistency of approach. The observation schedule facilitated detailed reporting on the quality of aspects of practice, including the learning environment in the classroom, classroom management skills, teaching approaches, and learning and pupils' engagement. The schedule also facilitated reporting on the curriculum programme taught and the co-ordination and linkage between the work of the class teacher and the speech and language therapist.

The document review instrument covered such aspects as curriculum planning, planning for monitoring and assessment, record-keeping in relation to admissions, review of children's work samples, practice in relation to individualised planning, and monitoring the progress of individual children.

Following a class visit, the inspectors completed a detailed evaluative commentary in relation to each item on the observation and document review schedules. A four-point rating scale was applied in respect of each evaluation question in order to facilitate the processes of collation and data analysis.

The school-based evaluation was undertaken during April and May 2002. This involved a two-day period in each school focusing on the work of the class. In schools that had two classes the evaluation concentrated on the senior class. The evaluation included observation of practice, review of relevant documents, meetings with personnel involved with the class, and consultation with parents.

Structured interviews and parents' meeting

As part of the school-based evaluation phase, each inspector conducted separate structured interviews with the school principal, the class teacher, and the speech and language therapist. Inspectors also held a meeting with the parents of children attending the class. A common set of seven discussion themes was used in each of the three structured interviews and in the meeting with parents. The topics included the effectiveness of the special class in meeting the needs of children; admissions policy; collaboration between school personnel and the speech and language therapists; involvement by parents; strengths and weaknesses of current provision; and development of provision for children with SSLD at system level.

The inspectors prepared a separate record of the main issues discussed under the seven headings with each of the four groups. The Evaluation Support and Research Unit compiled the responses into an electronic database so that the

views of principals, teachers, speech and language therapists and parents could be examined individually and compared. An extensive data coding was undertaken, which entailed identifying and tagging the significant issues most frequently raised by each group. Extracts from this qualitative analysis are presented throughout this report to illustrate issues of significance, to corroborate the main findings, and to substantiate propositions and recommendations.

Feedback to schools

A post-evaluation meeting was facilitated by the evaluating inspector in each of the schools in order to give feedback and to provide an opportunity for discussion about the further development of provision. Each school received a written report that summarised the discussion, identified the main findings, and set out the inspector's recommendations.

3.6   Strand 3: Seminar for professionals

In May 2002 the Evaluation Support and Research Unit held a one-day seminar for a representative sample of the professionals involved in the work of special classes for children with SSLD. School principals, class teachers, speech and language therapists, speech and language therapy managers, psychologists and inspectors were among the forty participants. The seminar featured a number of workshops and plenary sessions designed to provide participants with an opportunity to discuss the provision being made in the classes and to identify ways in which policy and practice could be further developed. An external facilitator directed the seminar.

In chapter 8 the main issues identified at the seminar are examined, and some important connections are made with the findings from the other three evaluation strands.

3.7   Strand 4: Pupil follow-up survey

The fourth strand of the evaluation involved a follow-up survey of two cohorts of children who had previously attended a class for children with SSLD. The purpose of the survey was to gather information concerning the transfer of children back to mainstream provision and to establish the level and range of support being provided. The follow-up evaluation also aimed to gather the views of individual parents concerning their child's experience in the class and their satisfaction with current school provision.

With the assistance of principals and class teachers, the destination schools of approximately eighty-five children who transferred from a language class in 1998 or 2000 were identified. In the majority of instances the children had returned to a mainstream class in a primary school, although in some instances they had transferred to some other form of special class provision. In a few instances the destination schools identified were post-primary schools. During May 2002 questionnaires were issued to the principals of the destination schools and, through these schools, to the parents of the target sample of children. (See appendix 1.) A total of sixty-one responses from principals and fifty-seven responses from parents were received.

Follow-up survey principals' questionnaire

The completed school principals' questionnaires provided information on the class level of each child, the level of access to learning support, the allocation of resource-teaching hours, provision for speech and language therapy, and information regarding assessment results and achievement. The views of school principals in relation to the effectiveness of transfer arrangements and the quality of post-intervention supports for children returning to mainstream provision were also gathered.

Follow-up survey parents' questionnaire

The follow-up survey yielded information regarding parents' satisfaction with the model of provision. They were asked to comment on the effect of the class on their child's progress, the social and personal development of the child, school transport arrangements, the provision of speech and language therapy in the class, and the quality of home-school communication and sources of information for parents. Parents also contributed extensive commentary in response to open-ended questions regarding the quality of aspects of provision and ways in which provision could be further developed or improved.

3.8   Presentation of evaluation findings

The four strands of the evaluation model facilitated the compiling of an extensive information base on the classes for children with SSLD. The comprehensive school-based evaluation by inspectors in a sample of the classes yielded important findings in relation to teaching and learning, and the model also captured the professional views of those working directly with the classes. The follow-up study generated valuable information in relation to post-intervention and transfer issues, while the insights of parents have also been captured.

The findings from the four strands of the evaluation are presented throughout the remainder of this report.

CHAPTER 4

PROFILE OF CHILDREN ATTENDING THE CLASSES

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4.1   Introduction

In this chapter an analysis of profile data compiled on the entire cohort of children enrolled in the classes in March 2002 is presented. The information was gathered through a pupil profile grid that was incorporated in the questionnaire completed by the class teachers. The findings are presented under five headings: enrolment details, compliance with enrolment criteria, additional disabilities, achievement at enrolment, and language and ethnic background.

4.2   Enrolment details

The total number of children enrolled in the classes at the time of the survey was 367. The total number of boys enrolled (273) constituted approximately three-quarters of the total enrolment. Slightly over 60 per cent of the children had enrolled in the classes in the school year 2001/2002 and had, therefore, been in the classes for a relatively short time. A further 30 per cent had enrolled in the previous school year, 2000/2001. Only 31 children were enrolled before the school year 2000/2001, eight of whom were enrolled in 1997 and 1998. It would appear, therefore, that the majority of children spend about two years enrolled in the classes.
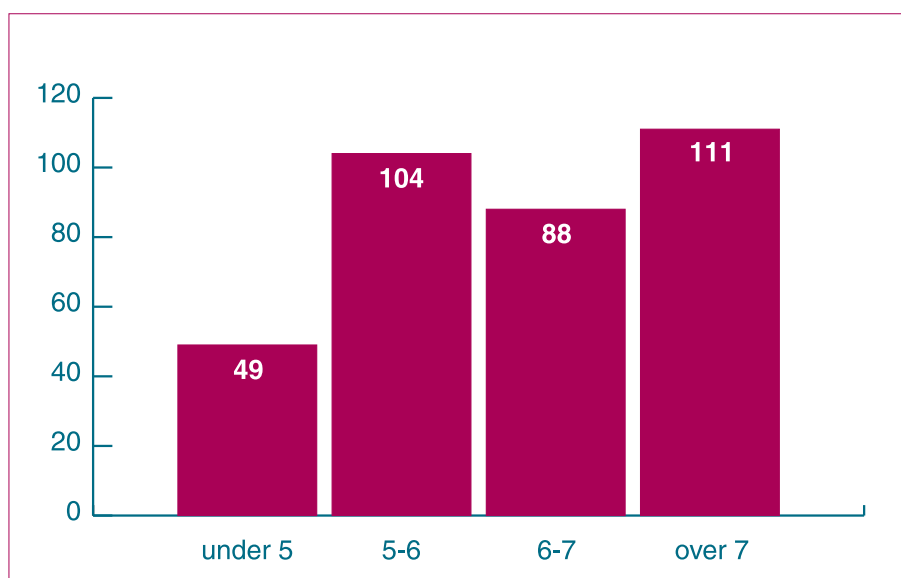
Fig. 4: Age of children on enrolment

Fig. 4 illustrates the age of children at enrolment. The average age of children on whom data was provided (n = 352) was 6.7 years. Close to half the children were less than six years old at enrolment, and only 20 per cent were aged eight or over.

4.3   Compliance with enrolment criteria

A number of questions were included in the teacher questionnaire profile grid to determine the extent to which there was compliance with the enrolment criteria set down by the Department of Education and Science for classes for children with specific speech and language disorder. Teachers were asked to provide information about children's general ability and their language ability, at enrolment, from their psychological and speech and language assessment reports. A numerical identifier was used to ensure confidentiality. Data was provided on 367 children, and this was compared with the criteria established by the DES. Where the general ability level or the language ability levels did not fall within the DES criteria the enrolment entry in respect of the child was rated as "non-compliant" for the purpose of the analysis. Where assessment showed that a child's assessment profile did not strictly meet but almost met the criteria, or where there were mitigating circumstances, the entry was recorded as "partially compliant"; and where assessment information on a child met the criteria the entry was rated as "fully compliant." Fig. 5 shows the results of the analysis of the data.
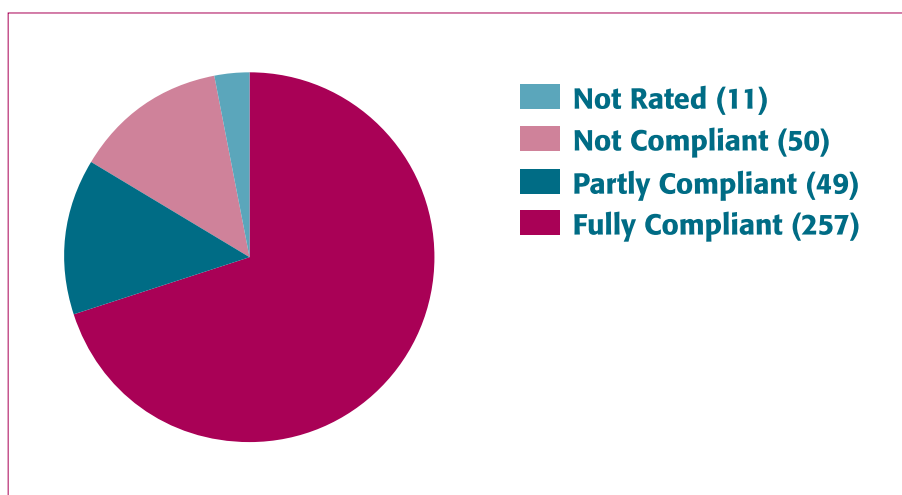
Fig. 5: Compliance of enrolment entries with DES enrolment criteria (n = 367)

It was not possible to give a rating in respect of eleven children's enrolment entry, because insufficient information was returned. Seventy per cent of enrolment entries (n = 257) were rated as fully compliant with the enrolment criteria. A further 12 per cent (49 children) were rated as partially compliant. However, 13 per cent of enrolment entries (50 of the 367 children) were rated as "non-compliant." It is worrying that approximately one in four children in these classes did not meet the enrolment criteria set by the DES. In the majority of cases rated as "non-compliant" the assessment of general ability showed that the children did not meet the DES criterion of having non-verbal ability within the average range or above but that they had a general learning disability rather than a specific speech and language disorder. In a number of cases the assessment results suggested that the children's general ability and their language ability were within the average range: that is, they did not meet the DES criterion of performing in one or more of the main areas of speech and language development at two or more standard deviations below the mean.

In many of the schools surveyed all the enrolment entries were compliant with the criteria, while in others the enrolment entries of several of the children in the classes were found to be non-compliant. This demonstrates a need for the DES to regularly monitor admissions to these special classes to ensure that the specialised and costly resources being employed are being used to meet the needs of children who meet the DES criteria for pupils with SSLD.

4.4   Additional disabilities

Teachers were asked to state whether children had been assessed as having other disabilities in addition to SSLD. Fig. 6 reveals that 59 of the 367 children for whom data was provided were assessed as having other disabilities in addition to SSLD. Twelve were assessed as having a general learning disability, four were assessed as having autistic-spectrum disorder, and ten were assessed as having dyspraxia. Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, specific learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties and physical disabilities were reported in a number of cases. Those with general learning disabilities and autistic-spectrum disorder are included in the figures given above as not meeting the criteria for enrolment in the classes. Children were also reported as having sensory motor integration problems, visual and hearing impairment, Asperger's syndrome, and epilepsy. In general it can be seen from these figures that co-existing disabilities are common in the children who are enrolled in these special classes. This calls for great care with regard to referral and enrolment, so that the most appropriate placement is arranged in each case.
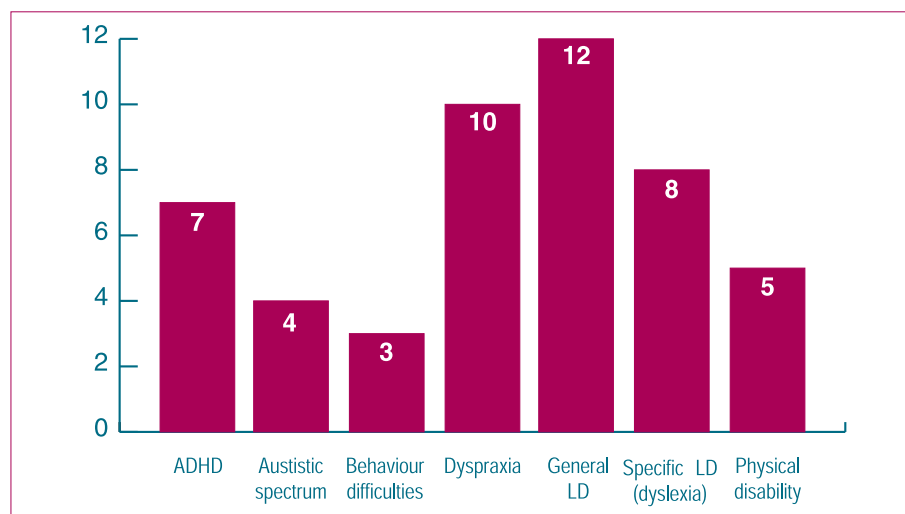
Fig. 6: Numbers of children assessed as having additional disabilities

During interviews conducted with teachers, principals and speech and language therapists, reference was made to the importance of having consistency in the profiles of children admitted to the classes in order to maintain an effective and efficient provision of education. Reference was also made to the lack of structures that exist for discharging a child who, having secured admission to the class, is subsequently considered to be inappropriately placed.

