

Mainstream–special school inclusion partnerships: pupil, parent and teacher perspectives

NORAH FREDERICKSON, SANDRA DUNSMUIR, JANE LANG
AND JEREMY J. MONSEN

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Perspectives of 107 pupils, parents and school staff involved in inclusion initiatives in two Local Education Authorities in the UK were obtained through interviews and focus groups. The format of the interview was semistructured, with a predetermined set of questions and prompts being delivered according to a standardized protocol. Transcripts were analysed using a qualitative procedure and commonalities and differences of view identified. All groups reported academic and social advantages as positive benefits of returning pupils with special educational needs from special to mainstream settings. Teachers identified changing attitudes and values and sharing staff expertise as important. Teachers' main concerns were organizational (planning, timetabling, curriculum). All groups highlighted some academic and social concerns, though for pupils relatively higher incidences of social concerns were recorded. All groups considered pupil progress to be a primary indicator of successful inclusion: parents placed greater emphasis on academic progress and pupils on social progress. Teachers and parents identified good planning and preparation and supportive communication as prerequisites for successful inclusion. The importance of establishing effective systems of communication is discussed in relation to the further development of inclusive practices.

Introduction

During the last decade, inclusion has emerged as a key international educational policy issue. The Salamanca Statement, which was signed by the representatives of 92 countries, calls on governments 'to adopt the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise' (UNESCO 1994: 44). National legislation in many countries including the UK (DfEE 2001a) has promoted 'inclusive education' for pupils who have Special Educational Needs, or disabilities. However, such legislation and associated guidance has typically stopped short of unqualified support for full inclusion and has incorporated a number of the 'reasons for doing otherwise' alluded to in the Salamanca Statement.

The UK's Special Educational Needs and Disability Act identified two such reasons for children who have a Statutory Statement of Special Educational Needs. In the UK Statements of Special Educational Needs are produced by means of a statutorily regulated multi-agency assessment

Correspondence should be addressed to: Norah Frederickson: Department of Psychology, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, UK; e-mail: n.frederickson@ucl.ac.uk

undertaken to identify formally pupils with significant Special Educational Needs and are required to access special school or facility placements. The Act stated that children who have a Statement of Special Educational Needs must be educated in a mainstream school unless this would be incompatible with parental wishes or with the provision of efficient education for other children (DfEE 2001a: Section 324). Accordingly, a continuing role for special education has been advocated (Allan and Brown 2001) and this is reflected in the broad agenda for inclusion that has been identified by the UK government which consists of four main elements: returning children from special to mainstream schools, strengthening links between special and mainstream schools, decreasing the number of pupils referred by the mainstream schools for Statutory Assessment of their Special Educational Needs, and involving Local Education Authority (LEA) support staff in supporting mainstream placements (DfEE 1997).

In the UK, the availability since 1999 of additional government funding to support LEA initiatives linked to the broad agenda for inclusion has substantially influenced the nature of such developments. The research described in this paper was carried out in two large LEAs in the South of England, which separately developed very similar bids for matched government funding to support an inclusion initiative. In each case, the LEA invited special and mainstream school partnerships to submit proposals for a 3-year project designed to meet certain defined objectives. The objectives of the projects in the two LEAs are highly similar to each other and to the elements of the government agenda for inclusion. In LEA1 the objectives were stated as follows:

to ensure that more pupils are educated in mainstream rather than segregated settings. . . . The district model . . . is already tackling some of the issues relating to the support of pupils in mainstream—the project . . . builds upon this and speeds the successful return of pupils from the three special schools back into mainstream.

In LEA2 the objectives were:

to support the integration of pupils from special schools to the mainstream setting, to develop the capacity of mainstream schools to meet the needs of most pupils, to bring together special and mainstream schools in a mutually supportive relationship, and to include the wider educational community in the promotion of this partnership.

In each LEA, three special schools, for pupils who have moderate and moderate/severe learning difficulties, led successful bids. While the term 'moderate learning difficulties' (MLD) is used to describe generalized problems in academic tasks such as reading, writing and numeracy skills, an increasing proportion of the pupils attending MLD schools have been found to experience sensory, physical, medical, language, emotional-behavioural, autistic spectrum and/or severe learning difficulties (Male 1996). In LEA1 three all age special schools were involved of which one opted to focus the project in their high school department (i.e. 11–18 year olds) and two opted to focus the project in their elementary department (i.e. 5–11 year olds). The expectation in LEA1 was that each of the special schools would link with numbers of mainstream schools in their district as pupils from the special school were integrated as far as possible into their local mainstream

school. In LEA2, one of the special schools was for elementary aged pupils while the other two were for pupils of high school age. Here consortia arrangements were formed between each special school and one or two nearby mainstream schools, into which pupils from the special schools were to be integrated. Government guidance encouraged LEAs to purchase external evaluation of their additionally funded inclusion projects and LEAs 1 and 2 had each separately approached the same university department with a proposal.

A major strand of the external evaluation entailed obtaining stakeholder perspectives on the outcomes of these projects. In addition, views were sought on the processes that had operated more or less effectively in supporting successful inclusion. The perspectives of three groups of stakeholders were sampled: staff from the schools involved, the participating pupils and their parents. This is not to suggest that other groups (e.g., policy makers, staff in agencies other than education), do not have important information to contribute or views which require consideration. The three groups selected were chosen because they are the most closely involved and directly affected and because recent research and government guidance has highlighted the importance of their views.

