Opening the Spectrum

Insights into working with pupils on the autistic spectrum
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Special Educational Needs
Cross-Border
Professional Exchange Programme under PEACE II

Opening the Spectrum
Insights into working with pupils on the autistic spectrum
Foreword

Every day, individual teachers and school staff bring dedication, imagination and skill to their work with children. By sharing these more widely across school communities, we ensure that all children on this island have greater opportunities to achieve to their full potential.

The Special Educational Needs Cross-Border Professional Exchange Programme was funded under Measure 5.5: ‘Education, Cross-Border School and Youth Co-operation’ of the European Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (Peace II). The programme enabled teachers, educational psychologists and other professionals from the border counties of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to build on peace and stability by coming together and exchanging experiences and models of best practice. These participants formed three North-South cluster groups and based their joint programmes of work on the key areas of Autism, Dyslexia and Marginalised Youth, respectively.

Through the project, close links were forged in the field of special education, North and South. The benefits to the whole of the island are many, as the clusters shared and learned from each other’s good practice and began to develop their expertise together. These links extended beyond the professional; they increased mutual understanding and respect and have led to the formation of positive and sustainable relationships.

We owe our gratitude, in the first instance, to all those who so willingly gave of their time and expertise to participate in the core work of the project. We are also grateful to the members of the Steering Group, to the Special Education Support Service for its work in overseeing the project, to Seamus McDermott of Monaghan Education Centre, who so willingly gave us a home, and to Andrea Quinn, the Project Manager, whose commitment and enthusiasm added greatly to the success of the project.

This resource, as well as those produced by the other two cluster groups, are the result of a truly collaborative effort and they reflect the wealth of knowledge and experience within those groups. We hope that they will be an invaluable tool to teachers throughout both education systems.

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INTRODUCTION

‘Inclusion is a vision, a road to be travelled, but a road without ending and a road with all kinds of barriers and obstacles, some of them invisible and some of them in our own heads and hearts’ (Mittler, 2000).

The Autism Cluster Group consisted of teachers and other professionals, from Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland, who worked together during cluster meetings and visits to one another’s schools to identify and share best practice in relation to working with children and young people with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The cluster group included educational psychologists, principals, teachers, education advisors and staff from teacher training colleges. The sharing of experience, knowledge, skills and expertise has facilitated the development of partnerships and networking opportunities both between schools in the North and South and across the schools in each jurisdiction. Through the meetings and professional exchanges, ways of disseminating knowledge, training and skills were explored, and it was agreed to use the format of storytelling to share views of what is good practice to help others to reflect on and develop their support for children and young people marginalised by their ASD.

Storytelling is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, method of communicating ideas and images. The cluster group members in this publication are telling their story. Through the story a child’s profile is outlined. Woven into the story are the responses of individual teachers, of the schools and of the wider school community.

Stories and experiences range from an initial ‘opening of the spectrum’ to ‘assisting inclusion in varied settings’ to ‘providing support’ through accessing the resources and interest of the wider school community.

For each story there is a structure. Firstly, the story of each pupil is told. The teacher’s response is then outlined. Finally, key learning points are summarised at the end of each story.

The stories convey the fear, dedication, determination and commitment of the participants to ensure that the child or young person is supported and included. It is hoped that by ‘opening the spectrum’ others will come to appreciate the colourful, unusual, sometimes amusing, and sometimes challenging way these pupils view the world.

Note: There are some differences in terminology used in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI):

- Moderate (NI) Learning Difficulties corresponds to Mild (ROI) General Learning Disability
- Severe (NI) Learning Difficulties corresponds to Moderate (ROI) General Learning Disability.

This is indicated throughout the text by the use of ‘(NI)’ or ‘(ROI)’ as appropriate.
SECTION 1 Assisting Inclusion: from special settings

1.1 John’s story (aged 13)

John is a 13-year-old pupil in a home-room provision in a secondary school. He is of average ability, though his spelling score is above average, while his mathematics score is below average. He spent four years in a speech and language unit before going to secondary school. His difficulties include high levels of anxiety, immaturity, distractibility and problems with organisation and the social use of language. The home-room provision meant that inclusion could be varied and flexible, and tailored to each individual pupil’s needs. John was taught English, mathematics, history, geography, French, personal and social education (PSE) and religious education (RE) by the specialist teacher in the home-room, in a group of four pupils, all of whom had been diagnosed with ASD. For the remaining subjects, John and three other pupils joined with a mainstream class and were accompanied by the specialist teacher and a classroom assistant.

The main difficulties experienced by John in the mainstream class were:

- getting equipment organised at the beginning of the class
- starting tasks
- completing written work in the time given (caused mainly by writing in pencil and endlessly erasing to make it perfect)
- becoming agitated if he didn’t get everything correct or if he didn’t understand
- becoming upset when given homework to do.

John found the integrated class quite a struggle, not academically, but socially. Some of the pupils in the class were not particularly well behaved and he found this upsetting.

