



MINIMISING BURDENS IN SCHOOLS
THE IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW UNIT

Draft IRU Position Statement on Special Schools (November 07)

The Implementation Review Unit (IRU) is an independent panel of school practitioners appointed in 2003 by the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills. Our remit is about supporting and challenging the government and its agencies, including local authorities, in removing and avoiding unnecessary burdens on schools.

One of the ways we keep schools practitioners in touch with our work is through the issuing of Position Statements on policy areas for which the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has prime responsibility.

Attached at the annex is our position on the 10 key areas that we believe currently, and could in the future, most impact in a disproportionate way on Special Schools. *It is noted that one of the overarching issues for Special Schools is that they are invariably overlooked in the thinking and planning stages by officials whether working in agencies, NDPBs, the DCSF or in Local Authorities.*

On a positive note the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust have agreed to consider streamlining designation documentation or offering frameworks linking, for example, SEFs and SDPs for Special Schools applying for Specialist Status (item 8 in the attached refers) .

During the next 12 months we will review this policy area, hearing from officials in DCSF about progress and probing as thoroughly as we are able to on the evidence supplied on the impacts on the school workforce in respect of burdens and bureaucracy. With this in mind we will be revisiting and updating this position statement in the Spring of 2008.

In the meantime we value your experience of issues that relate to Special Schools - good and bad.

Please contact us at IRU.PANEL@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk.

Special Schools

Special schools have experienced a gradual unbroken increase in workload during the last ten years through implementation of government initiatives. Impact is disproportionate in comparison with the mainstream sector due to the range of age (often covering six key stages) and special needs and cross authority catchment areas of pupils attending relatively small institutions. The Panel believes that attention to the following areas has the potential to significantly reduce current burdens:

1. Legislative issues: Raising Awareness

There is a need for agencies, NDPBs and the DCSF to be aware of and alert to the “Special School context” when thinking about and planning both legislative and non legislative activity in order to minimise further exponential growth of administration workload in an already disproportionately burdened sector of education. It should not be the default position of “one size fits all” – the Special School context is unique. There is also a need to reconsider application of “blanket” legislation such as the DDA as much of the required lengthy process is aimed at an outcome already established within the culture & practice of special schools

2. Evaluation of pupil attainment and progress

Introduction of a national model enabling the electronic recording of pupil attainment and progress would;

- Eradicate work replicating creation of in-school systems.
- Enable moderation and comparison across the country
- Remove obligation to amass broad range and high volume of unmoderated data in support of self evaluative processes.

3. Residential Inspections

The focus upon processes rather than outcomes is in conflict with OFSTED school inspections.

- Requirement for schools to present information in specific format results in replication of existing school data.
- Criteria determining inspection judgements are not clear and do not align with OFSTED school judgement criteria
- Requirement for schools to replicate existing data through completion of additional paper documentation in the form of a “Residential SEF” and a “Headteacher Questionnaire” generates further burdens.
- The gap in quality between OFSTED processes and that of residential inspection is wide and results in generating diverse inspection experience for schools

4. Every Child Matters agenda

Development of national guidelines could reduce requirements of schools to replicate input to a range of increasing processes aimed at supporting individual children, e.g. annual review of statement of special educational needs, reviews of looked after children, children in need, foster carer reviews etc.

5. Therapies

Rationalisation of both funding streams and responsibility for provision, particularly across LA & Primary Health Care Trust boundaries would reduce burdens.

6. Health & Safety

Schools require clear and consistent advice aimed at reducing the workload consequent upon the disproportionate number of vulnerable pupils found in Special Schools. Increased H&S requirements for staff to regularly update in areas of Moving & Handling, Positive Handling etc. is impacting upon curriculum delivery through staff being withdrawn for training. And these increased H&S requirements should not necessarily come about because Local Authorities choose to transfer on their own responsibilities in this area to Special Schools and the schools sector more widely without any assessment of the capacity of schools to meet the responsibilities.

7. Extended Schools

Potentially the children and families associated with Special Schools benefit most from extended services but create the greatest challenge to creating provision. Significant resources need to be allocated in order that service delivery does not generate a disproportionate burden upon schools.

8. Specialist School status and the NRwS

The Specialist Schools Programme would be more accessible to Special Schools if a reduction in the volume and complexity of information required during the bidding process were to happen. A possible solution going forward would be to look at enshrining the principles of the New Relationship with Schools to the Specialist Schools initial application and re-designation process, not just for Special Schools but for the schools sector more widely, e.g. a single school plan and SEF.

9. Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal

Measures to staunch the increasing frequency of appeals and the levels of preparatory work required from schools acting as “witnesses” to Tribunals would significantly reduce senior management workload.

10. Training

Introduction of national training opportunities, particularly for staff working with pupils with severe learning difficulties would remove burden from schools (see entry also at 5 above).