



## **ROYAL COLLEGE OF SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPISTS (RCSLT) RESPONSE TO THE EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

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13 October 2005

Mr Barry Sheerman MP  
Chairman – Education and Skills Select Committee:  
Inquiry into Special Education Needs  
The House of Commons  
7 Millbank  
LONDON SW1P 3JA

Dear Mr Sheerman MP

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence for the Education and Skills Committee Inquiry into Special Education Needs (SEN).

As the RCSLT did not hear of the enquiry until near to the closing date for written submissions, we are concerned that we have been unable to provide the level of evidence we would have hoped via our speech and language therapy members who work with children with SEN.

The RCSLT would be willing to attend an oral hearing to expand on the recommendations made and the issues raised in the attached memorandum.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sue Roulstone'.

Prof Sue Roulstone  
Chair of RCSLT

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kamini Gadhok'.

Kamini Gadhok  
Chief Executive

## **Summary of recommendations: Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists - Response to SEN inquiry**

### **Provision for SEN pupils in ‘mainstream’ schools: availability of resources and expertise; different models of provision**

#### ***RCSLT recommends that the Select Committee:***

1. consider the recommendations in the attached RCSLT paper (see Annex 1).
2. consider evidence from the models of collaborative practice from projects funded by Standards Fund and Children’s Fund. (Roulstone *et al*, 2005).
3. audit the recommendations set out in the *Law report* (2000) and the report on the *Provision of SLT services to children with SEN* (DH/DfEE, 2000)
4. support the identification and use of mainstream levers to embed good practice and that these examples of best practice are disseminated e.g. by the use of ‘champions’.
5. consider the need to review the support to deaf children and children with communication aids in mainstream schools.
6. consider aspects of the attached joint bid (See Annex 2) which may help to inform their work.
7. consult with the TDA during the review of the teacher training curriculum regarding input about child development and SEN and communication development and impairment.

### **Provision for SEN pupils in Special Schools**

8. ***RCSLT recommends that the Select Committee*** consider the need to assess the impact and outcomes of different models of service delivery for children with SEN in special schools.

### **Raising standards of achievement for SEN pupils**

#### ***RCSLT recommends that the Select Committee:***

9. supports the view that communication skills development is mainstreamed into all aspects of school life.
10. considers that parents and/or carers are seen as core to support raising levels of achievement and that they are effectively supported.

### **The system of statements of need for SEN pupils (‘the statementing process’).**

11. ***RCSLT recommends that the Select Committee*** consider the need for i) a full review of the statementing process; ii) a review of the costs of the statementing process and, iii) a review of costs of tribunals.

### **The role of parents in decisions about their children’s education**

12. ***RCSLT recommends*** the development of good practice standards in the process of engaging both parents and children/young people in choices and decisions.

### **How special educational needs are defined**

13. ***RCSLT recommends*** the review of the use of the definitions for SEN.

### **Provision for different types and levels of SEN, including emotional, behavioural and social difficulties (EBSD).**

14. ***RCSLT recommends that the Select Committee*** needs to consider a scope of best practice models of service delivery and identify learning to support dissemination.

### **The legislative framework for SEN provision and the effects of the Disability Act 2001, which extended the Disability Discrimination Act to education.**

15. ***RCSLT recommends that the Select Committee*** consider the need to identify good practice in the use of the legislative framework to support children with SEN.

# Memorandum

**To: Education and Skills Committee**

**From: Kamini Gadhok (CEO RCSLT)**

**Date: 13 October 2005**

**Cc: Prof. Sue Roulstone  
(Chair RCSLT)**

## **RE: INQUIRY INTO SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

1. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK and has over 12,000 members. The RCSLT is responsible for setting, promoting and maintaining high standards in education, clinical practice and ethical conduct.

### **Our mission**

To represent speech and language therapists and support workers, promote excellence in practice and influence health, education and social care policies.