What the teacher / school did to help John

A set of small laminated cards were produced with various messages printed on them, for example:

- Try to keep calm
- You are doing really well
- We’ll talk about it later, just keep going

The cards allowed the teacher and the classroom assistant to encourage John without disrupting the class. John has, over time, been given more cards that he can use to indicate how he feels, without disrupting the class. They include the following:

- I feel upset
- I want to do it on my own even if I don’t finish it
- Can we share the work?

1 Home-room is the specialist teacher’s classroom where, in John’s case, most of the curriculum is taught.
John was also encouraged to use a pen instead of a pencil. The classroom assistant attended the mainstream classes with him but it was anticipated that John would eventually attend the classes without support.

In an effort to prepare John for the classroom assistant’s support being removed, it was decided that she would try sitting at the back of the room, instead of in a seat beside John. After some weeks, it was obvious that he was finding this new arrangement too challenging, and for the rest of the year the classroom assistant sat beside him. John doesn’t like business studies. A five-minute ‘time-out’ in the home-room has been arranged between the two periods of business studies and the two periods of science that follow them. He sits and reads a book and this allows him time to settle and refocus. Over time, inclusion in mainstream classes has substantially increased.

The teacher kept the other members of staff informed about John’s progress. Those teachers who teach John as part of their mainstream classes have been very eager to make sure that John would be included successfully. They have been tolerant of his desire to achieve perfection, encouraged him when he does well, been sympathetic when he gets upset and have been sensitive to his unique needs. To support John during examinations, the examination papers were completed in the home-room, where he could be prompted to stay on task and to remain calm.

Thanks to their efforts and the level of support he receives, John will be able to successfully complete his studies with greater confidence and less anxiety.

**Key learning points from John’s story**

- Know your pupil well, especially how his autism affects his learning and his ability to work alongside his peers
- Know his interests and what causes him stress
- Plan ahead, including for those times when things go wrong
- Consider what works and repeat it
- Teach, observe, plan, review
- Get the support of colleagues
- Stay calm
1.2 Ruth’s story (aged 6)

This is the story of Ruth’s move from an ASD-specific class to a class for pupils with learning disabilities, with a view to integrating her into mainstream school. Ruth was a pupil in an ASD class for two years. During her first year, there were six pupils in the class, varying in ages, levels of functioning and behaviour. Her mum requested her inclusion in the mainstream school. Ruth’s mum was hoping for a fast transfer in order to avail of the fact that Ruth had brothers and close relations in her local primary school.

Ruth had made significant progress while in the ASD class. Her communication skills had improved and she was able to communicate her needs and express her feelings more appropriately. Her imitation skills improved and she showed great imagination in her pretend play. She wanted to play not only with adults but also with her peers, taking turns and waiting for her turn. She developed a growing interest in number work, recognising letters and hearing stories. She had a great love for music, art work, physical education and dancing. She began to develop social graces, make polite conversation and was better able to accept social praise instead of other, more tangible rewards. In the special ASD class setting, Ruth also benefited greatly from the structured working environment, routines, extra visual help, the use of schedules and regular one-to-one sessions. She also got a lot of attention and help from classroom assistants working with her. There were also very regular outings to the community to practise social skills and appropriate behaviour. She was ready for integration.

What did the teacher / school do to help Ruth?

It was agreed among the staff working with Ruth and those who had previously worked with Ruth that the best way to support the inclusion of Ruth was to have Ruth included back into a small unit for pupils with learning disabilities in the main body of our school, and then to her local mainstream school. Junior 3 was then chosen as the age-appropriate class for Ruth in the mainstream school. The Principal informed the class teacher and asked for her help.

The specialist teacher discussed Ruth’s integration at a number of meetings using her Individual Education Plan to show how Ruth worked and the targets set for her development. The teacher planned a gradual process to facilitate Ruth’s integration from the ASD class setting into the class for students with learning difficulties. Ruth’s mum agreed with the process. The integration process began with short visits to the class just to say ‘Hello’, to borrow a book or to deliver a message. Ruth’s time in the new class was increased over a period of time.

The specialist teacher informed the class teacher regarding Ruth’s level of functioning in academic and social skills. Pinpointing the areas of Ruth’s strengths and interests was particularly helpful.
In Junior 3, Ruth was allocated a work table. Samples of Ruth’s work were provided to the class teacher. Guidelines on how to structure the work were also given. It was agreed that the specialist teacher would have independent work prepared for Ruth when she was in Junior 3, and that she could still enjoy the type of activities that were part of her work in her ASD class.

Ruth started with very short informal visits to Junior 3 to borrow a toy or book to encourage her curiosity. Ruth then progressed to completing some work in her new class in return for a toy.

The classroom assistants were also involved in escorting Ruth between classes and giving her encouragement. The class teacher made every effort to involve Ruth in activities she liked and gave her a lot of verbal help, praise and guidance.

Transition times still proved to be stressful for Ruth, so a reward system was put in place. Toys and computers were used. Snack time was difficult, but the situation was helped by her mum, who provided her favourite snacks for lunch.