4.5   Achievement at enrolment

Teachers were asked to rate children's achievement at enrolment in English and mathematics, using a scale of 1–5, where 1 = very weak and 5 = very good. Ratings were provided for 255 children in English and for 273 children in mathematics. The average rating for children in English was 1.76, whereas the average rating in mathematics was 2.13, showing that teachers regarded the children's achievement as weak in both areas but somewhat better in mathematics.

4.6   Language and ethnic background

Questions were also included about children's nationality, ethnic status, and home language. The responses of the class teachers to these questions show that the home language of all the children in the classes was English and that no non-national or Traveller children were enrolled in the classes.

CHAPTER 5

THEMES FOR EFFECTIVE PROVISION: OUTCOME OF QUESTIONNAIRES AND INTERVIEWS

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5.1   Introduction and main themes

This chapter presents the outcomes of an analysis of questionnaires completed by school principals and class teachers in all forty-five schools with classes for children with SSLD. Information gathered through structured interviews conducted by inspectors with principals, teachers and speech and language therapists in a sample of sixteen schools is also presented, as are the main outcomes of the sixteen parent meetings that were conducted.

Twelve main themes for effective provision are identified. These include staff training and development; teaching and learning resources; accommodation; collaborative practice; curricular issues; social and personal development; integration; support services; parents and the classes; admissions procedure, placement, and discharge; transport; and return to mainstream provision.

5.2   Staff training and development

As part of this evaluation, teachers were asked to state the number of years that they had been teaching in mainstream education, in learning support or in a special class setting, and in the class for children with specific speech and language disorder (SSLD). An analysis of responses revealed that the average time spent teaching was 14.2 years in mainstream education, 2.9 years in a special class or a learning-support setting, and 2.8 years in the class for children with SSLD. The average cumulative total of teaching experience was 20.9 years, which suggests that, in general, teachers in classes for children with SSLD have extensive professional experience, extending to a range of different settings.

Nine teachers out of a total of 53 had completed the one-year full-time diploma in special education, six of them within the preceding ten years; all nine said that it had been either helpful or very helpful. The one-year part-time course in learning support had been completed by 11 teachers, three within the preceding ten years and eight during a period of ten or more years ago. The teachers were also asked to state whether they had undertaken any part-time training related to SSLD, and 11 stated that they had. It was reported that 33 of the 53 teachers had no specialist training of any kind.

All interviewees stressed the need to provide teachers with specific pre-service and in-service training to meet the needs of children with SSLD. A number of principals referred to the opportunities availed of by teachers to visit other classes for children with SSLD. However, the need for focused in-service training in the area of speech and language disorder for special class teachers was strongly advocated.

A number of comments from those interviewed suggested that some joint in-service training of teachers and speech and language therapists was required in order to enhance professional and collaborative practices to meet the needs of

the children. Therapists and teachers referred to the need for speech and language therapists to receive in-service training in the primary school curriculum (NCCA 1999). These findings have implications both at the level of initial and in-service training and education courses for speech and language therapists and teachers.

5.3   Teaching and learning resources

The availability of generous funding for purchasing material resources was cited as one of the strengths of the provision. The quality of teaching aids generally available was described by 74 per cent as either above average or excellent, while only 8 per cent thought that the quality of resources was below average.

In contrast, access to teaching materials that relate directly to supporting children with SSLD was described by 62 per cent of teachers as below average and not satisfactory by 31 per cent. Only 7 per cent thought that the quality of specific support materials was above average in this area. Commenting on the resources provided by the school for speech and language therapy, approximately two-thirds of the respondents were of the view that the resources were above average, whereas one-third thought that the resources were below average or unsatisfactory. One of the speech and language therapists commented that speech and language therapists rely heavily on photocopied material, and that easy access to a photocopier may not always be available in schools.

5.4   Accommodation

School principals demonstrated an awareness of the need to provide classroom accommodation of the highest standard for children with SSLD. The role of the Department of Education and Science in providing funds for renovations and alterations to existing accommodation was acknowledged. Reference was made to the desirability of sound-proofed rooms for speech and language therapy sessions.

Sixty per cent of the teachers commented that the teaching accommodation was above average, while the remaining 40 per cent thought the accommodation was either below average or not satisfactory. The responses in relation to accommodation for speech and language therapy were broadly similar.

5.5   Collaborative practice

All those interviewed affirmed the value of collaborative practice in meeting the needs of the children. Teachers and principals referred to the necessity of allotting a time and a structure within which to engage in collaboration. Almost half the teachers stated that principals are rarely or never involved in programme planning, although approximately 15 per cent of teachers reported that principals are frequently involved in programme planning.

Almost half the speech and language therapists were rarely or never involved in planning for the children's teaching and learning programme, according to

the class teachers. It was also stated that there is a need for non-contact time to enable the teacher and therapist to plan together, and that more formal clarification of roles and of the professional remit of both roles is needed. Speech therapists felt that "collaboration between the speech and language therapist and the teacher was in need of improvement," and that "training was needed in team work and team building."

Approximately two-thirds of parents were either sometimes or frequently involved in programme planning. It was reported that two-thirds of psychologists were rarely or never involved in planning the programme for the child.

5.6   Curricular issues

Curriculum access

Teachers were asked to give their views on the provision of curriculum guidelines for children with SSLD. Two-thirds stated that the provision of guidelines was not satisfactory or was below average. A significant number expressed the opinion that clarity was required with regard to the precise curriculum to which the children should have access. Some stated that it was possible to adapt the primary school curriculum for children with SSLD, and it was suggested that this was helpful in planning a modified curriculum in different subject areas. The view was expressed by a therapist that "the speech and language class is the Rolls-Royce of speech and language therapy services," and both teachers and therapists felt that "pupils benefit from the combined therapy and education programme."

All expressed the opinion that the individualised nature of the programmes was a factor in successfully meeting the children's learning needs, and that the children were benefiting from experiencing success and in progressing at their own rate in a non-pressurised environment.

When asked to comment on the usefulness of the primary English curriculum as a basis for planning and teaching a programme for children with SSLD, the overwhelming majority of teachers thought that this curriculum was reasonably useful or very useful. A number felt that the emphasis on pre-reading skills was particularly suitable for children with SSLD, and others felt that the primary English curriculum was well aligned with the needs of children with SSLD.

Parents and the curriculum

Parents were of the view that the curriculum was being mediated to their children in a good way, and that speech and language therapy was being provided in a more holistic and integrated way. They felt that the professionals knew what they were doing and that their children were happy and getting the help they needed.

Parents welcomed the opportunities provided for extracurricular activities. They requested clarification regarding the exemption from Irish. The need for the children to learn Irish was queried, and parents expressed concern that the children would be forced to study Irish on return to mainstream education without the exemption. Information for parents in relation to the teaching and learning needs of children with SSLD was considered to be either not

satisfactory or below average by 80 per cent of teachers, and others commented on the poor dissemination of information regarding these classes to parents.

Homework

There was considerable variation in the amount of homework assigned to children. Approximately two-thirds of the teachers said that they assigned less than 30 minutes of homework to the children each night. While this might not appear to comprise a significant amount of homework, the majority of the children were less than seven years of age. A third of teachers assigned between 30 and 60 minutes of homework per day.

5.7   Social and personal development

All interviewees observed that the class had a positive impact on the children's behaviour, social and emotional development, confidence, life skills, communication skills, and self-esteem. Teachers commented that "children who may have behavioural difficulties really improve in the secure, less pressurised environment of the class." Parents remarked that "the improvement in the children's confidence deserves the highest praise." There is no pressure in the classes, and no fear of failure. It was felt that pupils benefit from the increased confidence, self-esteem, and opportunities for success. There was universal agreement that the favourable pupil-teacher ratio allowed for increased pupil-pupil interactions in a secure environment. Speech and language therapists, teachers and principals considered that being in a class of peers with similar needs was of benefit to the children.

5.8   Integration

All interviewees were of the opinion that the placing of the class in a mainstream school was of great benefit to the children in providing a range of integration opportunities and possibilities. Variations in integration practices were reported. A number of parents suggested that their children could be integrated with mainstream classes for the curricular areas in which they exhibited strengths. Some speech and language therapists expressed concern regarding the lack of formality in arrangements for integration and cited the need for "a good practice model for integration." It was stated by a number of teachers that there was a lack of time for general management issues related to integration.

5.9   Support services to the classes

One teacher commented on the lack of information on recent research that was available to the classes. Another teacher remarked that information regarding specific speech and language disorder, methodology, support services and materials was not readily available to the class teacher, speech and language therapist, or parents.

The need for the daily intensive support of the speech and language therapist to the pupils was acknowledged and affirmed by all. There was a consensus that children benefited from the combined speech and language therapy and education programme.

There was considerable variation in the amount of speech and language therapy available. In 19 per cent of classes for children with SSLD, speech and language therapy was available for four hours or more per day, the amount recommended. However, in 25 per cent of classes speech and language therapy was available for less than three hours per day. There was considerable concern with regard to the restricted speech and language therapy service available to some classes. It was frequently suggested by interviewees that the DES should consider employing speech and language therapists so that a standard allocation of hours would be available in all classes.

All referred to the importance of the support of the whole-school community to the class. A number of speech and language therapists viewed the support of the school principal as "vital" to the success of the class. Some principals and speech and language therapists stated that there was a lack of clarity in some instances regarding whether the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) or the health board was responsible for providing psychological services to the class. It was also felt that a multidisciplinary approach to meeting the needs of the children was required but was restricted by the lack of additional support services, such as occupational therapy and psychological services. Principals felt that an assigned educational psychologist is necessary.

All the interviewees acknowledged the supportive role of special-needs assistants (SNAs). Speech and language therapists referred to the desirability of promoting consistency in the appointment of SNAs to classes for children with SSLD. Teachers referred to the need to develop organisational skills in order to provide direction for another adult in the classroom.

Respondents variously cited the favourable pupil-teacher ratio, the expertise of the speech and language therapist and the class teacher, good teamwork and the support team of psychologist, inspector and others as among the strengths of the present service.

5.10 Parents and the classes

Interviewees affirmed the importance and value of both formal and informal contact with parents through structures such as school notebooks, homework, telephone calls, incidental visits, and scheduled meetings. Speech and language therapists observed that they did not meet parents as often as they would if the children were receiving speech and language therapy in a clinical setting. They further suggested that the "attendance of the child at school and of the parents at meetings is absolutely crucial." Speech and language therapists remarked that parents require training, induction and support from when their child is assessed as having a specific speech and language disorder.

Parents believed that their involvement is encouraged and welcomed. They considered that they had great communication with very amenable professionals and that "the notes that go home are brilliant." They expressed a desire that psychologists should be more closely involved in the development of children's teaching and learning programmes and individual education plans. Some teachers and parents reported that parents were compelled on occasion to seek and pay for additional support services privately.

Parents expressed satisfaction with the capacity of the class to meet their children's needs and affirmed their positive relationship with the class.

5.11 Admissions procedure, placement, and discharge

Respondents to questionnaires and interviewees referred to the poor dissemination of information about the classes to parents. Parents indicated that they were at first shocked on getting their child's diagnosis. They felt that children with difficulties should be identified earlier, even at the pre-school stage; and, on getting the diagnosis, they wondered where to get advice about what school their children should attend.

Speech and language therapists, teachers and principals cited the need for the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Health and Children to compile agreed national guidelines for all SSLD classes with regard to admissions, discharge criteria and procedures, and the roles of the board of management, admissions committee, and school principal.

Parents expressed dissatisfaction with regard to the criteria for admission outlined in the SERC Report, particularly the requirement that aspects of speech and language development be at a level of two standard deviations below the mean. They described the criteria as "too rigid" and "fundamentally flawed" in not including the opinion of relevant professionals. Respondents to questionnaires and interviewees suggested that admission to the classes should be based on need and not on the availability of places. Speech and language therapists expressed a range of opinions with regard to the suitability of the admissions criteria and remarked that "children can't be put into boxes which have been identified by the SERC Report." The protracted and bureaucratic nature of the admissions procedure was criticised. Parents felt that they were kept in the dark regarding the procedure. School principals stated that meetings concerning admissions, placement and discharge were conducted in a fair and equitable manner.

Dissatisfaction was expressed at the fact that there were too many referrals for too few places, and the application of a maximum period of two years in the class was criticised. The view was expressed that "the range and complexity of the children's needs become more apparent over time and consequently there is a need for a third year in the class." Therapists, teachers and principals referred to the importance of securing relevant information from the child's former school. It was stated that there is difficulty in making judgements from paper reports. Therapists and parents suggested that there was a need to observe the child "socially" before admission to the class. It was also observed that the fact that children might be in classes with those of similar linguistic age rather than chronological age presents particular challenges for the teacher.

The delay in the provision of psychological reports in some instances was criticised, and school principals pointed out that the availability of reports in respect of some children might be a determining factor in whether those children gain admission to the class. All interviewees expressed the need to include qualitative assessment procedures, such as teachers' reports and observations, in considering applications for admission to the class.

Speech and language therapists and parents cited the need for a continuum of provision for children who do not qualify for admission to the class, and referred to regional discrepancies in the application of admissions criteria. The anomaly of children in the IQ range 80–90 not being included in the admissions criteria and also being ineligible for resource teaching support was referred to. Respondents criticised the fact that children with motor difficulties

can have great trouble gaining admission to a class because of the negative impact of their motor difficulties on their performance scores.

The need for early identification and intervention mechanisms with regard to meeting children's needs was referred to. Parents perceived themselves as being the "lucky ones" in securing a place for their children in the class. They also referred to the anxiety they experienced in waiting for a letter from the admissions committee. School principals and teachers criticised what they perceived as the peripheral role of the DES in the management of the classes, and criticised the fact that the school has the unenviable job of sending out the letters of refusal.