The importance to inclusion efforts of the views of those staff centrally involved in implementation has been consistently highlighted (Scruggs and Mastropieri 1996, Vaughn *et al.* 1996, Avramidis *et al.* 2000). However, parents' views have been investigated less often and multiple perspectives based on actual experience with the process rarely obtained. Bennett *et al.* (1997: 127) concluded that 'because parents and their children are most affected by the outcomes of the inclusion process, it is important to include parents, and children where possible, in studies investigating the 'benefits, of inclusion'. This is consistent with recent central government guidance in the UK, outlined in the revised Code of Practice (DfES 2001b), on good practice and recommended procedures for identification, assessment, provision and progress monitoring for pupils with SEN. The revised Code of Practice presents five 'fundamental principles' one of which is that 'the views of the child should be sought and taken into account' (paragraph 1.5). A whole chapter is devoted to pupil participation on the basis that children with SEN have a right 'to be involved in making decisions and exercising choice' (DfES 2001b: paragraph 3.1). Emphasis on supporting parental involvement in decision making is also strengthened in the revised Code of Practice.

Because so few studies have obtained multiple key stakeholder perspectives on experiences of inclusion, opportunities to look at commonalities and differences in view have been very limited. However, these are likely to assume considerable importance in promoting effective communication and collaboration. The extensive research on teachers' views of inclusion has demonstrated that comparisons across single-perspective studies conducted in different contexts are unlikely to be valid or meaningful. Teacher attitudes to inclusion have been found to vary across contexts depending on the type and severity of special needs involved (Ward *et al.* 1994, Scruggs and Mastropieri 1996), the amount of experience of inclusion (Villa *et al.* 1996, Everington *et al.* 1999,

Avramidis *et al.* 2000) and the degree of personal responsibility for the implementation of inclusion (Ward *et al.* 1994, Scruggs and Mastropieri 1996, Villa *et al.* 1996). A number of analogous findings have been reported in studies of parents' attitudes to inclusion. Kasari *et al.* (1999) found that parents of children with Downs' syndrome were more positive about inclusion than parents of autistic children, as were parents of younger, rather than older children and those currently placed in mainstream as opposed to those currently placed in special education.

A comprehensive literature search yielded three studies where the perspectives on inclusion of staff, parents and students were all collected within the same context. Lombardi *et al.* (1994) described a year long pilot inclusion project in a high school in West Virginia, USA, where 44 students with SEN who had previously been educated in separate special classes were included in regular classes for all or most of their time in school. Parent, teacher and student perceptions were assessed through surveys where participants rated their agreement with general statements designed to represent concerns about inclusion that have appeared in the literature. The parent and teacher surveys contained many of the same items but the student survey was different, making it difficult to compare the perspectives of all groups of stakeholders.

By contrast, York and Tundidor (1995) did explore a core of similar questions with students, parents and teachers, using focus groups, a more adaptive and interactive method of data collection than a rating based survey. They collected data from a wide range of school contexts, seven high schools and six elementary schools. The principal limitation of this study was that most of the participants had little familiarity with or experience of inclusion. What was being assessed were participants' general attitudes towards inclusion, rather than their first hand perceptions. In addition, of the 64 students who participated, all were high school council members and only three had SEN.

Avramidis *et al.* (2002) conducted a case study of a high school identified as inclusive by the LEA. Interviews with students, teachers and parents used schedules designed to address the same areas but adapted to the role of the respondent. Sixteen school staff, five pupils with SEN and four parents of pupils with SEN were interviewed about their perceptions of the factors involved in successful inclusion.

It would appear that when comparable perspectives have been obtained from key groups of participants actually involved in inclusion, these have been drawn from a single school context. In addition, very small numbers of pupils, all of high school age, have been involved. The main objective of this study was to extend this existing work substantially in addressing the need identified by Bennett *et al.* (1997) for the investigation of multiple perspectives based upon actual experience with the process of inclusion. It sought to achieve this by employing a systematic approach in collecting the perspectives of three different groups of participants in comparable inclusion projects. The three groups of participants were students with SEN who were integrating into mainstream schools from special schools, their parents and the special and mainstream school staff involved in their education.

Method

Setting and context

This research was conducted 9–15 months after the start of the inclusion project in each LEA. At that time 107 pupils were involved, 69 in LEA1 and 38 in LEA2. In LEA1, pupils from school A were integrating into 19 different mainstream elementary schools, pupils from school B were integrating into seven mainstream high schools and one mainstream elementary school, and pupils from school C were integrating into two different mainstream elementary schools. In LEA2, school D had formed a consortium with two elementary mainstream schools, school E with two mainstream high schools and school F with one mainstream high school. Of the 107 pupils involved in the inclusion projects, 68% were male. The pupils ranged in age from 5 years 4 months to 17 years 3 months with a mean age of 11 years 1 month (standard deviation [SD] 3 years 4 months). The proportion of time the pupils spent in the mainstream school ranged from 10 to 100% with a mean of 38.6% (SD = 40.0).

Two of the schools, one from each LEA, had been substantially involved in mainstream integration before the start of the funded project, schools A and F. School F had been working with the mainstream high school in its consortium for the previous two years on the provision of access to mainstream examination classes for particular individual pupils and to social and recreational activities for a larger number. School A had a long history of involvement and strong staff commitment to inclusion. Pupils were transferred off the roll of the special school and on to the roll of the mainstream school once they were attending mainstream school for more than 50% of their time. Most of the pupils included full-time in mainstream were from school A.