Ruth progressed very well and she was ready to be fully transferred about three months earlier than expected. The classroom teachers and assistants in both settings worked closely to monitor her progress, plan work and share strategies for addressing her individual learning needs. This model of integration, tailor-made to meet the needs of Ruth, proved to be very successful.

**Key learning points from Ruth’s story**
- Begin the integration process with short visits
- Plan joint activities that will facilitate the pupil working with the ‘new’ class
- Provide personal work space (a desk) to facilitate access to favourite pieces of work / toys
- Increase the amount of work / time in the new class, as appropriate
- Discuss with parents ways they can provide support and reassurance, e.g. providing favourite snacks for lunch
- Review progress and record in the Individual Education Plan. (It is important to maintain and adjust the IEP)
- Be supportive of colleagues; a positive working relationship and sense of respect and trust is important
1.3 A teacher’s story: assisting inclusion

Promoting the human rights of children with autism by using Amnesty International materials to support pupils with ASD

The Amnesty International programme, which is free to all schools, is a good learning tool to assist in helping all children to understand their rights and responsibilities and to be tolerant of others. In our school, we were aware of the problems for children with ASD, particularly during free time and breaks.

The staff agreed to use the materials available from Amnesty International to focus on playground health and safety by encouraging a shared sense of space for all pupils. The concept of ‘a shared sense of space’ within the school family permeated our classroom work. A policy was prepared and agreed which promoted the idea of constantly making the pupils feel welcome and valued, and of teaching tolerance and acceptance. This practice was accepted as helping the child with ASD to feel included, and demonstrated our school’s commitment to equality and inclusion.

The Amnesty lessons were also modified and woven into a programme of playground activities and games to allow the children to have a practical dimension to this new approach. It was found that pupils who are more aware of the rights of the child with ASD, who participate in practical activities and who co-operate at this level are more likely to be better at classroom interaction and to be helpful to their peers generally. It is my view, also, that the child with ASD needs to have a peer-group ‘buddy’ in school.

The first year of our programme has been completed. Our experience to date is that this is a useful programme and one to be recommended to other schools.
SECTION 2  Assisting Inclusion: from early years settings

2.1 Paul’s story (aged 4)

When Paul started his Primary 1 year, it was immediately obvious to the school that he had extreme sensory issues, receptive language problems and general communication difficulties. He was a very well behaved child but was almost too quiet and could have been described as being withdrawn in class. Changes in routine caused him considerable distress. He was clearly overwhelmed by the very busy class environment.

His playgroup transition report had very clearly outlined his strengths but the accompanying letter was full of observations which were indicative of a child with ASD. The playgroup leader did not know the source of the difficulties but was concerned, and wrote the letter to enable her to pass on her concerns.

Paul’s sensory issues are exemplified by the following:

- He could not tolerate the feeling of rain on his skin.
- He could not walk on the grass, even when wearing shoes.
- Eating was slow and laborious as he had many aversions to textures.
- He always sat on his hunkers at ‘carpet time’ because he couldn’t bear to make direct contact with the carpet.
- Holding a pencil was uncomfortable for him and any marks he made on paper were barely legible.
- He could not bear to play with sand or water and did not take part in any of the messier, creative activities.

Following instructions, starting and completing tasks were everyday problems for Paul and his level of frustration was a challenge. Writing and recording work were very tiring for him.

The playground was, at times, difficult for Paul. As the games played by the pupils became more complex he struggled to stay involved and at times perceived this to be the fault of the other pupils. He needed support, for example, in acquiring the skills of asking for help.

What the teacher / school did to help Paul

The school was at the very beginning of a steep learning curve in relation to working with ASD pupils. Whole-staff training led by the ASD outreach teacher helped enormously.
The teacher used the ‘Alphasmart’ keyboard and the computer to help Paul to take an interest, to concentrate for longer periods of time and to record longer pieces of work. The school set time aside to enable the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) to help Paul develop his social and interaction skills. The appointment of a classroom assistant was also of great help because it took much pressure off the class teacher. These initiatives gave Paul the individual support he needed to understand the activities set for him and the skills to seek help and work with others.

### Key learning points from Paul’s story

- Observe and assess the pupil in class to help plan intervention
- Develop your knowledge of autism as a good basis of understanding and working with pupils with ASD; access to training is the key
- Using the skills of others, e.g. the SENCO
- When necessary, look for additional resources e.g. classroom assistant
- Share the findings across the staff
2.2 Peter’s story (aged 4)

Peter was diagnosed with ASD at two years of age. The same educational psychologist monitored his progress from the point of diagnosis to his transfer to a mainstream primary school. As a young child, Peter’s behaviours were in keeping with a child with ASD and severe learning difficulties, and included the following:

- no language (at three years and three months he had only six words and his receptive language was almost non-existent)
- he spent long periods of time lying on the floor kicking and screaming
- he was once found on top of a roof
- he was found, on another occasion, walking down the middle of the road
- he had considerable sensory issues.

The educational psychologist proposed that a school for pupils with Severe (NI) Learning Difficulties (SLD) would be an appropriate placement, with a range of additional support. The parents put in place some early intervention strategies which included Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), music therapy and play therapy. He also received intensive Speech and Language Therapy and, on two mornings a week, attended a pre-school facility where Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children (TEACCH) methods were used.