5.12 Transport

129 of the 367 children enrolled in the classes were not availing of school transport. All interviewees observed that too many referrals for too few places generate large catchment areas, which result in some children having to travel long journeys. Of those who were availing of school transport, the average journey time was in the region of 60 minutes. In one instance it was reported that a child was travelling for four hours each day to attend the class.

School principals criticised the bureaucracy associated with arranging transport and stated that for many children each year transport arrangements are not settled until October. Speech and language therapists, parents and principals expressed concern about the need for the supervision of children while they are travelling unaccompanied in taxis. Principals referred to difficulties in securing escorts to travel with the children, as bus drivers are not paid for collecting or dropping off escorts. It was suggested that the use of the term "handicapped" on one of the travel application forms should be discontinued.

5.13 Return to mainstream provision

All interviewees remarked that the transfer of children to their former mainstream school was a cause of concern and anxiety for parents. Principals referred to the trauma for the children in returning to a class of thirty or more children and suggested that greater links should be maintained with the mainstream school to which the children are returning. It was suggested that reintegration should be supported by professionals with relevant expertise, and that children should be automatically entitled to resource teaching hours, speech and language therapy and SNA support on return to mainstream provision.

Parents and speech and language therapists criticised the absence of a protocol that provided details of the reintegration process. The concept was suggested of introducing a phased return to mainstream education through the use of such strategies as placing children in larger classes and facilitating more curricular integration before the return to mainstream education. Speech and language therapists suggested that alternative models of provision, such as a peripatetic speech and language therapy service, should be explored. Parents, therapists and principals expressed concern about the absence of a long-term plan by the DES for post-primary provision for children with SSLD.

CHAPTER 6

SCHOOL–BASED EVALUATION STRAND

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6.1   Introduction

The school-based strand of the evaluation of special classes for children with specific speech and language disorder (SSLD) involved a two-day evaluation visit by inspectors to each of sixteen special classes. The inspectors reported on the quality of provision through observing teaching and learning, reviewing planning documents and class records, studying collections of pupils' work, and through interaction with the pupils. In each class the inspectors also had discussions with the class teacher, the speech and language therapist and the school principal about specific aspects of provision. The inspectors also facilitated a meeting with parents.

The evaluation framework developed for the school-based phase consisted of seventy-two focused questions that inspectors addressed during their evaluation activity in schools. A composite picture of practice in the sixteen classes evaluated is presented in this chapter, and the strengths and weaknesses in provision are identified. The findings are presented under five main headings: planning and co-ordination of provision, provision for meeting children's individual needs, the environment for teaching and learning, curriculum provision, and assessment and pupils' achievement.

6.2   Planning and co-ordination of provision
6.2.1 The school plan and the curriculum framework for the class

In each of the sixteen schools the inspectors reviewed the school plan, the available policies in relation to co-ordination of provision for the pupils in the SSLD class, and the teacher's general curriculum programme, whole-class and individualised planning documents. This review enabled the inspectors to evaluate the extent to which the school plan provided a context and purposeful guidance in relation to the operation of the class.

Optimal practice was found in a quarter of the schools, where school plans contained very thorough and detailed references to the operation of the class and clear descriptions concerning the organisation of the class and the roles and responsibilities of those involved.

In a majority of instances the inspectors were of the view that there was scope for development in the links between the school plan and classroom planning. In a few instances reference was made to the need to update school plans and the need to include in them clear statements that would underpin the aims and objectives of the class.

6.2.2 Planning at classroom level

Teachers' planning for language development
In many instances the inspectors noted the existence of a systematic plan for the development of language, and they commented in particular on the

evident collaboration between the speech and language therapist and the class teacher in the development and implementation of this plan. The high priority given to language development was evidenced in the very comprehensive and detailed nature of the plans that, in some instances, included notes on the use of resources and on teaching strategies and methodologies. Where there were perceived deficiencies in the development and implementation of a systematic plan for language development these were associated with a lack of collaboration between speech and language therapists and class teachers.

Long-term planning of a broad curriculum

Evaluation findings in relation to the planning of a broad curriculum were mixed. The inspectors commented favourably on aspects of planning and on the effective implementation of planned curriculum programmes in approximately half the language classes. In these classes long-term plans were considered appropriate, in that they encompassed all aspects of the primary school curriculum, and clear aims and objectives were outlined. In some instances long-term plans made specific reference to the inclusion of pupils and to school policy on non-curricular areas such as admission and discharge criteria, communication with parents, evaluation, and teaching materials and methodologies.

However, in half the classes evaluated planning was found to require development, in that long-term plans were either unavailable or inadequate, in that clear aims and objectives were not included. In some of these classes plans were in evidence for a limited range of curriculum subjects only. In other instances the planning was set out as lists of topics to be taught, without reference to learning objectives or curriculum targets to be achieved. In two instances the level of planning undertaken was regarded as inadequate, and in one of these the inspector noted that the absence of planning affected the quality of the learning experiences provided for the pupils. In advising about planning, the reporting inspectors suggested that a greater degree of collaboration on planning between the class teacher and speech and language therapists would be beneficial and that planning should also link effectively with the individual needs of pupils. Curriculum planning spanning the full breadth of the primary school curriculum and planning for curriculum continuity and progression were also recommended.

These findings have implications for schools and for individual professionals. All pupils should have the opportunity to benefit from well-planned, comprehensive curriculum programmes and will derive maximum benefit from their placement in a language class only when their particular individual needs have been incorporated in a targeted plan of work.

Short-term planning

The inspectors expressed satisfaction at the level and content of short-term planning in half the classes, noting detailed individualised planning and preparation of work programmes, planning to meet specific needs, and well-ordered lessons. However, this satisfaction was counterbalanced by a perceived lack of adequate and effective short-term planning in the other half of the classes.

Professional collaboration in planning

It was evident that collaboration in planning presents a professional challenge in about half the language classes. Joint planning or collaboration for the implementation of curriculum or language programmes were not a feature of practice in these classes, although in a few settings the professionals involved suggested that this was an area of practice that they were concerned to develop.

Successful professional collaboration was reported in almost half the classes. There was both formal and informal collaboration, and this was underpinned in some instances by regular planning meetings and by explicit school policy on collaborative work. Aspects of effective practice noted by the inspectors included joint planning, agreement on learning priorities for individual pupils, and team teaching as a strong feature of pedagogy.

The awareness among teachers of the speech and language programmes devised for pupils varies within the sample of classes evaluated. In a few classes the inspectors noted that information was not shared effectively and that communication between the professionals in relation to individual programmes tended to be informal. Collaborative planning tended not to feature.

This contrasted with effective practice in just over half the classes. In these settings the teacher and speech and language therapist were seen to work cohesively and to share information concerning the individual speech and language needs of pupils. Among the positive aspects of practice observed were a collaborative planning process and use of shared planning materials, transparent short-term learning targets, and reinforcement by teachers of the work undertaken by the speech and language therapist.

6.3   Provision for meeting children's individual needs

6.3.1 Curriculum differentiation

Effective curriculum differentiation was evident in the majority of language classes. The provision of education for pupils was centred on the individual needs of the pupils, and the teachers and speech and language therapists provided pupils with high levels of individual attention. Individual needs were met in small-group situations and when pupils were working on their own. Individual needs were taken into account during curriculum activity and during speech and language sessions with the speecch and language therapist.

In some language classes a set individualised programme guided the learning. The inspectors cited a number of other positive strategies, including the creation of individual diaries or workbooks for pupils, collaboration between the class teacher and the speech and language therapist on programme planning and setting of homework, and the adoption of effective questioning strategies directed towards individual pupils.

In most of the language classes the curriculum activities observed and tasks that were organised were appropriate to the abilities of the pupils. Approaches to the grouping of pupils were frequently referred to in the context of matching curriculum to the needs of pupils.

In a few classes differentiation appeared to be less well developed, and the

inspectors noted that the emphasis was on groups of pupils or on a whole-class group rather than on planning to meet individual needs.

6.3.2 Individual education plans

Individual education plans are at varying levels of development in the classes. In half the classes they were either not in evidence or were incomplete. In many instances the teacher and the speech and language therapist prepared separate individual plans, plans by other professionals, or by parents. In general, few of the individual plans appear to satisfy accepted criteria for the content and structure of Individual education plans.

In some classes the inspectors noted the active collaboration of teachers and speech and language therapists in the preparation of the plans. In a limited number of instances the inspectors commented on the inclusion of a wide range of curricular areas in individual education plans.

In a minority of instances the inspectors noted that clear learning objectives had been delineated but that these appeared to be confined in the main to learning objectives in the areas of language, literacy, and mathematics. In most instances learning objectives were either not in evidence or were unclear. A number of inspectors emphasised the need for greater collaboration between teachers and speech and language therapists in the setting of learning objectives.

6.4   Environment for teaching and learning
6.4.1 Provision of accommodation

The inspectors reported that the accommodation provided in the majority of language classes was of a high standard. The classes generally provided an attractive physical environment, and space was effectively used. Useful modifications had been made to create complementary working areas for the language class teacher and the speech and language therapist, and suitable furniture, storage and display areas were provided. In most of the schools the teacher and the speech and language therapist had adjoining rooms or worked in a classroom with a partition.

In virtually all the language classes very good attention was paid to the creation of an attractive and stimulating learning environment. The inspectors reported that the rooms were well organised and generally comfortable, and in many classes there was much evidence of a bright and colourful display of educational materials. In about half the language classes separate areas had been created to support learning in specific areas, such as language development, mathematics, music, SESE, and ICT.

In four schools the accommodation was seen as needing some development, and in one school the accommodation was considered to be inadequate. In two instances the limited size of the classroom was a concern, and in another the lack of some basic facilities was noted. In this latter school, arrangements were being made to move to a new classroom at the end of the term.

Provision of teaching and learning resources

In most language classes the inspectors commented very favourably on the provision of a range of teaching and learning resources, on the attractiveness of teacher-designed curriculum resources, and on the quality of display in the classrooms. In these classes the supply of children's literature, concrete materials for mathematics, language development resources, art materials, curriculum charts, sensory games, teacher-designed learning resources and computer and audiovisual equipment was praised.

In several of the language classes the provision of resources was considered to be excellent, and in a number of instances the particular contribution of the speech and language therapist in building up resources for the language class was commended.

Creation of a language-rich learning environment

There was generally good attention to the creation of a print-rich learning environment for pupils. The inspectors referred to the use of the visual environment during teaching and learning to support the pupils' language learning. Language charts, word lists, labels, flashcards and samples of the pupils' written work were used effectively to create a language-rich environment.

In a number of instances the inspectors noted the effective use of specific language-rich teaching materials in the development of communication skills. In a small number of classes a potential for development was noted, and the inspectors advised an expansion of the range of language materials and better use of the classroom display areas to support language learning.

The specific recommendations made by the inspectors included the development of nature or interest tables to support learning in SESE, the creation of work areas for mathematics, computers, and reading, and support for learning throughout the full breadth of the curriculum.

The implication for schools is that although the language classes have a special goal in relation to the development of pupils' language competence, schools must at the same time ensure that all pupils have access to successful and appropriate learning experiences in all the subjects of the primary school curriculum – with the exception of Irish, where a pupil has been granted an exemption.

6.4.2 The social environment for learning

Co-operative pupil-pupil interactions

In the majority of classes the inspectors commented positively on interactions between the pupils. They were seen to mix well with each other, to play successfully together, and to engage in formal talk with each other or to chat happily. The inspectors noted that sharing, taking turns and playing together worked well in most of the classes.

In the classes where co-operative work was not very evident the inspectors commented on the value of adopting structured approaches that would provide regular opportunities for pupils to work in collaboration with each

other. There was an acknowledgement that some pupils may find interaction difficult and that a wide age range in the class can be an impediment. The reporting inspectors recommended that pupils be provided with more opportunities to learn through co-operative group work. Circle work was mentioned as a possible approach.

The implication for schools is that ensuring successful interaction between pupils requires a certain amount of planning. In the schools with the most successful pupil-pupil interactions the teachers and speech and language therapists were seen to play an active role in adopting methods likely to promote positive interaction.

Effective management of pupils' involvement

In all but two of the language classes the inspectors reported that the involvement of pupils was managed effectively. In the majority of classes effective classroom management approaches and organisational strategies were observed, which ensured the maximum involvement of pupils in the learning activities.

In a number of instances the teachers and speech and language therapists were seen to have success in managing the involvement of pupils who displayed challenging behaviour. The value of organisational planning, the monitoring of pupils and the establishment of routines in the class was acknowledged in this regard.

The importance of collaboration between the teacher and speech and language therapist in the management of pupils emerges as an important factor associated with successful provision. Another important factor is the creation of variety in the learning situations, including a balance of individual, pair, small-group and whole-class work.

Strategies for promoting positive behaviour

The promotion of positive behaviour through a range of strategies was commented on favourably in the majority of classes evaluated. The implementation of fair classroom rules, praise for positive behaviour and the use of incentive or merit systems were noted as effective strategies by the inspectors. Motivating pupils to co-operate and the provision of continuous feedback to them during class work were also seen as important factors in fostering positive behaviour.

Other positive aspects of practice included the modification of approaches to meet the needs of individual pupils and the commitment of teachers in promoting the self-esteem and confidence of individual pupils. The communication of high expectations to pupils regarding work and behaviour was also in evidence.

Supportive teacher-pupil interactions

Supportive teacher–pupil interactions were evident in all but one of the classes evaluated. In this latter instance pupils' behaviour was not well managed, as a result, it was felt, of the inexperience of the teacher allocated to the class. In eleven of the classes the inspectors considered that the interactions were at an optimal level. Particularly important in this aspect of practice were praise and support for pupils, opportunities provided by the teachers and speech and

language therapists for pupils to experience success, sensitivity within the interactions, and the promotion of positive behaviour and appropriate social skills.