Data collection approaches and procedures

The key objective was to elicit from each group of participants a comprehensive range of views, perceptions and reflections about their experience of inclusion. The views of included pupils and of mainstream and special school staff involved in the project were obtained using focus groups. Focus groups are planned sessions where individuals discuss ideas and perceptions focused around a topic of interest (Krueger 1988). Vaughn *et al.* (1996: 4) explained that ‘The major assumption of focus groups is that with a permissive atmosphere that fosters a range of opinions, a more complete and revealing understanding of the issues will be obtained’. This approach appeared well suited to addressing the main objective of this study. Vaughn *et al.* reviewed a range of research that suggests that focus groups have a number of advantages over individual interviews: the greater anonymity of the group environment can help individuals disclose more freely, social desirability responses or attempts to impress the interviewer may be reduced in the presence of peers, participants can see that a diverse range of views are welcomed and valued, there is no requirement or pressure for an individual

to answer every question so responses made are likely to be more genuine and substantial.

A number of authors have argued for the appropriateness of group interviews with children, particularly those who have SEN (Lewis 1992, Costley 2000). In a group situation with familiar peers, pupils can prompt one another with information not known to the interviewer. It is argued that pupils are likely to feel more supported, relaxed and confident than in an individual interview with an unfamiliar adult. On this basis, the potential advantages of focus group interviews in obtaining the parents' views appeared less clear cut. While the pupils were familiar with each other, as were the staff from the special and mainstream schools, staff considered it unlikely that many of the parents were acquainted. There were a number of significant pragmatic problems in terms of restricted parental availability due to work and childcare requirements, geographical distances and transport difficulties. Following consultation with a number of those involved, the views of parents were obtained using telephone interviews. Shuy (2002) reviews existing literature on the advantages of telephone versus in-person individual interviews. In the present study the following considerations were influential: the complexity and sensitivity of the information sought was not considered high enough to require in-person interviewing, a larger sample could be interviewed by telephone for the same cost and a wider range of respondent preferences for time of interview could be accommodated without any increased risk to researcher safety. For two of the parents interviewed, English was not their first language. In one of these cases, the recorded interview was set up as a three-way telephone conference involving an interpreter.

At the start of each focus group or interview the moderator introduced themselves and restated the purpose of the research—to find out how people who have been involved in inclusion think and feel about it. Participants were told that their views were considered to be valuable and could help to influence any future plans for inclusion in their area. However, they were assured about anonymity for individuals and schools and encouraged to share their ideas, feelings and thoughts about their experience of inclusion, speaking freely and not holding anything back they thought important. In each case the questions enquired about the following issues: positive aspects of inclusion, worries or concerns, indicators of successful inclusion, factors contributing to successful inclusion and contributions participants can make to aid success. Questions were phrased slightly differently for the different participant groups to ensure relevance and comprehension. Table 1 summarizes the variants on the first question: seeking perceptions about the positive aspects of inclusion.

Focus groups

Six staff focus groups and six pupil focus groups were conducted so that the participants involved in each (mainstream and special school staff or pupils) were from a single consortium and had a shared context. The focus of this study was on the perceptions of those who had been involved in inclusion, rather than the attitudes generally towards inclusion of staff in the project

Table 1. Question variants used with different groups of participants

Teachers	What would you say are the positive aspects of inclusion? PROMPT (<i>If the teacher does not spontaneously give specific examples follow up with 'Can you give some specific examples that show the benefits of this inclusion project?'</i>)
Parents	What would you say are the positive aspects of inclusion? PROMPT (<i>If the parent does not spontaneously give specific examples follow up with 'Can you give some specific examples that show the benefits of including _____ at _____?'</i>)
Pupils	What would you say are the positive and good things about being included at _____ (<i>insert names of any mainstream schools attended by the pupils</i>)? PROMPT 'What have you really liked about being included at _____?'

schools. Participants were therefore chosen using a non-random selection procedure (Basch 1987). Mainstream staff who had taught the included pupils or who had been closely involved in setting up and supporting the inclusion project were invited to participate in the focus groups by the member of staff of the special school who was co-coordinating data collection for the evaluation. Dates were selected to maximize the numbers of attendees. Pupils were selected for participation in the focus groups by staff of the special school who obtained parental consent for their participation. As most of the pupil focus groups were conducted on the same day as the staff focus groups, availability was a significant factor in pupil selection. Participant, and in the case of the pupils, parental consent was obtained for focus group sessions to be audio taped and transcribed.

The focus group sessions were set up to have the characteristics of a 'more structured' variant of the approach (Morgan 2002). On such approaches the direction of the group in terms of topics addressed is largely moderator led. A set of questions devised by the moderator effectively set the agenda for discussion. The moderator sought to facilitate participation by all group members and to elicit the full range of views held by them in relation to the topics of interest. Discussion was directed by the moderator to that end and interventions were made to refocus off-topic remarks. The focus group moderators adopted the process facilitation style described by Millward (1995).

Three of the staff focus groups and three of the pupil focus groups were moderated by the second author, a practising school psychologist and university trainer, who has extensive experience of interviewing children with SEN, their parents and teachers. The other six focus groups were moderated by a research assistant trained by the second author. The duration of staff focus groups ranged from 1 to 1.5 hours. The duration of pupil focus groups ranged from 25 to 45 minutes.

Telephone interviews

Telephone interviews were carried out with parents of pupils from a special school who were being included in a mainstream school for a

proportion of each school week as part of the LEA project. Interviews were conducted by two research assistants, trained by the second author. The same semistructured protocol of interview questions and follow-up prompts was used for each interview. The duration of the parent interviews ranged from 15 to 40 minutes. A sample of parent participants in the telephone interviews was recruited as follows. Schools wrote to each of the parents/carers of pupils involved in inclusion with information about the telephone interviews and seeking permission to pass their telephone number to the research team. Only a small number of parents (approximately 10%) declined. A member of the research team then worked through the list provided by each school with the aim of conducting 6 interviews per school for the schools in LEA1 and five interviews per school in LEA2 where fewer pupils per school were included. This aim was achieved except for two elementary parent interviews in one of the LEAs, where two additional high school parent interviews were conducted instead. An initial call was made to set up a time for the interview to be conducted and three parents opted not to participate at that point. Consent was obtained from the parents for their interview to be recorded and transcribed by British Telecommunications plc. In two cases when the recorded interview call was made the telephone was not answered. These parents were followed-up with an invitation to make contact to arrange another time, but did not do so in either case.