**What the teacher / school did to help Peter**

Peter received support with his sensory needs. He started a gluten and casein-free diet and this helped to settle some of the behaviours and calmed him. As a result, Peter attended a Moderate (NI) Learning Difficulties (MLD) School for the first two years whilst continuing with his ABA Programme. At his Primary 2 Annual Review his parents, teacher and the same educational psychologist felt that the progress he had made was considerable and that a place in a mainstream school might be a viable option. Suitable visual aids were introduced into all classrooms and unstructured times were monitored (followed by planned intervention, as necessary).

Peter transferred into a Primary 3 classroom with a full-time learning-support assistant. At the end of Primary 3, he achieved very satisfactory scores in his assessments units.

Midway through his Primary 4 year and in advance of his Annual Review the school trialled Peter without learning-support assistant. This was successful and Peter is now in his Primary 5 year without an assistant.
Key learning points from Peter’s story

- Whole-school training combined with learning from the experience of managing/teaching pupils with ASD is important
- Use a variety of approaches to ensure progress; embed visual timetables in all classes
- Develop an ‘autism approach’
- Take care to monitor how pupils with ASD manage during unstructured times (e.g. break-time, free play)
- Form good working relationships with parents
2.3 Mark’s story (aged 4)

Mark was diagnosed with ASD at the age of three and a half. He had a part-time place at a mainstream nursery school. He also received outreach support from a special school, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and applied behaviour analysis support.

Due to his considerable difficulties with social interaction, communication skills and extreme behaviours, Mark was due to take a Primary 1 place in a Moderate (NI) Learning Difficulties school. His standardised scores on a cognitive ability test were falling in the 70 to early 80’s range.

In contrast, Mark’s parents felt very strongly that he should be given the opportunity to attend a mainstream school if he was to reach his full potential. They approached a suitable school and the Primary 1 teacher (who was also the Principal) met with Mark and his mother and agreed to enrol Mark. The teacher had received training in autism and had taught pupils on the autistic spectrum.

The first five months were, at times, and for a variety of reasons, extremely difficult. A significant factor was the fact that Mark initially did not have a learning-support assistant.

In the early days of Primary 1, Mark had difficulty following many of the usual class routines and availing of the learning opportunities being provided. During structured play, Mark used the water tray in a very ‘rigid’ manner. If he went into the home corner he would, for example, stop the play by insisting on putting everything, and sometimes himself, into the washing machine. Mark was very easily frustrated by many of the table activities and would throw tantrums which sometimes resulted in him sweeping everything off the table, shouting and then becoming very distressed. Lining up, walking in the line, moving around the school, taking turns, taking part in whole-class activities were all problematic. On occasion, it was almost impossible to redirect Mark towards more acceptable behaviour. His echolalia, literal interpretation, outbursts and inappropriate communication skills were also affecting his relationships with his peers.

Occasionally he pinched or hit the adults in the room.

At one point both his parents and the class teacher began to think that they had made a mistake!

Gradually and slowly, we began to see progress. Mark had a very successful Primary 2 year with a successful partnership between his very capable class teacher and a newly appointed ABA assistant. In Primary 3 year, Mark was able to move to the very large, local mainstream primary school which his sister had attended.
What the teacher / school did to help Mark

- The school maintained a very close, supportive, working partnership with his mother.
- The teacher took time to get to know Mark.
- The teacher used positive behaviour strategies and reward systems to reinforce good behaviours and, where possible, ignored unwanted behaviours.
- The teacher used Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence (ABC) charts to search out potential triggers and used this to inform practice.
- The teacher used practical visual tools to deal with specific issues, e.g. leader badges and matching class list where Mark could see very clearly when it would be his turn to be the leader.
- Staff members were encouraged to model appropriate behaviour.
- A clear assessment of Mark’s needs was completed and, as a result, Mark was given time out of class to relax and exercise; in class he was helped to understand and follow the rules and routines of the school.
- Mark was given reassurance for those occasions when he was anxious or uncertain.
- Mark’s programme was kept flexible to suit his needs and he was encouraged to work independently.
- The teacher encouraged the other children in the class and the school in general to have empathy with Mark.

Key learning points from Mark’s story

- Involve parents as partners
- Detailed planning pays off
- Address challenging behaviours systematically
- Teach rules and routines
- Use a variety of strategies to meet the range of ASD needs
- Keep staff informed of, and involved in, the pupil’s programme
- Promote empathy among the other pupils when necessary
2.4 Samuel’s story (aged 10)

‘I don’t do multiply!’

Samuel had a diagnosis of ASD and had spent all of his primary education in a nearby special school before starting in the secondary school. He was a bright, cheerful boy who enjoyed drawing (and was very good at it). He also had a keen interest in electronic games. His ability in reading and spelling was average, but he had quite considerable gaps in his mathematical ability. It was a few weeks into the first term before the teacher discovered this because the introductory topic in Mathematics was *Shape* and Samuel had no difficulty in learning to recognise and learn the various shapes. In the next topic, *Number*, Samuel again had no difficulty with the addition and subtraction exercises. However when the teacher gave Samuel a multiplication sum to do he announced in a very matter-of-fact voice, ‘I don’t do multiply!’