The inspectors referred frequently to the responsiveness within the classes to the children and to providing for their individual needs through supportive interactions. Linking the class work to the individual strengths of the children was commended, and in some instances the inspectors also referred to the positive expectations that were communicated to pupils. There was evidence also of affirmation of pupils in their language work and provision of opportunities for pupils to work at their own pace. In the one situation in which the interactions were not successful the inspector reported that the behaviour of pupils was erratic and that the group had disparate educational needs.

6.4.3 Pupils' engagement in learning

Effective questioning and facilitation of learning

Effective or very effective questioning of pupils and facilitation of learning were observed in more than half the language classes. Among the strategies employed were the questioning of pupils on individual tasks and in groups, the use of open-ended techniques, and questioning based on the lesson subject and on the development of language skills. An example of commendable practice was noted as follows:

> Questioning is both directing and challenging. It encourages full and complete communication of answers and opinions. Questioning is supportive and scaffolds pupils towards giving complete answers, and leads to affirmation of pupils' efforts.

Active participation of pupils

In most of the language classes (75 per cent) there was effective practice in the provision of active learning opportunities for pupils. Many examples of effective practice associated with the active participation of pupils in their own learning were cited. These included the small class size, effective motivation of pupils, opportunities to promote independent learning, the provision of choices or opportunities for decision-making, and effective classroom management and organisation.

Where practice was less successful the inspectors commented on a need for more group activity, more first-hand engagement with the curriculum, and an increased use of concrete materials. Reliance on written and textbook-based activities was also noted in this regard.

Pupils' enjoyment of participation

In almost all the language classes, pupils demonstrated interest in and enthusiasm for their work. In the majority of classes the inspectors observed that the pupils greatly enjoyed the activities and their school experience. They were at ease in the classroom environment, and the adults were seen to encourage and affirm the pupils, to foster a positive rapport, and to communicate positive expectations to them about their learning. Reference was made to the varied and imaginative approaches adopted and to

opportunities provided by drama, creative dance and music for enjoyment. In four of the classes some scope for development was identified in this area.

6.4.4 Approaches to teaching and learning

Organisation of pupils

Individual and group work was observed that was seen to be appropriate to the needs of the pupils. The inspectors noted good arrangements in the majority of language classes for the grouping of pupils. Various grouping approaches were employed, including grouping by class level or by ability level. The grouping of pupils with similar language needs was also in evidence. The inspectors suggested that there was scope for the development of group work in a few classes. In this context they referred to the importance of planning to support collaborative learning approaches.

Use of teaching materials and resources

The inspectors reported on the effective use of visual materials and concrete teaching and learning resources in 75 per cent of the classes evaluated. Both commercially produced and teacher-designed materials were in evidence, including charts, printed language materials, activity books, and worksheets. In four of the classes visited the inspectors suggested that there was some scope for development in the provision and use of teaching materials and resources.

Use of a range of teaching approaches

The evaluation findings in relation to the use of a range of teaching approaches were positive in most of the classes. The inspectors found effective use of individual, pair, small-group and whole-class teaching. The effective use of resources during teaching was noted, and in several instances the inspectors praised the attention to pupils' individual needs and the differentiation of the curriculum to meet these needs.

Structure and pace of lessons

In general, the inspectors commented favourably on the structure and pace of individual sessions or lessons. In the majority of language classes the lessons were purposeful and included appropriate learning activities for the pupils. In a number of instances the inspectors made reference to the fact that individual pupils' ability level and stage of development were a determining factor in how activities were planned and created. In several instances there was evidence that the lessons were based on clear educational targets.

The inspectors considered that practice required development in a few instances. In three of the classes, activities were less well organised and difficulties in the management of learning were seen to result from a lack of planning and an over-reliance on textbooks. In one instance, activities jointly led by the teacher and the speech and language therapist were not successful. The implication of this finding is that clarity of roles is required in order for class teachers and speech and language therapists to learn to collaborate effectively in providing an optimal educational experience to pupils.

6.4.5 Validation of the children's learning

Samples of pupils' work

In the majority of language classes, attractive examples of the children's own work were displayed. These included written work, worksheets, SESE activity sheets, artwork, and bound collections of collaborative work. In almost half the classes the inspectors observed optimal practice in the maintenance of collections of pupils' work. Collections of work were observed to comprise a range of copybooks, notebooks, worksheets, workbooks, folders, and classroom displays. However, the inspectors reported scope for development in a number of situations, where samples of work were not always maintained systematically.

The samples of work generally reflected a breadth of curriculum activity and also included specific work in language development. The inspectors remarked that in most instances a progressive acquisition of language skills was reflected in collections of work, and they commented favourably on pupils' developing confidence in the use of language. In a few instances, however, the displays of children's work were limited or reflected work in a few curriculum subjects only, particularly language and mathematics. In those instances there was a serious need to broaden the curriculum on offer.

6.5   Curriculum provision
6.5.1 A broad curriculum

In the majority of language classes the inspectors commented favourably on the implementation of the language development programme within the context of the primary school curriculum. They noted that in a number of instances the pupils' language needs were emphasised while access to a broad curriculum was also ensured.

In a few instances the inspectors noted that the provision of an appropriately broad curriculum was associated with effective planning. Integration opportunities for linking with mainstream classes for visual art, music or PE were noted also. In one class the inspector observed that the extensive use of project methods enabled pupils to experience a broad curriculum.

The findings in relation to curriculum breadth and balance suggest that some language classes fare better than others in resolving the tension between curriculum breadth and specific work on language. The inspectors' comments suggest that there was scope for development in the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum in a quarter of the classes visited. In these classes the emphasis in class work tended to be on language and mathematics, with few opportunities for SESE, arts education or SPHE, for example. A clear rationale is required that acknowledges the entitlement of every child to a balanced curriculum experience and that can also accommodate the provision of a systematic language programme to pupils.

Integration in a mainstream class

Integration was reported on positively in the majority of language classes, although there was variety of practice in how schools approached the matter. In some classes individual pupils went to a mainstream class regularly for

particular subjects, such as mathematics, history, or geography, while in other settings the SSLD class as a whole joined with mainstream classes for subjects such as visual art and PE.

Some opportunities for pupils from mainstream classes to participate in the activities of the language class were promoted also. The inspectors noted comments made by mainstream class teachers in a few schools who were very positive about the benefits of integration for the pupils attending the language class.

In a quarter of the language classes the inspectors considered that provision for integration with mainstream classes was not effective. Difficulties included a lack of policy and planning to support integration and the provision of minimal opportunities for pupils to link with pupils in mainstream classes.

Effective language development activities

In almost all the classes evaluated, effective language development activities were an established priority. The inspectors noted a clear emphasis on language development, and in several instances the quality of curriculum planning and the whole-school plan were cited as success factors. Effective practice in the development of the pupils' language capacities through the full range of curriculum subjects was praised in a number of instances also.

Comments in relation to individual classes reflected imaginative approaches to stimulating pupils' interest in the language work and to effective collaboration between the class teacher and the speech and language therapist.

Language awareness activities in Irish

Irish does not feature on the formal curriculum programme for language classes. In a few classes, occasional informal use of Irish by the class teacher was noted, and in one instance some simple Irish rhymes had been taught in order to provide pupils with a level of awareness about the language.

6.5.2 Development of skills and concepts in English

In the majority of language classes the implementation of the English curriculum was reported to be effective. The inspectors acknowledged the quality of work completed by pupils in English and commented favourably on the breadth and balance in the programmes implemented. They noted an emphasis on oral language work in several classes. In one setting the systematic development of skills and the adoption of creative methods in order to promote pupils' engagement with English were noted as important success factors.

Curriculum integration with language development activity

The effective integration of the curriculum with language development activity was in evidence in three-quarters of the language classes evaluated. The inspectors noted a number of factors contributing to effective practice in this area; these included the adoption of appropriate teaching approaches in fostering language development, the availability of suitable teaching materials, and exploiting language development opportunities within all curriculum subjects. Effective curriculum planning and professional collaboration were also seen to support the integration of the curriculum with language development activity.

Activities for systematic development of language competence

Commendable practice was observed in relation to the systematic development of language competence in approximately half the language classes. In the most successful classes collaboration and joint planning was usual, and approaches to the development of language competence tended to be structured, with clear objectives and opportunities for reinforcement, for continuity, and for progression.

In the classes with less developed practice the inspectors suggested a need for more effective planning and for the development of better collaborative teamwork.

6.5.3 Development of skills and concepts in mathematics

In the majority of language classes, provision for the teaching of mathematics was seen as competent. Examples of effective practice cited by inspectors included appropriate programme planning, the use of concrete materials, opportunities for hands-on learning, attention to problem-solving, the acquisition of mathematical language, and an emphasis on the social dimension of learning.

In a few classes the inspectors observed that there was scope for development in the teaching of mathematics. Among the concerns raised were a lack of planning and organisation for teaching, difficulties experienced by pupils in grasping mathematical concepts, an over-emphasis on written computation, and a need to develop problem-solving skills in all strands of the mathematics curriculum.

6.5.4 Development of skills and concepts in SESE

The inspectors reported that provision for SESE was good in the majority of classes. Opportunities for integration of SESE topics with work in other curriculum areas were taken, and the inspectors praised the cross–curricular language work that was observed. The teaching of SESE was considered to be of very high quality in a few classes. Opportunities for pupils to develop skills of observation and experiment and to undertake science activities were commended, and the inspectors noted the attention to display of pupils' work in a number of settings.

The inspectors regarded the curriculum provision for SESE in about a third of the classes as less than adequate. They commented on the need for planned curriculum programmes and the implementation of appropriate teaching and learning approaches.

6.5.5 Development of skills and concepts in arts education

In the majority of classes the pupils had access to a broad and varied range of activities in visual arts. Opportunities for integration with other subjects were exploited, and in a number of settings the pupils linked with mainstream classes for visual arts. The quality of planning for visual arts was commended in a few instances, and the display of work samples was also praised. The

inspectors considered that provision for visual arts was limited in about a third of the classes.

In more than half the language classes the quality of provision for music was considered to be good. In two of the classes the musical experience provided for pupils was seen as excellent. The work undertaken included singing, listening and responding to music, exploration of sound and rhythm using percussion instruments, and integration with movement activity. In several classes the inspectors noted that provision for music was an area of weakness.

6.5.6 Development of skills and concepts in PE

In more than half the language classes the pupils were provided with regular opportunities to join with other classes for physical education, and there was evidence that the courses were aimed at providing a broad range of experience for pupils. In one setting the main activity on the PE course was swimming. In reporting on the quality of provision the inspectors referred to the development of motor skills and also to co-operation and communication skills and to building pupils' confidence and developing their independence.

6.5.7 Development of skills and concepts in SPHE

The inspectors reported that provision for SPHE was competent in about half the language classes, with excellent practice observed in a further 20 per cent. Good practice was seen in the integration of SPHE with other aspects of the curriculum, in the attention to the personal and social development of pupils, and in the effectiveness of circle work. In the classes seen as providing an optimal experience for pupils the inspectors commended the quality of formal curriculum planning in this area and noted that the NCCA curriculum documents for SPHE were used as an effective resource in planning. In a few classes, provision in this area of curriculum was less than effective.

6.5.8 Opportunities to learn using ICT

Almost all the language classes evaluated had at least one classroom computer, and in some settings the pupils had access to a computer room. Effective practice was noted in several of the classes. ICT was well organised, the pupils used computers regularly, and they had access to a varied and appropriate range of educational software. While pupils in all the classes had some access to ICT, it was evident that opportunities for learning through ICT were not very extensive in a number of classes.

6.6   Assessment and pupils' achievement
6.6.1 Assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress

In a minority of situations the inspectors reported an optimal level of collaboration between the class teacher and the speech and language therapist in the evaluation and monitoring of pupils' progress. In almost half the classes, however, they noted an absence or a minimal level of collaboration and co-ordination of procedures for evaluation and assessment.

The inspectors observed that in almost all instances the class teachers and speech and language therapists used a wide variety of assessment tools to form educational profiles of the pupils. These included psychological assessments, speech and language assessments, audiology reports, norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests in English and mathematics, and diagnostic tests, check-lists, teacher observation, and teacher-designed tests.

The inspectors found effective practice in the maintenance of collections of pupils' work in the majority of language classes. In a few classes this consisted of work kept in copybooks and curriculum work displayed in the classroom. In other classes the concept of a curriculum portfolio had been developed further and there was evidence that the collections were actively used to affirm effort, to provide feedback, to promote sharing and an exchange of ideas, and to support the assessment process.

In half the classes the inspectors found that collections of work were used in a positive manner by class teachers and by speech and language therapists as an auxiliary mode of assessing pupils' progress in language, mathematics and other curricular areas and to inform programme planning. In many instances, however, they found that collections of work were underused or not used in a formal or defined manner as a resource for assessment purposes. In some instances, where scope for development was noted, the inspectors commented on the need for compiling portfolios of pupils' work and on the need for greater collaboration between class teacher and speech and language therapist in reviewing pupils' progress.

6.6.2 Recording pupils' achievement

The inspectors observed that, in a majority of instances, class teachers and speech and language therapists kept separate records of progress. They noted scope for development of good practice in relation to the maintenance of individual records of progress and a lack, in some instances, of a systematic approach to record-keeping. The value of developing and using a common template for recording pupils' progress was emphasised.

In most instances, pupils' individual records contained results of standardised tests and other tests of progress, including reports from the speech and language therapist. In general, references were confined to assessment results in language and mathematics. The inspectors observed that in a little over half the classes individual records could be said to present a broad profile of pupils' performance. Some inspectors commented favourably on the quality of information contained in the records kept in these particular classes; others noted that the profile related to pupils' performance in language, mathematics and other areas of the curriculum on offer. They were less satisfied with the situation in almost half the classes, where they found that records contained references to pupils' performance in language only, or to language and mathematics only, or where separate records of performance were kept by the class teacher and the speech and language therapist.

The inspectors reported that admission records were generally carefully maintained and that pupils' files were well organised and comprehensive. In some instances the teachers and speech and language therapists held duplicate files, while in others the pupils' records were held by one or the other, or by the principal. In several instances the teachers and speech and language therapists maintained separate pupil files.