#### **To deliver our mission we aim to:**

##### **Represent**

- the interests of speech and language therapists and support workers and provide a voice locally, nationally and internationally

##### **Influence**

- and lobby governments and others to shape policy so that issues concerning the profession are reflected in public policy and people with communication, eating, drinking or swallowing difficulties receive optimum care

##### **Support and protect**

- the value of a profession whose members deliver quality services to meet diverse needs.
- the professional interests of speech and language therapists and support workers

##### **Develop**

- and educate speech and language therapists professionally and academically, building our resource of professional expertise and leadership
- speech and language therapy and its professional practice through the use of evidence-based practice
- speech and language therapy as an integral part of the modernised workforce across health, education and social care

##### **Build**

- a sustainable, member-focused, organisation with the capacity to deliver our mission effectively, efficiently and in accordance with our values
- the systems, attitudes and resources to offer the best possible support and development to our staff

2. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is submitting this written evidence having sought comments and feedback from specialist speech and language therapists working with children with special educational needs.

## **Provision for SEN pupils in ‘mainstream’ schools: availability of resources and expertise; different models of provision**

3. RCSLT recommends that the Select Committee consider the attached RCSLT position paper *Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs within integrated children's services* and the recommendations within the paper. The paper aims to summarise the role and approach by speech and language therapists (SLTs) providing support to children with speech, language, communication, eating, drinking or swallowing needs (See Annex 1).
4. **RCSLT recommends that** the Select Committee consider evidence from the models of collaborative practice from projects funded by Standards Fund and Children’s Fund (Roulstone, Owen & French, 2005). This also highlights the importance of SLT interventions using a systems level approach.
5. **RCSLT recommends that** the Select Committee audit the recommendations set out in:
  - i. The Law report (2000) and
  - ii. The Department of Health/DfEE report on the *Provision of speech and language therapy services to children with SEN (England): Report of the working group* (2000) which included a recommendation that, since communication is so fundamental to learning and progression, addressing speech and language impairment should normally be recorded as educational provision

to evaluate the level of implementation

6. **RCSLT recommends that** the Select Committee support the identification and use of mainstream levers to embed good practice. Examples provided by SLTs in Nottingham include:
  - i. Challenging the philosophy and value base of the school- should these children be here?
  - ii. Resources – used flexibly and in a timely way
  - iii. The development of competencies for all staff via mainstream CPD
  - iv. Not only considering the additional hours of support time but also raising the baseline of staff skills to create a more appropriate ‘communication environment.’
  - v. The use of the learning and teaching rewards to incentivise and ensure that responsibility is taken for children with SEN in mainstream schools by all staff
  - vi. Encouraging the use of planning, preparation and assessment time to support children with SEN
7. **RCSLT recommends that** the Select Committee considers how these examples of best practice are disseminated e.g. by the use of ‘champions’.
8. **RCSLT recommends that** the Select Committee consider the need to review the support to:
  - deaf children in mainstream schools. There is concern about how many severely deaf children are “included” inappropriately in mainstream education with insufficient resources available.
  - children with communication aids in mainstream schools.
9. **RCSLT recommends that** the Select Committee consider aspects of the attached joint bid (See Annex 2) that may help to inform their work, particularly with respect to developing an inclusive communicative environment.

10. **RCSLT recommends that** the Select Committee consult with the TDA during the review of teacher training curriculum regarding input about child development and special needs generally, and communication development and impairment in particular. RCSLT welcomes *Communicating Matters* (DfES September 2005) as a new initiative, which is in the process of being implemented, but we would wish to express our concern at the lack of consultation with RCSLT and SLTs in the roll out. RCSLT would wish to bring to the attention of the Select Committee that this work is a good start as it is aimed at giving Foundation Stage teacher's skills regarding better use of communication in the classroom. However, it has a minimal focus on special educational needs and covers only a narrow age range.
11. Some schools have been funding SLT from their school budget (e.g. in Witherwood, Bristol), but are expressing the concern that this is not sustainable without long-term commitment of funds for SLT services from more centralised sources.
12. Where speech and language therapy provision is too sparse, the biggest problem is that support for children is not timely enough, and becomes biased towards long-term needs. Impairments that can be resolved in the short term, left untreated, may become more severe and pervasive, and less responsive to therapy, resulting in spiralling unmet needs and potentially having a negative impact on the child's psychosocial development and stability.
13. In 1997, the government green paper *Excellence for all children: Meeting Special Educational Needs* included the following statement:

“By 2002, speech and language therapy will be provided more effectively for those children who need it.”
14. Though the statement in the green paper is vague enough for some to argue that speech and language therapy is indeed being provided more effectively for children who need it, consideration of the recommendations from the working group would suggest that many have yet to be implemented.
15. As inclusion policies have taken effect, children who previously would have been taught in a language unit are now in mainstream class. There is little included in the teacher training curriculum on how to teach children with communication impairments and teachers are therefore unable to help these children achieve their potential.
16. Access to speech and language therapy is also worse for many children who are now in mainstream as previously they would have had daily or at least weekly contact with a language unit SLT. Few mainstream schools have this level of contact.
17. Different Local Authorities have implemented inclusion at different rates and the models of service delivery vary significantly across England. There is a need to evaluate the outcomes of provision for children in mainstream schools. In developing effective mainstream services, there are examples where the approach taken (Nottingham SLT service) has been to identify the factors that can add to the success of provision in a mainstream setting (see Annex 3).
18. Vital specialist SLT input may not be available for deaf children in mainstream settings. Too often a non-specialist SLT is expected to treat deaf children in mainstream settings, without the support of a specialist. SLT managers often state they are unable to supply a service to deaf children in mainstream because they have no specialist. Either way the child loses out. A Teacher of the Deaf (ToD) may be involved, and his/her input needs to be balanced by appropriate experienced SLT input.

## **Provision for SEN pupils in Special Schools**

19. **RCSLT recommends that** the Select Committee consider the need to assess the impact and outcomes of different models of service delivery for children with SEN in special schools.
20. This is as the range of special schools is considerable and results in a variation of models of provision according to the nature of the school. One of the impacts of placing children with SEN into mainstream schools is the shifting population within SEN school provision. Some special schools now have a population of children who are different from the original specification of the school. For example, schools designated for children with moderate learning difficulties often have a high number of children with emotional/ behavioural, social difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders or more significant learning difficulties.
21. Deaf children in Special Schools are more likely to have access to the local SLT service, but there remains concern re: expertise (appropriate post-grad. training) and frequency of input (i.e. staff resource).
22. For children requiring communication aids, less individual equipment is available for pupils, particularly those with PMLD, which is where CAP (Communication Aids Project) has been a boon. Children who would never have had their own equipment now have it in some instances. The more able child who needs AAC will be funded through the education budget often – although not always. Fundraising and charities sometimes provide equipment but this is not an effective or efficient method of providing support.

## **Raising standards of achievement for SEN pupils**

23. **RCSLT recommends that** the Select Committee supports the view that communication skills development is mainstreamed into all aspects of school life as children need to communicate with a range of people and to meet a range of needs in the different contexts in which they have to function for example:
  - i. The classroom - access to the curriculum and in conveying day- day needs and communicating with peers and adults
  - ii. The playground- socialising
  - iii. All activities outside the classroom- including meal times, games etc
24. **RCSLT recommends that** parents and/or carers are seen as core to support raising levels of achievement and that they are effectively supported. Children with speech, language and communication needs have different requirements to enable them to maximise their potential and quality of life at school and in their home and community environments.
25. Particular consideration needs to be given to children with SEN and for whom English is a second language and whose language, culture and religious needs have to be taken into account.
26. Some teacher's work on spoken language skills as an essential foundation for other aspects of school achievement, and value joint work with SLT. Others feel pressurised into working towards specific literacy and numeracy targets *instead* due to constraints of the National Curriculum and its interpretation by the head teacher. Such pressures make collaborative practice for SLTs more difficult.

27. Communication skills have a fundamental role on the learning process and on how children demonstrate that they truly understand something by reforming the information in their own words – repeating statements does not indicate understanding – children with communication impairments have great difficulty in doing this (Wells, G, 1979; 1984; 1985).
28. In order to raise standards in children with communication difficulties, there is a need for a strong evidence base to understand what works and why; a greater access to SLTs who can work with a child, his/her teacher and LSA and the child's parents on a frequent basis and an awareness of mainstream teaching staff on the importance of collaboration with SLTs and an openness to trying new approaches. The difficulty for teachers can often be the needs of the rest of the class: one child with a communication difficulty may need a different teaching approach to the rest of the class but the teacher is only one person and to use two teaching approaches in every activity in the school day would limit the amount that all children could achieve in the day. Where a child with a communication impairment (or indeed with any of the more marked special needs) is included in the mainstream class, a teacher is surely more likely to be able to attend to their needs as well as the rest of the class if the class size was limited, e.g. to only 20 other children rather than 29. This may be very costly, but in order for standards to be raised in children with SEN, the funding that previously supported them in special schools and units should stay with them in the included environment.
29. Providing children with access to the communication equipment they need, when they need it following careful interdisciplinary assessment will help to raise standards
30. It is very important to set appropriate expectation of achievement for deaf children. Too often standards for both communication and general behaviour are set too low. Standards should be set individually for each child.