*What the teacher / school did to help Samuel*  
When the teacher first met Samuel, on a P7 visit to his school in preparation for his move to the ‘big school’, Samuel greeted him very politely and then produced a sheet of paper from his pocket on which he had written 37 questions about his new school! The teacher must have answered most of them successfully because he duly arrived the following September.

The in-built flexibility of the home-room provision in a secondary school meant that the teacher could arrange a programme for Samuel that would enable him to learn how to multiply.

One period a week was set aside to give him one-to-one teaching while the other boys in the small group did extension number work under the supervision of the classroom assistant assigned to them. Samuel was rather reluctant at the beginning, as he really didn’t believe that he would ever be able to ‘do multiply’. The teacher began with the few tables that Samuel could remember, consolidating them by saying them together with him, writing them out and playing games with them. At the same time, the teacher gave him multiplication sums in his exercise book, so that he would become familiar with the ‘procedure’. After a few weeks, he began to relax and gain confidence and even began to look forward to this period each week.

At the same time, the classroom assistant used the mental maths period each week to do further work on the tables Samuel had learnt – throwing dice and multiplying by 2, 3, or 4 and other similar games. His parents were also involved, helping him to learn a multiplication table each week. The teacher made a multiplication square for him so that he could work at the same rate as the other boys while continuing the number topic.
When the class started to learn the more difficult tables, the teacher reduced the learning to half a table per week and also looked for patterns in the tables to help him remember them. He was particularly pleased to discover the pattern for the nine-times tables – he had thought it would be a really tough table to learn. The level of difficulty was gradually increased and he was amazed to find that he could multiply really big sums. The whole process took the best part of that year to complete but it made it all worthwhile when he looked up at the teacher in class one day with a big smile and said, 'This is actually very easy!'

**Key learning points from Samuel’s story**

- Plan small practical and achievable activities for the pupil
- Increase the level of difficulty as the child gains confidence and success
- Encourage the parents to consolidate the work, and the general approach to it, at home
- Don’t give up, and enjoy the pupil’s achievement.
SECTION 3  Assisting Inclusion: managing transitions

3.1 Ben’s story (aged 11)
Ben is transferring from primary to secondary school. He had ongoing sensory problems with the school bell. He could tell the time and he had a watch. What follows illustrates the interaction between the two teachers (primary school teacher = blue, secondary school teacher = red) and the pupil (green).

I’m going to a new school in September.
I’m worried about the bell.
Will the bell be louder in my new school?

I don’t actually know.
I’ll be with you when we visit your new school.
Let’s ask the headmaster when we get there.

It’s not really the noise he’s worried about.
It’s the number of bells he will have to cope with.

I must tell Mrs Moore (secondary school teacher) about Ben’s fear of the bell ringing.
I wonder what we can do about this?

The two teachers meet

Ben has had a lot of problems getting used to the school bell. It took him over two years to become comfortable with it.

We’ll try to schedule the visit so that he arrives between bells and make sure he’s not in the corridor when the bell rings.

We’ll also need to promise to warn him a few minutes before the bell rings.
The bell was not a problem for Ben on this occasion but it was a continuing issue for the first few months at his new school. He continued to need reassurance that he would be told when the bell was going to ring. He would endeavour not to be in the corridor when a bell was likely to ring. Initially if he was inadvertently caught in the corridor, he would put his hands over his ears and run quickly to the home-room. Every time this happened Mrs Moore would talk to him about the bell and his reaction to it. Gradually he became more comfortable with the bell ringing and by the end of the first year he didn’t mention it any more.

Key learning points from Ben’s story

- In many situations faced by children with ASD, there is no ‘quick fix’! Often the solution is quite a simple one, but it does not become clear until teachers have worked through a lengthy process of experiences and examined reactions to those experiences.
3.2 Patrick’s story (aged 3)

“He won’t come when I call him. I have to go and lift him up when I need him to do something and that’s when he starts screaming.’

It was my first visit to Patrick’s house (to provide pre-school support before he started school) and his mum was keen to listen to any advice I had to offer.

Patrick was at the stage of following his own agenda. His interactions with me were very brief during that first visit but I did observe him play with Thomas the Tank Engine and help himself to food and drink. However, he did not appear to understand any language.

What the teacher did to help Patrick
I explained to Mum how we could help Patrick to understand what was going to happen by using visual cues, e.g. a plate when it was time for dinner, his favourite bath toy for bath time or car keys when it was time to go in the car. We agreed on a plan of action for the next visit.

Three days later I arrived with a plastic tray (it was a cat litter tray – a great resource!) and some ‘transition cards’. These were just small red cards with Patrick’s name on them. A small table in the kitchen was to be Patrick’s area and this held the tray and a little box to ‘post’ his cards.