The inspectors noted that, in the great majority of cases, transfer records were carefully maintained. They commented favourably on the effective manner in which a number of schools managed the process of transferring pupils to new settings, through formal contact between teachers and other professionals and through the forwarding of relevant records on pupils' progress to schools and to other relevant agencies.

In general, when commenting on the documents and records reviewed, the inspectors concentrated on the nature and quality of individual pupils' records. Their observations reveal the existence in many classes of good practice and effective procedures for the maintenance of individual records. They also noted that these practices and procedures were linked with collaboration between class teachers and speech and language therapists and with their shared responsibility for planning and recording progress. However, the inspectors expressed concern about a number of issues, including a narrow focus in individual records on the development of pupils' language competence, the practice of separate pupil records being kept by class teacher and speech and language therapist, and the lack of collaboration between teacher and therapist in the planning, monitoring and assessment of pupils' progress.

CHAPTER 7

POST–INTERVENTION SURVEY

CHAPTER 7
POST–INTERVENTION SURVEY

7.1   Introduction

This chapter reports the findings of a follow–up questionnaire survey of two cohorts of children who had previously attended a class for children with specific speech and language disorder (SSLD). Data were returned in relation to sixty-one children who transferred to other educational settings from special classes for children with SSLD in either 1998 or 2000. The purpose of the post-intervention survey was to investigate parents' views of the educational provision experienced by their children both while attending the class for children with SSLD and in subsequent provision. A questionnaire survey for the principals of schools that children transferred to on leaving the class was also undertaken.

7.2   Parents' responses

A range of themes emerged from an analysis of the data generated by the fifty-seven responses received from parents. These themes are examined below.

Satisfaction with children's placement in the class

A very high rate of parental satisfaction, 94 per cent, was recorded among parents in respect of their child's placement in the special class for children with SSLD. Parents praised the classes and referred to the wonderful effect placement in the special class had on their children. Eighty-eight per cent saw the enrolment as extremely or very beneficial to the academic progress of their child.

References were made to the behaviour and curricular difficulties experienced by children in the mainstream classes before admission to the class. It was reported that the children benefited from the favourable pupil-teacher ratio, the contribution of two professionals, individual and focused attention, the secure environment, and opportunities for integration.

Ninety-three per cent of parents considered the placement in the class to have been very beneficial to the child's personal and social development. Discernible improvements were noted in the children's confidence, self-esteem, and ability to relate to and communicate with their peers. It was reported that the children were happy and enjoyed going to school.

Parents referred to the positive relationships between the children and the class teacher, and the need for teachers to be kind, patient and encouraging was acknowledged. Parents commended the benefits of the home-school links that were actively fostered and maintained. One parent praised the mobility of provision afforded to her child, who had been enrolled in a special school and had progressed to a mainstream setting following a placement in the class.

Provision of speech and language therapy

Satisfaction was expressed with the daily provision of speech and language therapy available to the children, which was described as occurring regularly

and forming an integral part of the day. Ninety-six per cent of parents expressed satisfaction with this provision while their child was attending the class. However, the turnover among speech and language therapists, with delays in making new appointments, was cited as a cause for concern, and reductions in the speech and language therapy service to the classes were criticised.

Availability of places in the classes

It was suggested by parents that children's speech and language difficulties should be identified earlier to enable early intervention to take place. Parents were critical of the number of placements available in the classes, which should be linked to the number of children with identified needs. Parents referred to themselves as being "lucky" in securing a place in the class for their children. They expressed dissatisfaction with the time limit imposed on children attending the classes. It was suggested that children should be allowed to remain in the class for as long as it was felt to be necessary.

Availability of information regarding the classes

Parents referred to the absence of initial information for them regarding the classes. Reference was made to the additional work undertaken by parents at home with the children in order to mitigate the effects of SSLD on their children's learning. Parents referred to support received from a voluntary agency in one instance and also to support received from other parents of children attending the class and from the professionals who were directly involved with the class. They expressed dissatisfaction with the information available to them from sources other than the school while their child was attending the class. One parent suggested that a support group for parents would have been beneficial in allaying the worries and anxieties experienced by parents of children with SSLD.

During the period in which their child was attending the special class, communication between the school and the parent body was perceived as satisfactory by 91 per cent of parents.

Additional supports

The absence of official guidelines giving professional advice and information for teachers was criticised. One parent recommended that more structured physical education, drama, arts and music should be part of the weekly curriculum available to the children. Parents were critical of the lack of in-service education available to teachers and recommended that teachers have expertise with regard to the implications of SSLD for the children's teaching and learning. Reference was also made to the need for occupational therapy services to be provided for the classes.

Return to mainstream education

The children's return to mainstream education was a source of great worry and anxiety for parents. The need for extra support for the child, parents and class teacher was referred to, and many parents expressed the view that their child's language difficulty was continuous and that the child continued to need regular therapy. There was a satisfaction rate of 86 per cent among parents in respect of their child's progress in their present mainstream educational provision. The benefits to the child's personal and social development in the current educational setting were considered satisfactory by 88 per cent of parents.

A suggestion was made that before being discharged from the class the child should be allowed a phased period of attendance at a mainstream school, to facilitate ease of transition.

One parent referred to the problems experienced by the child on returning to mainstream education because of difficulty in obtaining an exemption from learning Irish.

Reference was made to children being assessed, after their transfer, as having additional difficulties, including autistic-spectrum disorder, dyslexia, behavioural problems, and dyspraxia. The lack of psychological support on return to mainstream education was referred to, and many parents mentioned the fact that their children required the assistance of the learning-support teacher or the resource teacher on their return to mainstream classes. Some children also required the support of a special-needs assistant, which the parents reported as being of benefit to the children in gaining access to the curriculum.

Provision of follow-up speech and language therapy

Regional variations were evident in the follow-up speech and language therapy service that was available to children who had been discharged from the special class. A shortage in the availability of therapists was referred to as having a negative impact on provision. A minority of children were receiving a satisfactory follow-up service, while others were receiving an unsatisfactory level of support or no support at all. Approximately 70 per cent of children who returned to mainstream classes were without the provision of a speech and language therapy service. It was suggested that a therapist should visit the mainstream school every week in order to provide support and advice for the class teacher.

Provision of transport to the class

Dissatisfaction was expressed with the extended length of the school day, because of the very early pick-up and late drop-off by buses. References were made to children travelling long journeys to and from classes every day because of the large catchment areas of classes. Parents referred to the bureaucracy involved in securing transport and questioned the necessity for campaigning and lobbying to secure transport for their children. Dissatisfaction with the provision of transport to and from classes is reflected in the fact that nearly a quarter of the parents found this provision unsatisfactory. The importance of the driver being aware of, and appreciating, the children's difficulties during journeys to and from school was also commented upon. Satisfaction was expressed with the punctuality of drivers and with their treatment of the children.

Post-primary provision

Parents expressed dissatisfaction with the provision of post-primary education for children with SSLD and expressed the view that continuity and the same emphasis on provision should be placed at post–primary level as at primary level. The transition to post-primary school for a child with SSLD was described as a "real trial" for parents. The necessity of securing a psychological report in order to reapply for additional resources to meet the child's needs was criticised. The Department of Education and Science was described as

seriously lacking with regard to the continuity of provision it made from primary to secondary level.

7.3   Responses of principals in destination schools

The principals of destination schools returned 61 responses in respect of children reintegrated in mainstream classes; of these, 56 were still in primary school and 5 had transferred to a post-primary school. The issues raised by principals with regard to the children's school placement on transferring from the special class are outlined below.

Speech and language therapy support

Regional variations were evident in the level of follow-up speech and language therapy available to children who had returned to mainstream provision. Reference was made to both the lack of therapists and their high turnover. The responses to the questionnaires showed that 33 children were not receiving speech and language therapy in their new settings. A total of 15 children continued to have access to therapy, mostly outside the school setting, while no information was received in respect of 13 other children.

The majority of principals expressed concern that more frequent speech and language therapy support was necessary. Reference was made to the need for external support when a child returns to a multi-grade mainstream class and to the need for greater integration between the health board services and school-based services. Alternative modes of providing speech and language therapy were suggested, such as employing peripatetic therapists, providing the service to children in groups, and working collaboratively with resource teachers and parents.

Multi-disciplinary support

School principals expressed the opinion that the availability of a multi-disciplinary team would greatly assist the school in meeting the needs of children with SSLD. It was suggested that the adoption of a case conference model would be of benefit in seeking to meet the needs of the children. Reference was made to the importance of formally allocating time for engaging in collaborative practices. Two principals suggested that the provision of special-needs assistants would assist in the implementation of the children's programmes.

Psychological support

The inadequacy of psychological support for children with SSLD who had left the special class was criticised. The levels of consultation with the psychological services had a low rating among principals. More than half of the principals returned a rating that suggested that little or no consultation with the psychological services took place.

Consultation

The importance of consultations with the child's former class teacher and speech and language therapist regarding the child's previous programme was stated. All the school principals reported receiving progress reports from the class teachers in the classes for children with SSLD. These reports varied in the types and sources of information provided.

The survey elicited information regarding how helpful the principals found these reports in planning for the children's education in a number of areas. Approximately three-quarters of the principals considered the reports on oral language and English reading and writing to be helpful. Sixty-five per cent described the reports as helpful in relation to mathematics. More than 30 per cent described the reports as not very helpful in providing information on the children's physical development. However, more than 65 per cent considered the reports on the social development of the child and information on integration issues to be quite helpful.

Questions were asked in respect of the levels of consultation with the school principal, the child's parents and the professionals providing the services in the special class when the child had transferred to the new school. School principals rated consultation with parents highest compared with other sources of advice and information about the needs of individual children.

Only 36 per cent of the principals of destination schools found the level of consultation with the child's former school principal to be satisfactory. More than half rated the level of consultation with the speech and language therapist as satisfactory, while the level of consultation with psychologists received a rating of "satisfactory" in only a few instances.

It was suggested that contact should be maintained with the special class during the initial transition phase in order to assist the children in readjusting to the much larger mainstream class.

Level of support required on return to mainstream provision

Reference was made to the additional difficulties experienced by children on return to mainstream provision. These included specific learning disabilities and continued speech and language difficulties. The need for children to receive additional support to meet their needs in the form of resource teaching or learning-support teaching on their return to mainstream school was stated. It was also suggested that suitable teaching and learning resources should be provided to meet the needs of the children on their return to mainstream provision.

The principals of the destination schools provided information on sixty-one children regarding the additional supports being availed of by them in their new school settings. Six children were recorded as receiving individual learning-support teaching in their new setting and fourteen as not receiving the service. Forty children were availing of resource teaching hours in their new school setting. Seventeen children were receiving two-and-a-half hours of individual tuition. Four children were receiving three hours per week each for a range of special educational needs. Fifteen were receiving four hours of individual resource support, and four others were receiving more than four hours of individual tuition. Two of the latter children were described as having autistic-spectrum disorder.

The necessity for resource teachers and class teachers to receive in-service training on the implications of SSLD for teaching and learning was reported.

Observation of children's experiences in the classes

The principals of destination schools affirmed the importance of early identification and early intervention in addressing the needs of children with

SSLD. Enrolment in the special class was considered beneficial, and children were described as being subsequently able to maintain progress in their mainstream placement.

Principals were asked to compare the progress of the children with SSLD with that of their mainstream class peers in a number of educational areas and according to their physical and social development. Approximately 69 per cent of the principals described the children's progress in oral language to be lower by comparison. In English reading and writing and in mathematics between 56 and 59 per cent of the principals also considered the progress of the children in their current setting to be at a lower level than that of their peers. However, the physical development of the children was seen to compare favourably by 75 per cent of principals. With regard to the child's integration within the school, 77 per cent of the principals suggested that the child was on a par with mainstream class peers. Principals were less enthusiastic about the children's social development, with about half recording a somewhat lower level of progress in this area.

Location of classes for children with SSLD

The geographical distribution of the classes was criticised, and reference was made to children having to make onerous daily journeys to attend a class. It was suggested that classes should be established in all areas where there were children who would benefit from attending. Two principals stated that suitable accommodation was available in their school for a new class; however, because of a lack of a speech and language therapy service, the classes could not be established.

Post-primary provision

The need for an automatic reassessment of children on transition from primary to post-primary provision was cited. It was also suggested that speech and language therapists would benefit from receiving in-service training on the content and implementation of the post-primary curriculum. The need for more classes for children with SSLD at post-primary level was stated.

CHAPTER 8

VIEWS OF PROFESSIONALS: OUTCOMES OF A SEMINAR ON POLICY AND PROVISION

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8.1   Introduction

The Department of Education and Science held a seminar for professionals on 28 May 2002 in the Stand House Hotel, the Curragh, Co. Kildare. This seminar constituted an important element of the review of educational provision in classes for children with specific speech and language disorder.

Teachers, speech and language therapists, psychologists, occupational therapists, health board personnel and inspectors attended the seminar. Representatives of teachers' organisations, as well as representatives from St Patrick's College of Education in Drumcondra, were also present. This representation of professionals from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines was a particular strength of the seminar and contributed greatly to the constructive discussion that took place.

Members of the staff of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) facilitated the organising and management of the seminar.

8.2   Objectives of the seminar

The purpose of the seminar was to provide a forum for professionals associated with providing services for children with SSLD. The participants were provided with an opportunity to discuss the provision in classes for children with SSLD and to share their experiences with colleagues and with other professionals.

Through reflecting on their own practice and giving priority to needs, the participants constructively identified ways in which policy and practice might be further developed.

8.3   Professional dialogue

The organisation of the seminar allowed for sectoral and cross–sectoral discussion. The discussions ranged from reviewing the positive aspects of the present system to concerns, problems, and recommendations. This ensured that the issues were approached in a deliberate and systematic manner and facilitated the disclosure of a range of beneficial professional viewpoints.