### **The system of statements of need for SEN pupils ('the statementing process')**

31. **RCSLT recommends that the** Select Committee consider the need for:
  - i. A full review of the statementing process;
  - ii. A review of the costs of the statementing process
  - iii. A review of costs of tribunals
32. The rationale for this includes:
  - i. The need to address inequities in the system. RCSLT has ongoing feedback from both parents and SLTs that the statementing process is flawed. There is no link between the statement and level of resource available. For children with communication impairment, the responsibility for provision lies within health whilst the ultimate responsibility for meeting needs rests with education. This creates ongoing tensions between health who have the requirement to identify the child's needs and yet not be finally responsible for meeting those needs and education who are responsible for delivering services. There are particular concerns from parents that statements are resource rather than needs –led which leads to mistrust and tribunals. This situation was the subject of extensive consideration by the DfEE working group in 2000 (para 4). There was no political will at the time to change the legislature to place a clearer requirement on health. However, there are now precedents for such changes, e.g. the Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act 2004, which could be considered as part of the overall review of the statementing process.
  - ii. Some children with higher levels of need do not have statements

- iii. Practice between LEAs varies considerably with some working collaboratively with health and only issuing statements for children who are required to attend a special school or where there may be specific issues
- iv. Many children with specific language impairment (SLI) do not get a statement. There is variation between authorities as to how well SLI is recognised
- v. Funding and resources to support children with SEN (with or without a statement) is not adequate. It would be helpful to assess the costs of children in a special school setting versus costs for supporting them in mainstream schools and where the funding comes from (how much is health versus education)
- vi. Costs of both the statementing and tribunal process. It is important to identify the costs of both processes. Time and money could be better spent on providing quality services. Approximately £3,000 per child is spent on the statementing process with £6 million being spent on tribunals (ICAN, 2005)
- vii. In some education areas, funding has been targeted early intervention in the school action stages of provision. This seems to result in the reduction in the need for issuing statements. It would be useful to review these approaches, particularly to discover if parents support these approaches. Parents are likely to be particularly resistant to any dilatation of the statementing process since this is their only protection for gaining resources for their child.
- viii. A review of the training of tribunal members and their understanding of models of service provision for children with speech, language and communication needs.
- ix. SLTs, teachers (and parents) usually work from a social rather than medical model of disability, where functional descriptions of need mean more than labels and percentile scores, yet the present system seems biased towards the latter.
- x. The statementing process, requiring evidence of 2 terms of failure, is not preventative in nature.
- xi. SLTs feel unable to state what communication aids or levels of SLT is required as the LEA would have to fund these and there may be resource constraints.
- xii. The needs of children change (e.g. following a cochlear implant, or following introduction of good amplification). The process of setting up a review of the child's needs is not flexible. It is not always easy to access the Educational Psychologist (EP) to set review in motion.
- xiii. There are frequent huge discrepancies between the detailed assessment of need made by a specialist SLT and a shorter assessment made by a generalist EP. The SLT may wonder why her time has been "wasted" when the EP's comments are heeded and the SLT's not heeded.

## **The role of parents in decisions about their children's education**

- 33. **RCSLT recommends** the development of good practice standards in the process of engaging both parents and children/ young people in choices and decisions.
- 34. Parents are saying that the process of getting their child's needs recognised and responded to is too slow. Parents also talk of the constant fight throughout the life of their special needs child to access resources. This is particularly problematic at transitional points. The Department of Health has recently established a working group to look at transitional arrangements (chaired by Professor Sir David Hall). They do have opinions and appreciate choices, but only in the context of access to information, in a format they understand, from sources they trust.
- 35. Parents prefer a transparent system of multi-agency working and single point of contact for information. Parents from many communities only collaborate willingly with individuals with whom they already have a trusting relationship. It is important to consider what systems are set

up locally to allow for flexible approaches to meeting the needs of both parents and children in enabling them to make decisions.