He was running around the dining area at the time so, before we put our plan into action, we put his favourite toy on the tray. Mum called him but, as usual, to no avail! She called him a second time and that is when we drew his attention to the toy in the tray by moving it to create a noise. He was interested and, as he moved towards it, I prompted him to hold the red card and then post it in the box beside the toy. This was the first step. We prompted him several times with other objects during that visit until he showed some understanding of what the cards meant.

The third visit was arranged for a week later and by that stage mum was calling the cards ‘magic cards’. She didn’t have to lift him now. After a few days Patrick had learnt that the card meant he had to stop what he was doing and go to his area in the kitchen to see what was happening next.

There was a lot more to learn about the use of such ‘visuals’ but Patrick and his mum had taken the first step and, over the next few months, he made a lot of progress before starting in a special needs nursery school. His transition was successful and within, a year, Patrick was reassessed and moved to a school for pupils with moderate (NI) learning difficulties.

Key learning points from Patrick’s story
- Most children with ASD are visual learners
- A home programme can lessen anxiety and confusion
- Favourite toys can help in getting and keeping the interest of even the most restless child
3.3 Simon’s story (aged 4)

Simon received a diagnosis of ASD just before his third birthday. He received home-based support from an outreach teacher for children with ASD. Speech and Language Therapy was provided by the local health trust and the recommendation clearly stated that this should be carried out in liaison with his teachers and parents. His parents felt very strongly that he should attend the pre-school unit attached to the primary school. It turned out that his general ability was indicative of a moderate (NI) degree of learning difficulty.

What the teacher / school did to help Simon

- During Simon’s pre-school year the school provided for an assistant for him (payment came from school’s own fund, and some was eventually reimbursed)
- The learning support assistant and the playgroup leader set up visual structures and did daily one-to-one language and play sessions using Simon’s individual education plan to set targets and monitor progress
- At the end of his pre-school year Simon was reassessed and although it was recognised that he had made some progress, the recommendation was that he should transfer to a diagnostic unit at one of the special schools. His parents were totally against this and did not want to separate him from his siblings. They also felt he deserved the opportunity to attend a mainstream school. The principal agreed to offer Simon a place in Primary 1 and it was agreed that he would be closely monitored
- A learning-support assistant was appointed to work closely with the class teacher and do a lot of one-to-one work with Simon
- At the beginning of his P2 year an excellent working partnership developed between the school and the speech and language therapist. The speech and language therapist made regular visits to school, leaving a detailed programme for the class teacher, the SENCO and the learning-support assistant to work through.

Initially Simon settled into the mainstream class better than expected. He was happy and responded well to all the visual structures and routines. His imitation skills developed and these, together with the influence of his peers and the language-rich environment, helped Simon to make good progress with his communication. Simon was also selected for the Reading Recovery Programme in the school.

This high level of provision from a number of partners and professionals together with the role models provided by his peers has resulted in considerable progress in Simon’s social skills, academic performance and speech and language development. The same educational psychologist who had recommended a special school recently reassessed Simon. His speech and language is now age-appropriate and she agrees that Simon is appropriately placed in the mainstream class.
Key learning points from Simon’s story

- A close working relationship between the teacher and the speech and language therapist enhances the outcomes for the pupil.
- The importance of responding to the pupil’s emotional needs by, for example, ensuring that his/her surroundings are familiar.
3.4 Michael’s story (aged 8)

Michael’s parents came to visit our school along with the clinical psychologist who had been involved for almost a year with their son. It was a difficult time for them to agree the move to a school which catered for children with severe (NI) learning difficulties. After all, Michael, who had an ASD, had only been diagnosed with moderate (NI) learning difficulties. The reality though was that he was not coping in his MLD placement and was presenting with many challenging behaviours.

What the teacher / school did to help Michael

- The school made the necessary preparations and agreed on a phased introduction.
- Michael’s classroom assistant accompanied him on the initial visits.
- The social story approach was used to help his transition and given to Michael’s parents to read during the summer holidays.
- The teacher was prepared for Michael’s strong obsession with computers and planned to use that knowledge to encourage Michael’s learning.
- Visual structures were prepared for every minute of Michael’s time in school.
- Areas of the classroom were identified as being suitable for particular activities which would suit Michael.
- Michael’s academic skills were quickly assessed by his teacher and his individual programme and visual schedule were planned to meet his needs.

Michael developed behaviour problems and the school contacted the Behaviour Support Team to seek advice.

One of the early problems is described below.

The teacher already knew that Michael was sensitive to noise and that he had difficulty coping in a crowded, noisy environment, so he didn’t persuade him to go into the dining hall. Instead, the teacher placed a table and chair in the entrance hall next to the dining hall and allowed Michael to eat his lunch there. The teacher was also aware that Michael was sitting close to the school bell, so we placed a notice on the wall beside the switch: PLEASE WARN MICHAEL WHEN THE BELL IS GOING TO RING. The bell-ringers were very obliging and Michael was able to put earphones on before the bell rang. This allowed him to cope with the noise.