Participants

Table 2 presents descriptive information about the participants who took part in the focus group and telephone interviews by gender and phase of education. The school staff participants included school principals (three special and five mainstream), teachers (11 special and 15 mainstream) and teacher assistants (two special and five mainstream). These staff were drawn from the six special schools in the project and from 18 mainstream schools. The number of participants in the six staff focus groups was three, five, seven, seven, eight and 12. The number of participants in the

Table 2. Participant characteristics

Characteristics		Staff (<i>n</i> = 42)			Pupils (<i>n</i> = 38)	Parents (<i>n</i> = 33)
		Special	Mainstream	Total		
Gender	Female	12	19	30 (73.8%)	11 (29.0%)	29 (87.9%)
	Male	4	7	11 (26.2%)	27 (71.0%)	4 (12.1%)
Phase	Elementary	9	16	25 (59.5%)	18 (47.4%)	15 (45.5%)
	High school	7	10	17 (41.5%)	20 (52.6%)	18 (54.5%)

six pupil focus groups was four, four, seven, seven, seven and nine. Three of the pupils who participated in the focus groups were from Indian Subcontinent ethnic groups. Two of the parents interviewed were from Indian Subcontinent ethnic groups and one was African-Caribbean. All other participants were of European ethnic origin.

Data analysis

The 12 focus group transcripts and 33 parental interview transcripts constituted the data for analysis. The transcripts were analysed using a qualitative approach based on procedures described by Vaughn *et al.* (1996) as follows:

- Identification of key themes or 'big ideas' within the data, following reading and rereading of each transcript.
- Identification and highlighting of units of information (phrases and/or sentences) relevant to the research purposes.
- Selection of category headings to sort and group these units of information.
- Units of information are coded according to category headings, to enable most of the units to be placed within a category. A software package for qualitative data analysis, winMAX (Kuckartz 1998) was employed.
- Negotiation between the researchers to agree the category headings that most economically accommodate the relevant units of information.
- Categories generated in the first phase of data analysis are reviewed and revised.

Once the categories and subcategories had been agreed, a final categorization of each unit was made by the third author. The reliability of this categorization was checked by the second author on 10% of the units across all respondents. The percentage of agreements was calculated overall and for each group of respondents separately by dividing the number of agreements by the number of agreements and disagreements and multiplying by 100. Interrater reliability was found to be 87% overall and to range from 85% for the parent interview data to 87% for the teacher focus group data to 94% for the pupil focus group data.

Participant verification and validation was obtained to a limited extent through the review processes set up within each of the LEAs. Initial findings for each LEA were included in the interim evaluation reports which were reviewed by key staff from the LEAs and schools involved and, in the case of LEA2, parent representatives. Comments on both accuracy and interpretation were invited in the review meeting held by the LEAs and attended by the first author. The accuracy of the section of the interim report relevant to this study was not challenged. Of the small number of comments made about the interpretation of the data, none voiced disagreement.

Results

Analysis of the focus group and interview transcripts is reported in tables 3–7. The number of units falling into each category is shown in the first column for each participant group. The first column also shows the

Table 3. Themes emerging from question 1: ‘What are the positive aspects of inclusion?’

Category	Teachers		Pupils		Parents	
	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 6)	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 6)	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 33)
Academic advantages	13 (15.5%)	6	24 (47.1%)	5	21 (28.8%)	21
Social advantages: general	14 (16.7%)	4	17 (33.3%)	6	14 (19.2%)	14
Social advantages: appropriate models	2 (2.4%)	2	0	0	7 (9.6%)	7
Social advantages: social acceptance	5 (6.0%)	4	2 (3.9%)	2	10 (13.7%)	10
Evidence of progress	12 (14.3%)	5	1 (2.0%)	1	7 (9.6%)	7
Family/community reasons	6 (7.1%)	5	3 (5.9%)	2	4 (5.5%)	4
Staff–pupil support	0	0	4 (7.8%)	2	7 (9.6%)	7
Changing attitudes/values	11 (13.1%)	2	0	0	0	0
Sharing staff expertise	13 (15.5%)	5	0	0	0	0
Mainstream pupil benefits	8 (9.5%)	4	0	0	3 (4.1%)	3

Academic advantages: ‘You get better qualifications. You get to do your GCSEs’.

Social advantages: general: ‘He seems to have settled extremely well and socially it has enormous benefits’.

Social advantages: appropriate models: ‘Certainly I think the role models, learning how to behave properly, understanding what’s appropriate behaviour at school’.

Social advantages: social acceptance: ‘After a while people get used to you and you start making friends with them. They include you in class work and things outside school, anything they do’.

Evidence of progress: ‘I would say that one of the main things was it built up his self-esteem again and his opinions of himself. And, his whole outlook to education changed and he began to look more positive towards the future’.

Family/community reasons: ‘For us it was really important to get [our child] into the village school because both my husband and I were brought up in a village community, and we wanted [our child] to be part of this community’.

Staff/pupil support: ‘The teachers, some of them will go out of their way to help you, and they will organise time after school to help you finish like course work and stuff’.

Changing attitudes/values: ‘We have to accept that there are staff that who still, until recently, genuinely believe that this is not the forward, . . . and when you turn those people around you really know you are winning. . . .’