36. Parents must take an important role in decisions about their children's education. However parents' wishes may be contra to professional advice. For example, in the field of deafness, parents may insist on an oral educational setting for a child who clearly (in professional opinion) needs a signing setting in order to access the curriculum. The process for joint working in these scenarios needs to be strengthened. A parent comments: "They (SLTs) don't seem to have any continuity at all. I just feel as if I was pushed from pillar to post". There is a clear need to promote service support to children and families over the long-term as children's needs will vary along their care pathway. "I think as long as us parents know what's going on, I can accept that, it's the not knowing. Chasing people up all the time...we have enough to do. You don't need to be chasing like we are...it's very wearing, like I said, because you have to be on your toes all the time. I feel, I mean I'm not. I feel that (child's name) is my priority, if I don't fight for her rights then there's no-one else who will do it for me. I just want her to have the best. So that she can develop to the best of her potential. If that means fighting for a service that she's rightfully entitled to then that's the way it is going to be. I am willing to do that for her" (Roulstone, S, forthcoming).

### **How special educational needs are defined**

37. **RCSLT recommends** the review of the use of the definitions for SEN. Key questions to support this review include:
- i. What is the purpose of creating these definitions?-What will they be used for? e.g. service provision, resource allocation
  - ii. How can problems with inconsistency in application of definitions be addressed within and across professional groups and the health and education sector?
38. Currently there is too much emphasis on medical diagnoses and long-term needs. We need to be more responsive to difficulties that are preventable through timely short-term intervention, and to be more open to functional definitions of problems and needs.
39. Labels are a two edged sword but nevertheless, in most cases, very important for parents. The crucial issue of definition however is that whether or not it enables a child to get the support he/she needs in order to achieve their potential. The reality is that we do not know what a child's potential is and we do not know whether or not a different environment would have enabled them to achieve a higher level. Again, there is a need for a strong evidence base to support our decisions regarding defining children in terms of the need.

### **Provision for different types and levels of SEN, including emotional, behavioural and social difficulties (EBSO)**

40. **RCSLT recommends that** the Select Committee needs to consider a scope of best practice models of service delivery and identify learning to support dissemination.
41. In Nottingham, there are a number of projects underway to support children with behavioural problems e.g. 'Place to be', MAST project, Standards Fund Project (Jane Storer and Julie Larouche- Report November 2004) which highlighted the link between children with

behavioural and social difficulties and children with communication difficulties.

42. Many types of SEN (e.g. ASD, EBSD) are managed best through multi agency working, which still needs to be better coordinated and better centred around the service user (as proposed in *Every Child Matters*).
43. In addressing this issue, the needs of the rest of the class must be considered as teachers are only human. With inclusion, a mainstream class may not just have one but several children with more specific needs than the average mainstream child. Providing extra support in the form of LSAs is one way but this means that the child with the most need gets support from the least qualified (though not necessarily the least able) member of staff. Each child's needs and abilities must be considered individually alongside that of the prospective schools ability to address his or her needs. Neither the child nor the school gain anything from a child being placed with them when the school has insufficient resources to manage already high levels of demand, which may occur.
44. Deaf children tend to show relatively high levels of EBSD due to their communication difficulties. Increased provision of specialist SLT input can help to combat this. There is concern about the poor amount of SLT training made available to Learning Support Assistants. This training is vital to ensure effective use of specialist SLT time, enabling specialist resources to reach deaf children in the classroom throughout the school week, whether in Mainstream, Hearing-Impaired departments or Special Schools

### **The legislative framework for SEN provision and the effects of the Disability Act 2001, which extended the Disability Discrimination Act to education**

45. **RCSLT recommends that** the Select Committee consider the need to identify good practice in the use of the legislative framework to support children with SEN.
46. In Nottingham, the SLT service uses the DDA to encourage schools to include in the access plan how they intend to make reasonable adjustments in relation to:
  - The environment
  - The curriculum
  - Information provision- including the use of signs and symbols

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