The seminar was also significant in that it provided an opportunity for different professionals with diverse ranges of knowledge to discuss a matter of common interest and to increase their understanding of the work engaged in by other professionals. Most importantly, the seminar allowed professionals to see themselves as part of an integrated service that provides support for children with SSLD.

The seminar generated a considerable range of dialogue and discussion. While it was evident that there were many points of agreement among the participants, there was also a willingness to examine all aspects of the service

in order to respond fully to children's and parents' needs in improving the provision for children with SSLD. The main points of agreement and concerns raised at the seminar are listed in table 3.

Points of agreement

■ All participants affirmed the value of the special class for children with SSLD.

■ Discernible improvements in children's self-esteem were evident through enrolment in the class.

■ The class generally had a positive impact on children's behaviour.

■ There was an improvement in children's language skills.

■ Children's socialisation skills and social language were enhanced.

■ The valuable collaborative work engaged in by the class teacher and the speech and language therapist was acknowledged.

■ Appreciation was expressed for parents' affirmation of the benefits of the classes for their children.

Main concerns of professionals

■ a need to revise admissions procedures

■ the desirability of adopting a more flexible approach to the application of diagnostic criteria

■ ensuring clarity in the language of professional reports

■ the implications of the Freedom of Information Act (1997) for report–writing

■ the importance of providing pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities

■ providing satisfactory supervision of children during recess periods

■ the necessity of providing additional teaching and care support for children on return to mainstream provision, as required

■ addressing the teaching of Irish in the context of the children's return to mainstream provision

Table 3: Summary of seminar discussions

8.4   Recommendations

During the seminar a particular emphasis was placed on the sharing of experiences. The participants' attention was also directed towards looking at the future and identifying ways and means by which policy and practice might be improved.

The following were among the more important recommendations made:

- Admissions criteria should be revised, as a matter of urgency.

- The interpretation of the criteria contained in the report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) should be standardised.

- A database of children who do not secure places in the classes should be maintained, and the practice of maintaining waiting-lists should be reviewed.

- Clarification should be provided on the funding of classes.

- Difficulties with regard to the provision of transport to classes should be identified, and solutions should be suggested.

- A greater role should be assigned to parents .

- Guidelines should be prepared for the classes on curriculum planning and implementation, report-writing, and integration.

- It should be ensured that the class for children with SSLD is included in whole-school planning.

- The work of the different agencies assisting the classes should be co-ordinated.

- The psychological and occupational therapy services at present available to the classes should be extended and expanded.

- A psychologist from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) should be assigned to each class.

- The allocation of special-needs assistants should be standardised .

- Training, including joint training, should be provided for all professionals.

- Appropriate modules on SSLD should be included in pre-service training.

- A continuum of provision for children with SSLD should be made available.

- Support should be provided for the mainstream class teacher following the child's return to mainstream provision.

8.5   Conclusion

The seminar for professionals was a valuable process, which beneficially informed the findings of the research. The generous sharing of professional experiences and expertise contributed to consolidating the data obtained from questionnaires, interviews and follow-up surveys in a positive and constructive manner.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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9.1   Introduction

This chapter presents a series of conclusions and recommendations that are based on a synthesis of the data obtained from the various strands of the evaluation. The data included information from an analysis of the questionnaires returned by the principals and class teachers in all fifty-four special classes; information from classroom observation, document review, structured interviews with principals, class teachers, speech and language therapists and parents of the pupils in the sixteen selected special classes; and information from the follow-up survey of a sample of former pupils of the special classes for SSLD and from the seminar for professionals.

It is hoped that the conclusions and recommendations presented in this chapter will assist in ensuring that children with SSLD continue to benefit from their educational placements and achieve their maximum potential.

9.2   Provision for children with SSLD

Early identification and intervention were observed to be important factors in meeting the needs of the children. While 42 per cent of pupils with SSLD were enrolled before the age of six, many others were older. It was felt generally that children with SSLD should be identified earlier, and that intervention should be made at the pre-school stage through the establishment of pre-school classes in mainstream schools where there are existing special classes for SSLD, or where it is proposed to establish a special class. This was in fact a recommendation that was made in the SERC Report but on which no action had been taken.

Prevalence figures for SSLD are related to the definitions and diagnostic criteria that are used. One often-quoted estimate of prevalence is 0.6 per cent. If this estimate is applied throughout the primary school population of about 450,000 children, it suggests that the number of pupils with SSLD would be about 2,700. At any one time, on the basis of each child getting an intensive intervention of two years' duration in a special class, one would therefore expect to have to provide for between 600 and 700 pupils, necessitating up to a hundred special classes for SSLD. At present there are fifty four special classes throughout the country. There are four counties without such a class. Further, there appears to be a low provision of such classes in areas of large pupil population. It seems reasonable to assume that there are pupils with SSLD who are not getting an intensive special education service, and that more special classes need to be established.

It is recommended that the special educational needs organisers (SENOs) should liaise with the relevant speech and language therapists and psychologists at local level to compile a database of pre-school children with SSLD in order to plan for and implement early intervention strategies, to investigate the need for pre-school classes, and to take the appropriate steps to advise on their

establishment, where they are needed. Particular attention should be given to the frequency and intensity of speech and language therapy that is made available to pre-school children and young school children who are identified as having SSLD or even severe speech and language difficulties, so that early intervention of high quality might decrease the need for, or the duration of, subsequent special class placement.

As there is a growing body of evidence of a strong genetic component in SSLD, greater attention should be paid by speech and language therapists and psychologists to the monitoring and early assessment of siblings of children with SSLD to ensure early identification and intervention.

It is further recommended that the SENOs investigate the need for establishing additional special classes for pupils with SSLD of primary-school age. Particular attention should be given to the need for provision in areas of large pupil population, and in those counties with no provision at present.

Consideration needs to be given to making provision for a minority of pupils at post-primary level. There are pupils whose difficulties in the areas of speech and language are so severe that they may need intervention throughout their time in school. SENOs need to be vigilant in identifying such pupils at primary level and in ensuring appropriate provision for them on their transfer to second level.

9.3   Diagnostic criteria for SSLD

Many issues were raised relating to the diagnostic criteria for SSLD. These issues are not unique to Ireland, and it can be seen in the review of the literature (chapter 2) that neither the terminology used in describing this area nor the diagnostic criteria used in identifying children are standardised between countries. What is not at issue is that there are children who have difficulties in acquiring basic competence in their home language. Some have problems in understanding language, while others have difficulties in expression and in communicating clearly and effectively with others. In many cases there is an explanatory reason for their difficulties in communication. It may be that their difficulty is secondary to a disability or impairment, such as a hearing impairment or a general learning disability, or it may be a feature of an autistic-spectrum disorder (ASD). In other cases there may be an environmental cause, such as lack of stimulation. These children can be assisted through the existing provision in schools: support from their class, learning-support or resource teacher, placement in an appropriate special class or special school, and support from a speech and language therapist, as required. However, a minority of children have severe difficulties in communicating, and there is no evidence of an explanatory cause. Their difficulty with communication is primary, not secondary to another disability. These are the children who are the subject of this report.

The criteria recommended in the SERC Report are those adopted and used by the Department of Education and Science since its publication. Two of the

criteria are of particular interest and have been subjected to most criticism. They are the specific qualifying criteria relating to the pupil's need to have assessed non-verbal or performance ability within the average range or above, and assessed performance in one or more of the main areas of speech and language development at two or more standard deviations below the mean. There has been little reference to the other recommended criteria, which relate to excluding a hearing impairment, emotional and behavioural disorders or a physical disability as primary explanatory factors in the pupil's communication difficulties. In fact it can be said that these criteria are often ignored when a diagnosis of SSLD is being made. Evidence for this arises from the number of pupils in the special classes, or returned to mainstream, who have ASD, emotional or behavioural disorders, mild or borderline mild general learning disabilities, or hearing impairments.

However, even when the two diagnostic criteria most at issue are considered there is evidence in the report that they are frequently disregarded. Only 70 per cent of pupils in these classes fully complied with the recommended criteria. While information was lacking on some pupils, it is a fact that a quarter of those in the special SSLD classes did not comply with the diagnostic criteria. This is a serious situation, and it is worse in some classes than in others. It is clear that many admissions committees are not adhering to the department's criteria, or are misinterpreting them.

It is argued by some that the criteria are too rigid, and the criteria used in other systems are recommended as improvements. For example, in some instances it is suggested that the non-verbal IQ criterion be extended downwards to one standard deviation below the mean (i.e. from 90 to 85), and that the language criterion should be raised upwards to take in children between 1.5 and 2 standard deviations below the mean. Were these criteria to be adopted a significant additional number of pupils would meet the criteria for SSLD.

It is not recommended here that these criteria be adopted. Arguments will always be put forward for extending the qualifying criteria, and cases will always be made for pupils who just fail to meet them. However, it must be pointed out that there is evidence in the report that, even where the existing criteria are used, there are difficulties in many areas with the supply of speech and language therapists. Only in 19 per cent of SSLD classes was there the daily intensive SLT provision of four hours per day. Most classes had between three and four hours' speech and language therapy, while a quarter had less than three hours, and some had a very restricted contribution from the therapist. Parents also expressed concerns about the turnover among speech and language therapists, and the delays in making appointments. In the absence of an adequate supply of therapists nationally it would be unwise to change the qualifying criteria. The existing service, which is seen to be successful in providing for the pupils with the most severe needs, could be stretched if it is expected to provide for an increased number of pupils.

Strict observance of the existing qualifying diagnostic criteria is recommended. It is recommended also that attention be given by admissions committees to all the criteria so as to reduce the number of pupils in the classes whose primary disability is not specific speech and language disorder. This is the only way, for now, of ensuring that

those pupils who meet the criteria receive the daily intensity of speech and language therapy, and small-group and individual teaching, that they need.

SENOs should regularly monitor admissions to SSLD special classes to ensure that the specialised and costly resources being allocated are being used to provide for the needs of children who meet the DES criteria for pupils with SSLD.

The National Council for Special Education should investigate more thoroughly how this population of pupils is identified in other countries, how their specific needs are addressed, and what could be considered best practice with regard to diagnostic criteria and in supporting them. Consideration should also be given to how best to meet the needs of those pupils who fail to meet the diagnostic criteria but who have difficulties with communication not catered for under other categories of disability. In particular, investigations could be undertaken into practice elsewhere that adopts alternative models of provision for speech and language therapy, for example provision that is made consultatively through parents and teachers. Such a model could provide for the needs of pupils who do not meet the existing criteria for SSLD or who have been returned to mainstream but who have residual difficulties.

The DES should publicise the existing criteria, the broad aims of the SSLD classes, the procedures for the enrolment and discharge of pupils, the membership of enrolment and discharge committees, and the functions of the committees, particularly in relation to the boards of management and principals of the schools concerned.

9.4   Accommodation and resources

The accommodation both for teaching and for the provision of speech and language therapy must be of the highest standard. There should be adjoining rooms or a classroom of adequate size that is partitioned to create an area suitable for individual speech and language therapy. It is desirable that such a room be free of noise distraction. The accommodation should permit the teacher and the speech and language therapist to work collaboratively with the pupils, or with each having a small group, or one-to-one, as required. In 60 per cent of the classes investigated the accommodation was of a very satisfactory standard. However, the remainder was less than satisfactory.

The funds available for resources and teaching aids were found to be generous. However, the quality of the materials was poor. There is a need for high-quality teaching resources that are specific to work with pupils with SSLD, and speech and language therapists need regular access to photocopiers for copying the many useful worksheets they use with the pupils. Generally, classrooms had adequate supplies of children's literature, language development resources, concrete materials for mathematics, art materials, sensory games, audiovisual equipment, and computers. Members of the staff ensured that there was a print-rich environment and that the classrooms were attractive and stimulating through the high quality of display.

It is recommended that when the SENO is selecting a school for the establishment of a special class for pupils with SSLD, care should be taken to ensure that the existing available accommodation is of adequate size to permit both individual and collaborative practice in the provision of teaching and speech and language therapy. Existing or new accommodation should be adapted to permit appropriate provision.

The DES Planning and Building Unit, the NCSE and the SESS should liaise with each other and consult representatives of the teachers and speech and language therapists in the existing special classes with regard to drawing up specifications for the provision of high-quality accommodation and resource materials.

9.5   Support services

There was general support for the favourable pupil–teacher ratio in the special classes. It was stated that being in a class of peers with similar needs was of benefit to the children. As a result there was increased pupil–pupil interaction in a secure environment. The role of the special-needs assistants was acknowledged, where they were allocated, but it was felt that consistency in their allocation was needed.

The view was put forward that these classes needed the support of an occupational therapist, and there was strong agreement that each class should have the support of an assigned educational psychologist. It was felt that these professionals would be of assistance in planning the children's education programme and in reviewing progress.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) should examine the possible role of occupational therapists in the provision of education for children with SSLD. There is a need for the HSE and the National Educational Psychological Service to develop an agreed practice on the provision of psychological support to these classes.

SENOs should ensure that each class has consistent access to the requisite teaching, speech and language and psychological support.

The possible role of SNAs in these classes needs to be considered.

9.6   Staff training and development

Teachers in the classes for children with SSLD had a considerable range of teaching experience, generally up to twenty years. However, fewer than half the class teachers had specific training in teaching pupils with SSLD or in special education. It was felt that there was a need for teachers to have specific pre-service and in-service training to meet the needs of children with SSLD.

There was evidence that where the teacher and therapist planned together and engaged in collaborative practice, the pupils made greater progress. In such situations there was a sharing of information about the needs of the pupils, and the teachers consolidated the work done by the speech and language therapist. Collaborative planning was found to be a real challenge in about half the classes. Indeed it was hardly a feature in these classes, and as a result there were

deficiencies in provision. In the more successful classes there was agreement on learning priorities, a systematic plan for the development of language, agreed teaching strategies and methods, and, at times, team teaching.

Joint in-service training is required to assist teachers and speech and language therapists in developing a shared understanding of their specific roles and responsibilities in the planning and provision of children's programmes. These professionals need training in collaborative planning, collaborative implementation of programmes, assessing pupils' progress, record-keeping, and inclusive practice.