Each day the table and chair were moved a little bit closer to the dining hall. He was encouraged to put his rubbish in the bin which was just inside the door of the hall and, with everything moving a little closer to the hall each day, Michael was soon dining with his peers. However, we always had the earphones beside him so that when he decided that the noise was too much for him to bear, he could use them.
Key learning points from Michael’s story

- Remember some pupils with ASD have sensory difficulties; it is important to find this out
- A desensitising programme helps the pupil to prepare for the unexpected and to cope
- Explaining to other pupils, on a need-to-know basis, about a pupil’s anxieties, can help enormously.
3.5 Jack’s story (aged 6)

‘I dreaded going to collect Jack from school each day because I knew the teacher would have another tale of woe for me.’ (Jack’s mum)

Jack used to attend a mainstream primary school unit. He is now in a Severe (NI) Learning Difficulties setting and both parents are pleased with his progress since the move. He found it difficult to sit still for any length of time and, if he did manage to sit on a chair, he would flop across the table as though he was just too tired to sit up straight.

He had limited sensitivity to movement and touch, which explained why he liked to be on the move all the time and enjoyed his tactile hugs. Jack had some language but chose not to speak very often. He would sometimes hit, kick, bite and pull hair.

What the teacher / school did to help Jack

- The school used the TEACCH structure to help Jack to settle quickly in school.
- The staff observed his behaviours using frequency charts and used the information to make sense of Jack’s behaviours and plan a programme to develop his skills and encourage positive interactions.
- The Occupational Therapist (OT) assessed Jack and suggested that he had low muscle tone and required a supportive chair to help him to sit straight.
- The OT introduced a programme of sensory integration which included physical activities in the playground or a session in a swing before he was expected to sit at a table.
- Jack sat in a specialist chair which helped him to settle and to complete tasks.
- Jack received pressure activities and played with tactile toys to help reduce the frequency of hitting, biting and pulling hair.
- The teacher used the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) with Jack to encourage his communication.

Key learning points from Jack’s story

- Problems don’t immediately disappear when a pupil transfers from one school to another
- It is important to consider advice from an OT when seeking out the reasons why a pupil is presenting with behaviours that challenge us. Sensory dysfunction can often be a major contributing factor
- No more daily tales of woe!
3.6 A teacher’s story: transition from a primary speech and language unit to a secondary school centre / resource

Pupils in a primary-level speech and language unit had reached P7 so secondary-level provision had to be planned for. It was decided to open a centre in a secondary school that would provide sufficient support to allow the pupils to be included in mainstream classes.

The following is a diary of the transition year, from the perspectives of the primary school teacher and the receiving secondary school teacher:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary school teacher</th>
<th>Second-level school teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Term 1: Sept-Dec</strong></td>
<td><strong>Term 1: Sept-Dec</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dear Diary</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dear Diary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have three main concerns at this time for the pupils in my P7 class:</td>
<td>I have just learnt of an interesting possibility for our school – we have been asked if we would be interested in starting a secondary provision for some pupils who have ASD. The members of staff have a number of concerns:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• that the authorities will not be able to find suitable provision for the pupils, in time for them to start next September</td>
<td>• lack of knowledge of ASD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• that I will be unable to reassure their parents</td>
<td>• concern that the pupils will present with behavioural problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• that I will be unable to prepare the pupils.</td>
<td>• concern that significant changes will have to be made to course-content or teaching style to accommodate them in mainstream classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hope to address these concerns by:</td>
<td>• concern that their inclusion will, over time, change the perception of the school to that of a special school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• liaising, through my principal, with the education officer responsible for this area</td>
<td>The principal hopes to address these concerns by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• holding meetings with the parents to listen to their concerns and expectations</td>
<td>• open discussions with staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• conducting question and answer sessions with the pupils – I will say to them, ‘Ask any question and I will do my best to answer it’.</td>
<td>• increasing the staff’s knowledge and awareness of ASD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dear Diary</strong></td>
<td>• meetings with education personnel, staff at the primary school and parents of the pupils concerned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We had a good meeting with some of the staff of a secondary school which may be prepared to make provision for the pupils. The parents and education personnel were there too and many important issues were addressed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 2: Jan-March</td>
<td>Term 2: Jan-March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dear Diary</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dear Diary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is almost certain that the secondary school has agreed to take the pupils, so I am going to encourage them to attend the open night for P7 pupils and their parents.</td>
<td>It seems likely that our school will set up a home-room provision in the school for pupils with speech, language / communication difficulties. I don’t know very much about ASD but I would be interested in learning – it sounds both challenging and exciting. I think I might apply for the position of teacher responsible for the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dear Diary</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The parents and pupils were very positive about their visit to the open night. That makes it easier to talk to the pupils about next year. They have so many worries and concerns.</td>
<td>It was interesting to meet some of the pupils and their parents at our open night. They seem to be really pleasant and were very polite. Now that I understand more about the type of provision required, I am beginning to feel quite confident that I could cope with it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Dear Diary
I'm so pleased that the secondary school home-room teacher has been appointed – I already know her so that will make the necessary liaison easier. Now I can talk to the pupils about their teacher by name.