Sharing staff expertise: ‘And staff have got to start talking to each other ‘what did you do when this happened? How did you manage that?’

Mainstream pupil benefits: ‘We’ve done a lot of preparation work with classes in circle time, which has benefited the whole class anyway’.

Table 4. Themes emerging from question 2: ‘What worries or concerns might you have about inclusion?’

Category	Teachers		Pupils		Parents	
	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 6)	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 6)	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 33)
Academic concerns	12 (9.9%)	5	10 (25.6%)	4	14 (18.4%)	14
Social concerns: general	15 (12.4%)	5	13 (33.3%)	3	11 (14.5%)	11
Social concerns: bullying	2 (1.7%)	1	5 (12.8%)	4	4 (5.3%)	4
None because of support/preparation	1 (0.8%)	1	3 (7.7%)	2	13 (17.1%)	13
Home–school relationships/communication	1 (0.8%)	1	0	0	8 (10.5%)	8
Pupil relationships with staff	5 (4.1%)	2	4 (10.3%)	2	2 (2.6%)	2
Demands on staff	15 (12.4%)	5	0	0	0	0
Organizational: general concerns	15 (12.4%)	5	4 (10.3%)	3	9 (11.8%)	9
Organizational: planning and preparation	25 (20.7%)	4	0	0	3 (4.0%)	3
Organizational: timetabling/curriculum issues	15 (12.4%)	4	0	0	5 (6.6%)	5
Perceived effects for mainstream pupils	4 (3.3%)	2	0	0	1 (1.3%)	1
High school transfer	1 (0.8%)	1	0	0	3 (4.0%)	3
Support/funding concerns	10 (8.3%)	4	0	0	3 (4.0%)	3

Academic concerns: ‘There is his ability to cope with the work, whether he’s up to the academic standards’.

Social concerns: general: ‘When you first go there you don’t know any people there. You don’t know how they’re going to act, if they are going to be horrible to you or nice to you or whatever’.

Social concerns: bullying: ‘They call me names, start on me, pick on me and sometimes it’s just not nice and it really gets you annoyed sometimes’.

No concerns: ‘They were brilliant, and then my anxieties vanished because they were brilliant, and I realised that I was quite happy to work with them, you know, if they had a problem we sort of worked it out together’.

Home–school relationships/communication: ‘They didn’t know what he would need, they didn’t know what help he would get, they didn’t even listen to me saying that yes I would go in every morning of the week if need be to help him to understand, because his language is a bit behind. They just basically put the shutters down’.

Pupil relationships with staff: ‘They’re here to teach us and not to tell us how to live our lives and they seem to want to tell us who to hang around with, what to do, where to go, when to speak, when not to speak, when to jump up and down, and a load of silly things like that’.

Demands on staff: ‘I think the class teacher, particularly this year, is finding it harder because the differentiation is now much greater. And I think she has to differentiate 99% of the work for him. Which as a workload for her is obviously more’.

Organizational: general concerns: ‘It is quite a big school and he has to find his way around the school to be at a class in time for his next lesson. He also has to carry with him all his equipment and look after that and make sure he gets to a certain place at a certain time, and have the right equipment with him. So I think it has been quite taxing for him’.

Organizational: planning and preparation: ‘Not knowing what to expect was our school’s concern to begin with. We didn’t know what we should be doing, what we shouldn’t be doing’.

Timetabling/curriculum issues: ‘She loves her sports . . . when she was going to [mainstream school], she was missing out on her PE . . . she was having to lose her PE time . . .’.

Perceived effects for mainstream pupils ‘They immediately think are we drawing away resources from the main part of the school.’

High school transfer: ‘And possibly the further up her school career as it were, that she goes, there maybe bigger hurdles to cross. When you start looking at high school when there is a lot more pressure on them, having a kiddie who is a little bit behind the others is going to put pressure on the school and the teachers, and they may not want that’.

Support/funding concerns: ‘The main concern for us was would the learning support assistant be coming. Without that support the child would have no support to hang on to and the teacher would have nobody else to help out’.

Table 5. Themes emerging from question 3: 'If we were to meet again in a year's time how would you judge whether inclusion had been successful?'

Category	Teachers		Pupils		Parents	
	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 6)	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 6)	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 33)
Pupil progress: academic	6 (11.3%)	2	2 (14.3%)	2	15 (24.6%)	15
Pupil progress: social	6 (11.3%)	2	8 (57.1%)	3	8 (13.1%)	8
Pupil progress: other	17 (32.1%)	5	3 (21.4%)	1	14 (23.0%)	14
Changes in attitudes/values	5 (9.4%)	1	0	0	1 (1.6%)	1
Changes in mainstream practices	7 (13.2%)	3	0	0	0	0
Levels of inclusion: increased time	4 (7.6%)	2	0	0	6 (9.8%)	6
Levels of inclusion: sustained placement	0	0	1 (7.1%)	1	3 (4.9%)	3
Levels of inclusion: wider availability	1 (1.9%)	1	0	0	4 (6.6%)	4
Long-term outcomes	7 (13.2%)	4	0	0	10 (16.4%)	10

Pupil progress: academic: 'I think you know, it would be nice just to know that he is keeping up and he's meeting his own personal targets in class which he is still doing so far'.

Pupil progress: social: 'And that he still continues to associate with the people that are around him, his friends at the moment, or that he keeps some friendships going'.

Pupil progress: other: 'And his general enjoyment and happiness would be clues for me to think that that is the right place for him'.

Attitudes/values: 'Also our own students . . . to actually have them as part and parcel of the student body within the school is actually very important in altering their own attitudes and their own feelings about them, those kind of students. Very important that they see that they're all part of one community'.