Increased attention needs to be given in pre-service and in-service teacher training courses to best practice in the development of pupils' language skills, including those children who have difficulties in this area.

9.7 The views and role of parents

Teachers and speech and language therapists considered parents to have a pivotal role in supporting their children's placement in class. Ninety-four per cent of parents expressed satisfaction with the placement of their children in the special class for SSLD. They found it extremely beneficial to the child's academic progress, personal and social development, and ability to relate and communicate. Aspects of provision they found particularly pleasing were the low pupil-teacher ratio, the secure environment of the class, the availability of two professionals to give individual and focused attention to each child, and the opportunities for integration with pupils in other classes. The benefits of the home-school links and the positive relations and communication with staff members in the class were strongly acknowledged.

However, parents were critical of the lack of access to advance information on the existence of the classes, the enrolment and discharge procedures, and the role of admissions committees, principals and boards of management in relation to the classes. Parents felt that the enrolment procedures were too bureaucratic and protracted. They felt that there was a need for standard national guidelines on all these matters, including the securing of school transport for the child. They were critical of the practice of allowing a two-year maximum placement in the special class.

The unsatisfactory dissemination of information about classes, admission procedures, roles, school transport and other matters should be addressed through the publication of a short information booklet by the DES and through the creation of a web site about provision for SSLD.

It is recommended that the NCSE provide parents with support and advice regarding the implications of SSLD for their children's education.

Teachers and speech and language therapists should develop joint procedures, such as home-school notebooks, for communicating with parents. They should welcome classroom visits from parents and

share their objectives with them and should provide oral and written advice on strategies that parents could adopt at home to support the work being done in school.

The DES should give consideration to overcoming the delays and bureaucracy experienced by parents in making arrangements for school transport. The need for escorts to accompany and supervise children on school transport, and particularly when they travel alone in taxis, should not be overlooked.

9.8 Curriculum and planning

All interviewees observed that enrolment in the class had a positive impact on the pupils' communication skills, social and emotional development, and behaviour. All noticed the growth in the children's confidence and self-esteem, how they interacted and mixed well with peers, and how they acquired skills in playing together, sharing, chatting together, engaging in formal conversation and taking turns.

The inspectors found inadequate or little reference to the operation of the SSLD class in schools' plans and policy documents. These should include, among other matters, an expression of how the class is organised, what its objectives are, the roles and responsibilities of those involved, the policy on staff collaboration, and inclusion of the pupils with SSLD.

The existing primary school curriculum was acknowledged as being useful in assisting teachers to plan a programme for the class. This was particularly true in the case of the English curriculum, which teachers felt was aligned to the needs of the child with SSLD, especially its emphasis on pre-reading and early reading skills. However, teachers felt there was still a need for guidelines on how to adapt the existing curriculum to accommodate the needs of pupils with SSLD. Advice is needed on the place of Irish in the curriculum during the pupils' enrolment in the special class and on their return to mainstream.

The inspectors found that both long-term and short-term planning was inadequate in about half the classes. In these classes there was a lack of clarity with regard to aims and objectives, continuity and progression, and linkage to the specific needs of the pupils. The provision of a broad and balanced curriculum, in addition to an emphasis on language and communication in a focused and systematic manner, was a problem in a quarter of the classes.

Curriculum differentiation and the individualisation of programmes was a notable feature in the classes that successfully met the pupils' learning needs. The children benefited from experiencing success and from progressing at their own rate. However, individual education programmes were not in evidence in half the classes. In some instances staff members prepared separate individual education programmes. Generally, there was no involvement of parents or other professionals in the planning of such programmes.

Generally, the inspectors found the structure and pace of the lessons observed to be satisfactory. Lessons were mostly purposeful, with clear educational objectives. There was effective use of materials and no inappropriate reliance on the use of textbooks. In the majority of classes the inspectors praised the curriculum coverage and how the children's work was displayed and

maintained. They noted the progressive acquisition of language skills in almost all classes and the emphasis on language development throughout the curriculum. Questioning techniques were effective in more than half the classes.

While in the majority of classes observed the provision for English, mathematics and social, environmental and scientific education was good, other areas of the curriculum were less well covered. The teaching of visual arts was good in most classes, but the teaching of music was considered weak in several classes. Similarly, the teaching of physical education was limited in half the classes. The area of social, personal and health education was seen as competent in about half the classes and evaluated as excellent in a further 20 per cent. The use of ICT was effective in several classes, but there were classes where its use was quite limited.

It is recommended that, on the establishment of a special class for pupils with SSLD in a school, the staff should include a policy statement relating to the class in the school plan. This should be done in consultation with the members of the admissions committee and with the parents of the pupils. The policy should refer to issues such as the admission and discharge procedures, the aims of the class, the curriculum that will be followed, how teaching and learning objectives for pupils will be determined, the teaching approaches and resources that will be used, how the pupils' progress will be monitored, assessed, and recorded, how the parents will be involved in their children's education and how pupils' progress will be reported to them, the arrangements for staff collaboration, and the inclusive practices that will be adopted.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) should develop guidelines for these classes on how best to adapt the primary school curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with SSLD and how best to ensure that the pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum while at the same time obtaining focused teaching and therapy in their area of greatest need.

The DES should address the issue of the appropriateness of teaching Irish to pupils with SSLD whose home language is English. Policy needs to be decided with regard to whether these pupils should follow a programme in Irish while in the classes and, if they are exempted from its study while in the SSLD classes, what is required in this area on their return to mainstream and thereafter.

The needs of pupils who meet the criteria for SSLD whose home language is Irish should be considered by the DES. The NCSE should liaise with the relevant personnel from the HSE to establish the location of these pupils, and appropriate steps should be taken to provide special classes for them, where numbers warrant them.

The principals of the schools with SSLD classes should arrange opportunities for members of the staff to plan together and to consult other professionals and parents in specifying long-term and short-term objectives for the pupils. Issues related to curriculum differentiation, IEPs, teaching approaches, the continuity and progression of programmes and assessment and recording practices

need to be agreed and planned so that staff members can work collaboratively and individually, as required. Particular attention needs to be given to ensuring that children benefit from access to a broad and balanced curriculum.

9.9   Assessment and recording of progress

In almost half the classes there was little collaboration in the assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress. In a minority of classes there was good collaboration in this regard. A wide variety of assessment tools was in evidence, and effective practice was observed in the maintenance of pupils' work, in using portfolios, and in using data from these to inform continuous planning. However, in the majority of schools, the staff members kept separate records of progress, and in some classes these records were restricted to progress in English and mathematics. Some special classes sent copies of these records to the mainstream schools to which the pupils returned.

The staff in schools with special classes for pupils with SSLD should agree common assessment and recording procedures. These procedures should cover the pupil's progress in the entire curriculum, while giving particular attention to each pupil's progress in speech and language. Staff members should be able to draw comparisons between a pupil's progress and the initial assessment on referral to the class. Copies of a summative assessment should be supplied to parents and to the mainstream school to which the pupil is returning.

9.10 Integration

The location of the SSLD class in a mainstream school was found to be of benefit in providing a range of opportunities and possibilities for integration. Staff members felt that there was a lack of time for managing integration. The inspectors found a lack of formality in the arrangements for integration, and there were variations in practice between the classes. Integration took place mostly in the areas of visual arts, music, and physical education. The view was expressed that greater use of integration could have been arranged in pupils' strong curricular areas. However, children's experience of integration was positive in the majority of classes, and there was some use of reverse integration.

The principals of the schools with SSLD classes should lead in considering to what extent the integration of pupils with SSLD with other classes is desirable and feasible. The best interests of the pupils with SSLD should determine the practice. Issues such as each pupil's present achievements, ability and learning needs should influence decision-making. In addition, the programmes being followed in the mainstream classes are important in any planning for integration that takes place. Careful aims and objectives need to be set for each pupil's integration, and the pupil with SSLD, the pupils in the

mainstream class and their teacher need to be prepared for the integration. The progress of the plan should be evaluated in a systematic way. Formal plans should be drawn up to ensure that the integration is purposeful and of benefit to all participants.

9.11 Discharge and return to mainstream

Parents, in particular, expressed anxiety about the prospect of the child being discharged from the class and returning to a mainstream class. They were worried about large classes and the amount of attention that could be given by a mainstream class teacher in such circumstances to a child with difficulties in communication. They suggested that the return to mainstream should be done in a phased manner. They claimed that their children had residual difficulties in speech and language, even though 86 per cent of parents were satisfied with their children's progress in the SSLD special classes. They felt that their children continued to need regular speech and language therapy and support from a psychologist. However, it was found that 70 per cent of the children who had returned to mainstream were without speech and language therapy, and most of those getting therapy were getting it outside the school.

There should be a comprehensive review of each pupil's learning needs and strengths before discharge from the special class. In particular, the pupil's status with regard to speech and language should be evaluated and recorded. The staff of the special class and other relevant professionals who are involved in assessment of the child should inform the child's parents and the SENO of the assessment outcomes and any continuing special educational needs the child may have. The SENO should arrange for appropriate resources, both teaching and speech and language therapy, to be available to meet those needs on the child's return to mainstream.

Opportunities for liaison between the staff of the special class and the staff of the mainstream school should be facilitated, in the interests of the child.

The SENO should bring the training needs of staff members in the mainstream school to the attention of the SESS.

9.12 Conclusion

It is apparent from this evaluation that the provision made for pupils with SSLD through the establishment of special classes is meeting their needs. Parents are generally very supportive of the classes and greatly appreciate the focused attention their children receive from the professionals associated with the classes, particularly from the teacher and speech and language therapist. The system of provision, the procedures relating to it and the classes themselves generally work very well, but they are not without shortcomings. It is hoped that the conclusions and recommendations advanced in this report will lead to significant improvements in the provision of educational and therapeutic services to the children and even greater success in their mastery of fluent and effective communication with their peers.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRES AND SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

APPENDIX 1
QUESTIONNAIRES AND SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

General School Principal's Questionnaire

School Questionnaire

Evaluation of classes for children with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD)

AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | AND SCIENCE

INSPECTORATE

School ID: _____Roll Number_____

Name of School: _____Address of School: _____

Telephone: _____No. of Language Classes: _____

Principal's Name:_____Name of Chairperson: _____

Names of SSLD Teachers:_____

Names of Speech and
Language Therapists:_____

About the SSLD Class(es)

1(a) How many years has(have) the SSLD class(es) been in existence?

	Junior Class	Senior Class
Less than 1 year		
1 – 2 years		
3 – 5 years		
More than 5 years		

1 (b)

	Junior Class	Senior Class
Year the SSLD class(es) was (were) established (if known)		

1 (c)

Is there (a) one class only

(b) a Junior and Senior Class

2. Timetable for SSLD Class(es)

Morning Session	Main Lunch Break	Afternoon Session
From:	From:	From:
To:	To:	To:

3(a) Has a Special Needs Assistant been assigned to any pupil in the class(es) (Yes / No)

Yes _____No _____

3 (b) If Yes, please state the number of special needs assistants assigned _____

4. Is there an Admissions Committee specifically for the SSLD Class(es) in your school?

Yes _____No _____

5. If 'Yes,' please indicate the membership of the committee:

	Yes	No
Principal teacher		
SSLD special class teacher		
Health Board psychologist		
NEPS psychologist		
Speech therapist who works with SSLD class		
Other Health Board Speech Therapist		
Department of Education & Science inspector		
Other (please specify)		
Please add your comments on the operation of the Admissions Committee		

6. Is (are) your SSLD class(es) served by a Common Admissions Committee responsible for SSLD Classes in a number of schools?

Yes _____No _____

7. If 'Yes,' please indicate the membership of the Common Admissions Committee and the names of the schools involved in the joint arrangement:

Membership of Common Admissions Committee

_____
_____
_____
_____

Schools served by the Common Admissions Committee

_____
_____
_____
_____

Enrolment / Discontinuation* of pupils in special class(es) for pupils with SSLD

8. With reference to the current school year (2001/'02), please state:

		No. of pupils
a	Number of pupils discontinued* at the end of 2000/01 school year	
b	Number of applications for placement in the SSLD class	
c	Number of pupils deemed unsuitable because they did not meet the criteria for enrolment	
d	Number of places available for new pupils	
e	Number of new pupils enrolled	
f	Number of pupils who were suitable for enrolment, but for whom places were not available	

*returned to mainstream education or placed in other special education placement

Note

> If a Common Admissions Committee was responsible for Enrolment / Discontinuation* of pupils in a cluster of schools in your region for the school year (2001/'02), please complete the table in Q8 in relation to the total numbers for that cluster.

9. Please give your views on the following:

	not satisfactory	below average	average	above average	excellent
(a) The accommodation available for the SSLD class					
Please add your comments					
(b) The accommodation available for the speech therapist:					
Please add your comments					
(c) Equipment/resources for the SSLD class					
Please add your comments					
(d) Department funding for the SSLD class					
Please add your comments					
(e) Department guidelines on criteria for enrolment of pupils in SSLD classes					
Please add your comments					

	not satisfactory	below average	average	above average	excellent
(f) Support and guidance on educational provision for pupils with SSLD					
Please add your comments					
(g) Inservice education for SSLD teachers					
Please add your comments					
(h) Transport for SSLD pupils					
Please add your comments					

10. Please give your views on the adequacy of the following services to the pupils in your school who have SSLD

	Inadequate	reasonably adequate	excellent
Speech therapy services			
Occupational therapy services			
Psychological services			
Please add your comments			

11. In your view, which of the following policy options should the Department of Education and Science prioritise in order to improve the quality of special class provision for children with SSLD? Please list your choices in order of priority 1 – 7, (1 being the highest priority)

	Priority 1-7
(i) Lower pupil-teacher ratio in special classes for children with SSLD	
(ii) Increased funding for SSLD classes	
(iii) Support for increased integration of pupils with SSLD in mainstream classes	
(iv) Increase provision of speech therapy	
(v) More inservice training for SSLD teachers	
(vi) More inservice training for the whole school	
(vii) Other (please specify)	

12. Please add your comments and / or recommendations in relation to educational provision for children with specific speech and language disorder:

Please return the School Questionnaire and the Teacher's Questionnaire together in the pre-paid envelope.