Changes in mainstream practices: 'But also the teachers' acceptance of . . . to make and differentiate material and try and promote that particular student's learning'.

Levels of inclusion: increased time: 'I should think if he was capable he could probably go there full time'.

Levels of inclusion: sustained placement: 'Well for me it would be that if the children are still with us'.

Levels of inclusion: wider availability: 'I certainly would think that every child with special needs should give it a go. I don't think it will necessarily work for everybody, but I would like to think that the opportunity is there'.

Long-term outcomes: 'He's able to start moving on to some sort of whatever levels of independence he's able to manage after school. So, . . . that's why I think mainstream is very important, and inclusion is so important'.

percentage of the total number of units emitted in response to the question that were classified in this category. The number of interviews that had at least one unit coded to each category is shown in the second column for each participant group. Following each of the tables, quotations from the transcripts are provided to illustrate each category.

Table 6. Themes emerging from question 4: ‘What are some of the things that help to make sure that inclusion is as successful as possible?’

Category	Teachers		Pupils		Parents	
	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 6)	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 6)	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 33)
Planning and preparation	17 (21.0%)	5	2 (14.3%)	1	13 (21.7%)	13
Communication and support	12 (14.8%)	6	6 (42.86%)	1	16 (26.7%)	16
Quality individual teaching/academic support	8 (9.9%)	4	2 (14.3%)	1	12 (20%)	12
Individual attention/support non-academic	7 (8.6%)	4	4 (28.6%)	3	14 (23.3%)	14
Financial/physical resources	11 (13.6%)	5	0	0	4 (6.7%)	4
Shared philosophy/commitment to change	14 (17.3%)	6	0	0	1 (1.7%)	1
Sharing staff expertise	12 (14.8%)	4	0	0	0	0

Planning and preparation: ‘You need to have things set up and in place so you can deal with things properly’.

Communication and support: ‘The support that he had from both schools was very, very good. If I had any concerns all I had to do was ring the school and they try and sort it out’

Quality individual teaching/academic support: ‘The good teaching, and the standards, take time with the kids, you know, pay more attention to them, like some of them, you know . . . take time to explain more . . .’.

Individual attention and support: non-academic: ‘And she’s been a wonderful support for us . . . she has the expertise and ways of dealing with various problems that arise. She is great for the school staff, but also for me she is very available. I can phone her up at home if anything has cropped up and I want to talk to her about it’.

Financial/physical resources: ‘[It] ultimately comes back to resourcing because you’ve got to have the time and you’ve got to be able to have support’.

Shared philosophy/commitment to change: ‘I think it revolves round a positive thinking on the part of, it’s got to be a whole school policy number one. The head’s really got to believe it, disseminate that belief to the staff and encourage and support staff’.

Sharing staff expertise: ‘Well supporting the staff, you would do that by setting targets, i.e. . . . setting, then giving strategies on how to help the child. You could also have staff meetings to share experiences and what’s working’.

The eight coding categories generated for the first area discussed, the positive aspects of inclusion, are shown in table 3. One of these categories, social advantages, was further divided into three subcategories: general social advantages, appropriate models and social acceptance by other pupils. Academic and social advantages were positive aspects of inclusion commonly identified by all groups of participants. Whereas teachers identified more positive social aspects and pupils identified more positive academic

Table 7. Themes emerging from question 5: ‘What do you do as individual teachers/parents/pupils to ensure that inclusion is successful?’

Category	Teachers		Parents	
	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 6)	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 33)
Academic support	2 (9.1%)	2	11 (20.8%)	11
Communication	7 (31.8%)	3	22 (41.5%)	22
Positive attitude to change	1 (4.6%)	1	1 (1.9%)	1
Support and relationship with child	12 (54.6%)	4	19 (35.9%)	19

Category	Pupils	
	No. of responses (%)	No. of interviews (of 6)
Academic effort	8 (28.6%)	2
Communication with support	3 (10.7%)	1
Confident attitude	6 (21.4%)	1
Good behaviour	6 (21.4%)	2
Social effort	5 (17.9%)	3

Academic support: ‘If he has homework I will help him with that’. ‘In normal activities you’d be going round to look out for individuals and see how they are getting on’.

Communication: ‘I listen to them and they listen to me’. ‘Supporting parents if they’ve got any difficulties or concerns, you know, that it doesn’t take you a week to get back to them. If they’ve got a concern they want it answered now they don’t want it in a week’s time’.

Positive attitude to change: ‘Showing them that you’re convinced it works and it’s worth it’. ‘Not be frightened by it’.

Support and relationship with child: ‘I think the most important thing I do is encourage him’. ‘Supporting the child, sorting out any problems that they’ve got, not for them, but giving them the strategies, ‘how can we do this together so you’re not taking over?’

Academic effort: ‘I think you’ve just got to do well and show the teachers so that they know positively that you can do this work and they know that this boy can cope with these surroundings, he can cope with the timetable, he can cope with all the demands and you’ve just got to show them that’.

Communication with supporters: ‘You should ask for help’. ‘Telling your parents about what is wrong at your new school’.

Confident attitude: ‘Having the confidence to go up and talk to somebody, that you don’t know’. ‘Tell them that basically we are not afraid of other kids, that are in an older year than us’.

Good behaviour: ‘You don’t give any trouble whatsoever’. ‘You have to get on with the teachers’.

Social effort: ‘Trying to get on well with the other kids’. ‘Be nice to people’.

aspects, parents identified very similar percentages of academic and social advantages. Parents and teachers also identified pupil progress in other areas such as confidence and self-esteem.

Teachers identified some types of positive aspects that were not identified at all by parents. These aspects, which related to changing attitudes and values and to the sharing of staff expertise, have a broader

focus, beyond the individual children who are integrating from special to mainstream schools. A further area of this kind that was identified by a small minority of parents related to benefits to mainstream pupils. In considering staff-parent differences on these broader, positive aspects of inclusion it is of interest that seven of the 11 comments about changing attitudes and values as a positive outcome came from the consortium in LEA1 where almost all the project pupils were included full-time in mainstream and had transferred onto the roll of the mainstream school. Eight of the 13 comments about sharing staff expertise came from the focus group involving staff from this consortium.

Responses to the second question, which asked about any worries or concerns relating to inclusion, were classified into the 10 coding categories shown in table 4. One of these categories, social concerns, was further divided into two subcategories: general social concerns and concerns specifically about bullying. A second category, organizational concerns, was divided into three subcategories: concerns relating to planning and preparation, concerns relating to timetabling, curriculum issues and general organizational concerns.

As in the case of advantages, academic and social concerns were commonly identified by all groups of participants. Across each of these areas, and in particular for the bullying subcategory, the relative focus is strongest for pupils, followed by parents. Within participant groups, analysis of relative percentage responses indicated that parents identified very similar percentages of academic and social concerns, while slightly higher percentages of social than academic concerns were identified by staff. For pupils however, the percentage of social concerns identified substantially exceeded the proportion of academic concerns highlighted. Clear differences in the perspectives and priorities of parents and teachers were apparent in the patterns of responses in a number of areas. For example, demands on staff were highlighted in all but one of the staff focus groups, but were not mentioned at all by parents. On the other hand a quarter of the parents interviewed identified home-school relationships and communication as an area of concern, while only one comment was made about this across six staff focus groups. Organizational concerns, while recognized by some parents and pupils, were very much more prominent issues for the staff. While 40% of parents said that they had no concerns or worries, only one comment to this effect was recorded in a staff focus group. The parents who had no concerns were divided evenly between the two LEAs and were involved with at least two of the three consortia in each LEA.

Responses to the third question, which asked about criteria for success, were classified into the five coding categories shown in table 5. The pupil progress category was further divided into academic progress, social progress and 'other' which was mainly comprised of personal aspects such as improved self-esteem and confidence. The 'levels of inclusion' category was divided into three subcategories: sustained placement, increased time and wider availability. Pupil progress was clearly identified by all groups as the main factor in judging the success of inclusion. Parent comments placed more weight on progress in academic skills and other personal areas, than on social progress. By contrast pupils were most focused on social progress and

staff on other, personal aspects. Both staff and parents also showed concern for long term outcomes in judging the success of inclusion. However, only staff really focused, in addition, on broader criteria such as changes in the attitudes and values of mainstream staff and pupils and changes in mainstream practices such as differentiation.

Responses to the fourth question, which asked about factors likely to facilitate the success of inclusion, were classified into the seven coding categories shown in table 6. A distinction was made between the support provided through regular, timely, open communication between various participants and the academic and non-academic support provided directly to pupils. The younger groups of pupils found this question rather too complex and abstract and all but one of the comments came from the high school aged pupil focus groups. There was concurrence between parents and teachers on the importance of supportive communication and good planning and preparation. Academic and non-academic support were highlighted by both groups, particularly by the parents. The staff tended to place rather more weight on physical and financial resources. Once again, broader aspects, such as a shared philosophy or commitment to change and sharing of staff expertise, tended only to be highlighted by staff.

Responses to the final question, which asked individuals what personal action they could take to facilitate the success of inclusion, had to be classified into different coding categories for staff and parents on the one hand and pupils on the other. As can be seen from table 7, for the adults the categories of communication, academic support and personal/social support again dominated. Parents placed relatively greater emphasis on academic support than teachers did. More than one of the pupil focus groups identified the importance of working hard, behaving well and trying to get along with other people. One group highlighted confident self-presentation, while another considered it important to communicate with supporting adults.

Discussion

Many commonalities between the perspectives of the three groups of participants can be identified, together with a number of differences. For the pupils, parents and staff involved in the initiative the focus of inclusion is primarily on securing social and academic benefits for the pupils who have SEN. Broader benefits and concerns relating to mainstream schools and pupils or society more generally were predominately identified by staff. Perhaps unsurprisingly, only staff identified changing attitudes or values and sharing staff expertise as potential benefits. As a potential concern, only teachers identified demands on staff.

It has to be considered that the different methodological approaches used to obtain the views of parents and staff might be implicated in the different emphasis observed. In particular, the individual nature of the parent interview was focused on the individual child, in contrast to the broader range of perspectives present in the staff focus groups. However, York and Tundidor (1995) report that much of the parental discussion in

their study that used focus groups for parents as well as staff and pupils, centred on issues specific to their own children.

Examples of improved academic and social outcomes were identified by all groups of participants as positive aspects of inclusion. Improvements in other aspects such as confidence and self-esteem were identified as advantages by teachers and parents. Pupil progress in these areas was clearly identified by all groups as the primary considerations in judging the success of inclusion. Academic and social outcomes were identified as sources of worry or concern by all groups. However, the relative emphasis placed on these areas differed between groups. Pupils stressed academic advantages more than social advantages and highlighted social concerns more than academic ones. Criteria for success in a year's time identified by pupils likewise placed more emphasis on social than academic or other personal outcomes. School staff tend to emphasize social advantages of inclusion rather more than academic advantages and social concerns a little more than academic concerns. In identifying indicators of success, other personal aspects such as self-esteem and confidence tended to receive greater attention from staff than academic or social outcomes. As a group parents identified equivalent numbers of academic and social benefits and concerns. Academic and other personal aspects were more often identified as indicators of success than were social aspects.