It would be appreciated if the questionnaires could be returned before Friday 26 April 2002.

Thank you for your assistance with the SSLD Evaluation Project.

OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | AND SCIENCE

INSPECTORATE

Evaluation of Special Classes for children with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD): SSLD Teacher Questionnaire

School ID: _____Roll Number _____

Name of School: _____Address of School: _____

Telephone: _____Number of Staff: _____

No. of Pupils on roll: _____No. of Sp Lang Classes: _____

Name of Chairperson: _____Principal's Name: _____

SSLD Teacher:_____

Teaching Experience

1 (a) Number of years teaching mainstream classes:

1 (b) No. of years in learning support, other special class or resource teaching

1 (c) No. of years teaching the special class for pupils with SSLD

Inservice education for teaching children with special needs

2 (a) One year fulltime course in Special Education (Yes / No) Year

2 (b) One year part-time learning support course (Yes / No) Year

2 (c) Attendance at part-time course(s) specifically designed for

teachers of children with SSLD (number of hours)

2 (d) Part-time course(s) specifically designed for

teachers of children with special needs (number of hours)

1 (e) Other relevant in-service course or professional development

3. Please indicate the extent to which you found the following helpful in your work as a teacher of children with SSLD

	not very helpful	helpful	very helpful	does not apply
One year fulltime course in Special Education				
One year part-time learning support course				
Attendance at part-time course(s) specifically designed for teachers of children with SSLD				
Attendance at part-time course(s) specifically designed for teachers of children with special needs				
Membership of Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA)				
Membership of Irish Association for Teachers in Special Education (IATSE)				
Membership of other professional organisation (please specify)				
Education Centre				
Please add your comments				

3. Please describe how teaching is organised for children in your SSLD class

	rarely/ never	sometimes	frequently	very frequently
SSLD teacher with individual pupils withdrawn from mainstream				
SSLD teacher with all pupils together				
SSLD teacher supporting pupils in mainstream classroom				
Other (please specify)				
Please add your comments				

4. Please indicate your views on the quality of the accommodation and equipment available for teaching pupils with SSLD

	not satisfactory	below average	above average	excellent
Accommodation available for your teaching				
Equipment / teaching aids available				
Please add your comments				

5. Please indicate your views on the quality of the accommodation and available for speech therapy

	not satisfactory	below average	above average	excellent
Accommodation available for speech therapy				
Equipment available for speech therapy				
Please add your comments				

6. Apart from the SSLD teacher, please describe the extent of involvement of the following in programme planning for teaching SSLD pupils:

	rarely/ never	sometimes	frequently	very frequently
Principal Teacher				
Please add your comments				
Class Teacher				
Please add your comments				

	rarely/ never	sometimes	frequently	very frequently
Other specialist teachers				
Please add your comments				
Speech therapist				
Please add your comments				
Parents of children with SSLD				
Please add your comments				
Psychologist				
Please add your comments				

7. Please give your views on the following provision for pupils with SSLD

	not satisfactory	below average	above average	excellent
Access to support materials				
Curriculum guidelines				
Information for parents about SSLD				
Please add your comments				

8. Availability of speech therapy for pupils with SSLD on a daily basis (please tick one box)

	Less than 2 hours	2 to 3 hours	3 to 4 hours	More than 4 hours
Daily availability of speech therapy				
Please add your comments				

9. Please give your views on the usefulness of the primary English curriculum as a basis for planning and teaching a programme for pupils with SSLD

	not useful	reasonably useful	very useful
usefulness of the English curriculum			
Please add your comments			

10. Approximately how much homework is assigned to SSLD pupils daily (excluding Friday)

	less than 30 minutes	30 to 60 minutes	more than 60 minutes
amount of homework assigned			
Please add your comments			

Each pupil in your class has been assigned a Pupil ID number on the Pupil ID Form. Please provide information in respect of each pupil in the row opposite the ID no. assigned to him/her

Pupil ID No	Date of Birth	Sex (M/F)	Date of enrolment in SSLD class	General ability at enrolment[1]			Language ability at enrolment[2]		
				Verbal	Performance	Full Scale	Expressive	Receptive	Overall
01									
02									
03									
04									
05									
06									
07									
08									

1. Please quote findings in psychological report
2. Please quote findings in speech therapy report

Pupil ID No	Educational attainment at enrolment[3]		Progress to date[4]		Attendance[5]	Any other disability[6]	Does the pupil avail of school transport (Yes/No)	If 'yes' please state his/her approx journey time to/from school	Is this pupil a Traveller or a non-national (Tr/N)	Child's home language
	English	Maths	English	Maths						
01										
02										
03										
04										
05										
06										
07										
08										

3. Please give your view of the child's overall educational attainment at enrolment on 1 – 5 scale, where 1= very weak and 5 = very good, or approximate class level achieved, in the case of older pupils.

4. Please give your view of the child's progress to date (e.g. results of standardized tests, where available or class level reached by the pupil)

5. Please state (i) the no. of days school was open up to February 28th of the current school year the at the top of the column and (ii) the no. of days attended by each pupil in the appropriate box

6. If the child has been assessed as having a disability as described in Circular 8/99, in addition to SSLD, please state the nature of the disability

INSPECTORATE

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA

Evaluation of Classes for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder

Questionnaire for Parents

1. Child's Date of Birth: _____

2. For how long was your child enrolled in the speech and language class?

From date	To date

3.

	not very satisfied	somewhat satisfied	very satisfied	extremely satisfied
How satisfied are you that your child attended the speech and language class? **Please tick one box**				
Comment				

4.

	not very beneficial	somewhat beneficial	very beneficial	extremely beneficial
In your view, to what extent was your child's enrolment in the speech and language class beneficial to his / her school progress? **Please tick one box**				

5.

	not very helpful	helpful	very helpful	does not apply
In your view, to what extent was your child's placement in the speech and language class helpful to his/her social and personal development? **Please tick one box**				

6. Please rate the provision of the following while your child was attending the Speech and Language Class:

	Not satisfactory	Satisfactory	Very satisfactory
School transport			
Speech therapy			
Home school communication			
Information for parents from other sources			
Please add your comments			

7. Is your child currently receiving speech and language therapy?

Yes	No

Comment in relation to Speech and Language Therapy

8.

	Not satisfied	satisfied	Very satisfied
To what extent are you satisfied that your child's current educational provision is beneficial to his/her school progress?			

9.

	Not satisfied	satisfied	Very satisfied
To what extent are you satisfied that your child's current educational provision is beneficial to his/her social and personal development?			

10. Please add your views about how current educational provision for children with speech and language difficulties has helped your child and how provision could be improved in the future.

Please return the completed Questionnaire for Parents to YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL in the envelope provided.

It would be appreciated if the questionnaire could be returned as soon as possible

Thank you for your assistance with the Pupil Follow-up Survey.

INSPECTORATE

Evaluation of Language Classes for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder

Questionnaire for Principal of Destination School

1. Information in relation to the pupil's enrolment after he/she transferred from the Special Language Class:

(a) If the pupil is currently attending Primary School please complete the following:

What class did the pupil join after leaving the Language Class?								
Jun Inf	Sen Inf	1	2	3	4	5	6	Sp Cl

Other Class: please specify

What class is the pupil in at present?								
Jun Inf	Sen Inf	1	2	3	4	5	6	Sp Cl

Other Class: please specify

(b) If the pupil is currently attending Post-Primary School please complete the following

What class is the child in at present?

Class: please give details of class level and specify any additional support provided.

2. Did you receive a report (progress report, psychological report etc) from the Special Language Class teacher when this pupil enrolled in your school?

Yes	No

3. Please give your view on the extent to which the report(s) was/were helpful in planning for the pupil's education in the following areas:

	Not very helpful	quite helpful	Very helpful
Oral language			
English reading and writing			
Physical development			
Mathematics			
Social development			
Integration in your school			

4. Please rate the level of consultation on a scale of 1 – 4 with THE CHILD'S PARENTS when this pupil transferred to your school (1 = little or no consultation, 4 = optimal level of consultation).

	1	2	3	4
Level of consultation **Please tick one box**				

5. Please rate the level of consultation on a scale of 1 – 4 with the following PROFESSIONALS when this pupil transferred to your school (1 = little or no consultation, 4 = optimal level of consultation).

	1	2	3	4
Principal teacher				
Special Language class teacher				
Speech Therapist				
Psychologist				

6. If this pupil is in receipt of learning-support teaching (remedial teaching), please indicate the level of support:

	Amount of time per week (hrs. & mins.)
In small group	
Individual	
Not receiving support	

7. If this pupil is in receipt of resource teaching under the terms of Circular 8/99 or Circular 8/02, please indicate the amount of resource teaching:

2.5 hours per week	3 hours per week	4 hours per week	More than 4 hours per week

8. If this pupil is in receipt of resource teaching - under which of the Department of Education and Science special needs categories has resource teaching been sanctioned?:

9. If available, please state the most recent percentile / grades achieved by this pupil on any of the following tests:

Type of test	Name of test	Date administered	Percentile score achieved	Other rating or score, if percentile not available (please specify)
Oral language				
Reading				
Mathematics				
Other (please specify)				

10. Does this pupil currently receive speech and language therapy (either outside school or in school)?

Yes	No	Don't Know

11. If "yes", please state how much speech and language therapy the pupil receives per month:

	Amount of time per MONTH (hrs. & mins.)
Speech Therapy - outside school	
Speech Therapy – in school	
Not receiving support	

12. In comparison with his/her peers, how would you describe this pupil's progress in the following aspects of his/her education

	Much weaker than peers	Somewhat weaker	About average	Better than most
Oral language				
English* reading				
English* writing				
Physical development				
Mathematics				
Social development				
Integration in your school				

*or child's home language if not English

13. Please add your views about current educational provision for children with speech and language difficulties and how provision could be improved in the future.

Please return the completed Questionnaire for Principals and the Questionnaire for Parents together in the pre-paid envelope.

It would be appreciated if questionnaires could be returned before Tuesday 25 June 2002.

Thank you for your assistance with the Pupil Follow-up Survey.

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INSPECTORATE

Evaluation of Classes for Pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder

Meeting with Parents

School ID No:_____Date of meeting: _____

No. of Parents attending:_____

1. Effectiveness of the school's SSLD class in meeting needs of pupils - How do pupils

benefit?
_____

_____

2. Admissions policy and placement of pupils: satisfaction with placement
_____

_____

3. Curricular Issues: Progress, access to curriculum, integration, enjoyment of school
_____

_____

4. Parental involvement and addressing the concerns of parents: Return to mainstream
_____

_____

5. Strengths of current provision for pupils in SSLD classes
_____

_____

6. Weaknesses of current provision for pupils in SSLD classes
_____

_____

7. System development for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder
_____

APPENDIX 2

FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL–BASED EVALUATION OF CLASSES

Evaluation Framework – Classroom Observation

1	Accommodation and Resources	1.1	Accommodation
		1.2	Teaching and learning resources

2	Classroom atmosphere	2.1	Teacher-pupil interactions
		2.2	Pupil-pupil interactions
		2.3	Pupil enjoyment

3	Classroom management	3.1	Involvement of pupils
		3.2	Positive behaviour
		3.3	Organisation and pacing

4	Learning environment	4.1	Involvement of pupils
		4.2	Displays
		4.3	Special curriculum support
		4.4	Language-rich environment

5	Teaching approaches	5.1	Curriculum planning
		5.2	Range of approaches
		5.3	Lesson structure
		5.4	Pupil needs are central
		5.5	Grouping
		5.6	Teaching materials
		5.7	Questioning / facilitation
		5.8	Professional collaboration in implementation

6	Learning and pupil engagement	6.1	Active participation
		6.2	Motivation
		6.3	Success
		6.4	Systematic development
		6.5	Differentiation
		6.6	Portfolio of work
		6.7	Learning using ICT

7	Curriculum and programme	7.1	Broad curriculum
		7.2	Child's stage of development
		7.3	Language development
		7.4	Integration
		7.5	Speech and language work
		7.6	Curriculum integrated with language work
		7.7	Professional collaboration for curriculum

8	Curriculum areas	8.1	Awareness – Irish
		8.2	Skills and concepts – English
		8.3	Skills and concepts – Mathematics
		8.4	Skills and concepts – SESE
		8.5	Skills and concepts – Visual art
		8.6	Skills and concepts – Music
		8.7	Skills and concepts – PE
		8.8	Skills and concepts – SPHE

9	Management and co-ordination	9.1	Teamwork
		9.2	Model of provision
		9.3	Linkages: Teacher and SLT
		9.4	Integration
		9.5	Management structure
		9.6	Planning and review meetings

Evaluation Framework – Document Review

1	General curriculum planning	1.1	School plan
		1.2	Aims and objectives
		1.3	Long-term plans
		1.4	Short-term plans
		1.5	Language development plan
		1.6	Co-ordination of planning

2	Planning for monitoring and assessment	2.1	Collaboration for evaluation
		2.2	Coherent and systematic approach to assessment
		2.3	Individualised educational plans
		2.4	Specific targets
		2.5	Records of progress

3	Documentation for Admissions	3.1	Admission records maintained
		3.2	Organisation of pupil files
		3.3	Transfer records

4	Samples of pupils' work	4.1	Collections maintained
		4.2	Samples reflect broad curriculum
		4.3	Specific work in language development
		4.4	Acquisition of skills and growth evident
		4.5	Link with assessment purposes

5	Planning, monitoring for a specified pupil	5.1	Preparation of Individualised Plan
		5.2	Learning objectives
		5.3	Assessment results
		5.4	Range of assessment tools
		5.5	Broad profile of pupil