As in the present study Avramidis *et al.* (2002) found that school staff, as opposed to parents or pupils, tended to place more emphasis on the social benefits of inclusion, while the pupils were least convinced about social benefits. Likewise, concerns about bullying came from pupils and, to a lesser extent, from parents, while staff showed little awareness of these concerns. In the present study, the level of social concerns among pupils substantially exceeded that expressed by parents and teachers. When concerns about bullying are specifically considered, pupils' worries do not appear to be shared, or recognized by adults, in particular teachers. There is strong international evidence that included pupils who have SEN are less socially accepted and more socially rejected than mainstream pupils (Taylor *et al.* 1987, Roberts and Zubrick 1992, Nabuzoka and Smith 1993) and that they are subject to higher levels of teasing and bullying (Thompson *et al.* 1994). It would seem that evidence from other sources indicates the validity of pupil worries in these areas and that active monitoring by schools is advisable.

Avramidis *et al.* (2002) reported that teachers in an inclusive school, the pupils with SEN and their parents identified a wide range of obstacles that have to be surmounted if inclusive programmes are to be successful. Successful implementation of inclusion was considered to require restructuring of the physical environment, resources, organizational changes and instructional adaptations. These were all identified in the present study but were given different emphasis by different groups of participants. The importance of sharing staff expertise and of a shared philosophy/commitment to change were identified almost exclusively by staff. Financial and physical resources were highlighted as important more often by teachers than by parents. These findings are consistent with those of other studies that have highlighted the importance to staff of time and opportunities for collaboration (Janney *et al.* 1995, York and Tundidor 1995, Villa *et al.* 1996).

The importance of planning and preparation was given similar weight by both groups and was mentioned by pupils, so emerging as one of the key perceived aids to successful inclusion. Parents, pupils and staff all highlighted communication and support, and individualized support to pupils, both academic and non-academic. However, all these areas were less strongly emphasized by staff. Insufficient staff attention to home-school communication may be one reason why it was identified as an area of concern by almost a quarter of the parents involved.

The lower emphasis by staff on individualization of support is further reflected in the limited mention of academic support made by staff when asked about individual actions they could take to aid inclusion. This is consistent with observational studies of inclusion projects which tend to suggest that differentiation and individualization do not generally occur. Baker and Zigmond (1995) reported that class teachers across five inclusion projects in different part of the USA showed a willingness to change an approach for the whole class with the needs of the included pupil in mind, however adaptations (beyond repetition of more explicit instructions) were rarely directed at an individual pupil. Some teachers in this study expressed the belief that pupils had to learn to cope with the world and differentiating or individualizing work would not help them with that. Pijl (1995) reported that teachers in inclusive schools in the Netherlands did not differentiate between pupils in their use of methods and materials more than in other schools. McIntosh *et al.* (1993) found that even US teachers identified by their school principals as effective in working with included pupils made few adaptations for individuals.

In considering the results of the current study, a number of cautions should be considered. The process for recruiting informants was heavily reliant on the special school staff member acting as project coordinator. They invited the mainstream staff to the focus group meetings, selected the pupils who participated in the pupil focus groups and obtained parental consent for provision of contact details. Special school influence on the selection of participants and the role of the researchers in the external evaluation of the inclusion initiatives are features that are likely to encourage a positive bias.

Some commentators may wish to debate whether this research is properly described as a study of inclusion. It was considered as such by the two LEAs involved and its features closely matched the elements of the broad agenda for inclusion identified by the UK government. However, questions might be asked about key differences between the initiatives described in this paper and the 'link schemes' between special and mainstream schools that have been widespread in the UK over the last 15–20 years (Jowett *et al.* 1988, Fletcher-Campbell 1994). Are these new inclusion initiatives simply 'a misleading veneer for old special education practices' (Slee 1996: 29)?

In arguing against this view, two aspects of the LEAs' stated intentions are compelling. The commitment to return pupils from special to mainstream schools indicates a different focus from the link schemes. The emphasis on building the capacity of mainstream schools to meet the needs of most pupils indicates a focus on inclusion, rather than integration.

Admittedly, the extent to which these aspirations were realized varied. Significant numbers of pupils were actually returned to mainstream from only one of the six special schools involved during the period of the initiative. The mainstream schools involved appeared to have reached very different stages in the process of embracing a change agenda with regard both to values and practices which is regarded by many as central to inclusive working (Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education 2000).

Commitment to a broader vision of inclusion is more apparent in the comments made by staff than in those made by parents. It would seem that the majority of parents interviewed for this evaluation regarded inclusion primarily in terms of specific benefits for their child, and were less likely to highlight its merits on political or ideological grounds. There are costs and benefits of inclusion for all parties although these are not necessarily congruent. It may be necessary for school staff to negotiate and seek to reconcile differing perspectives by establishing common ground. This becomes possible when good communication channels have been established.

Parents considered good communication with schools to be particularly important. Parental responses indicated that they valued effective, responsive communication channels that facilitate the smooth flow of information between home and school and provide opportunities for cooperative relationships to develop. Government initiatives in the UK have recognized the importance of effective communication between home and school in supporting pupil learning and behaviour (DfEE 2000, DfES 2001b). The concept of parental partnership is increasingly central to policy development in many other countries as well (OECD 1997). The development of a sense of shared purpose and common goals between teachers and parents is important in the education of all children (Pugh and De'Ath 1989), but especially for those with SEN (Gascoigne 1995, Hornby 1995, Beveridge 1998). Responses by parents indicated that support and communication can diffuse parental anxieties and build positive, collaborative relationships through the process of directly sharing perspectives. It may well be that through the development of shared goals and understanding, the practice of inclusion may be advanced.

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