### Dear Diary
The home-room teacher has spent most of the last two weeks with us. I hope it hasn’t been too frightening an experience. She certainly got a glimpse of the full spectrum of ability and behaviour! One of the pupils threw a rather spectacular tantrum, which took all afternoon to deal with. At least it was an opportunity for her to see some of the strategies being used in a real situation.

### Dear Diary
I brought the pupils to their new school today – they were very excited about it all, especially about the idea of having sweets on sale in vending machines! They were very well behaved – very polite – and asked lots of questions. One of them is worried about being bullied because he saw a poster on bullying on the notice board – one more issue to work through!

### Dear Diary
I have begun my new job – it’s all a bit daunting at the moment – so much to learn! I plan to approach my training period in the following way:
- Spend time with the education advisor – a very helpful lady who has worked in the field of ASD at many levels for quite a few years. She has offered weekly support for at least the first year of this new venture. Wonderful – I’ll really need it!
- Read lots of books on ASD and search the Internet for information.
- Attend recommended courses on ASD and structured teaching.
- Spend a considerable length of time with the pupils and their teacher in the primary speech and language unit.
- Talk to psychologists and speech therapists.
- Arrange some training for the staff in the school and discuss with them the arrangements for the pupils.
- Order the necessary resources – where do I start? Help!!

### Dear Diary
Our induction evening for next year’s Year 8 group was last night. The pupils met with me in their new classroom, though it isn’t ready for them yet – we hope to make it an ASD-friendly room with a quiet corner and colour coded timetables, computers to work at, books to read etc. Their parents also were able to meet some of the teachers. It seemed to go well.

The induction programme will continue on the first day of the new term, when only Year 8 pupils attend – I’ll introduce them to the routine in the canteen, give them colour-coded maps and discuss new subjects and new rules. It should all help them to settle in to life in the ‘big school’.

### Key learning points from the teachers’ story
- Teamwork is essential to effective planning
- An attitude of openness and transparency helps keep everyone on board
- Plan an induction programme to assist the smooth transfer of pupils
3.7 A principal’s story: managing transition

An unexpected, yet exciting, phone call from the ‘Board’ today. They have a problem. Could we help them? A number of children were identified some years ago by the Psychology Department as having speech, language and communication problems. Some were also described as having a condition called ‘Asperger’s Syndrome’. I vaguely remember this term from psychology lectures quite a few years ago. Must look it up: Internet’s a good place to start. I was assured that the youngsters weren’t violent!

Why us? I was told it was because we were a small school, in a good geographical location for the youngsters to travel to, and that we had a reputation for having a good pastoral system. (Is this just soft soap??). I was also told that the pupils are capable of attending a mainstream school with lots of support. The idea would be to gradually integrate them into mainstream classes as much as possible when they are ready. They have now reached Primary 7 and are ready to transfer to secondary education.

Their parents want them to stay together as a group rather than split up to attend different secondary schools. The group have been friends and it would be easier to provide the support needed if they stayed together.

The ‘Board’ would like to discuss this further to see if we might be interested. I’ll let the Senior Management Team (SMT) know what I’ve learnt and then make an appointment with board officers to discuss the issue further and to explore it as an area of possible interest for us. I’m interested!

The SMT is not exactly enthusiastic. The members wanted assurance that these youngsters were not going to be a discipline problem. Would the image of the school be affected? Would we be seen as a ‘special needs school’, resulting, possibly, in parents sending more ‘academic’ pupils to other local secondary schools? This could affect our overall exam results. If fewer ‘bright’ pupils came to the school would this have an effect on teacher morale? Teachers look forward to teaching ‘top’ groups. Would there be a limit to the number of children? If not, then would the school truly be a mainstream secondary school? How might parents of current pupils see the development? What would it cost in terms of our delegated budget? What effect would this group have on other pupils? How would the whole thing work in practice?

We agreed the following at our meeting:
Further reassurance that the youngsters were not going to be violent and would not disrupt significantly the usual running of the school.
Funding will be discussed with the Board.

I referred to our agreed aims for the school; it is the thing to do if we are taking these aims seriously.
The aims state that all ability ranges are provided for in our development plan, including the needs of the ‘bright’ pupils. In this context, it is also our intention to review strategies and resources with a view to improving exam results. This might reassure the staff when we raise the issue of special provision with them. Improving examination results and Key Stage 3 results has been a priority in past years and, by continuing to emphasise examination performance, we show our commitment to all pupils, irrespective of ability. In the meantime we all need to find out more about Asperger’s Syndrome and about pupils with speech and language difficulties.

There was agreement to explore the issue further with the Board.

The whole-staff meeting went fairly smoothly. No new issues or reservations were raised and, having debated the matter with SMT, the answers I gave seemed acceptable. It was agreed in principle that I should get more details from the Board and we would discuss these at a future meeting.

A meeting was set up with members of the Board and with the school’s Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). The approach was to let them talk to see what exactly they had in mind. Then I came in with questions. It seems that they saw a model which was broadly similar to the one which worked in the primary school. The children would have a home-room teacher and a classroom assistant. There would be four boys. The Board would contribute a set-up grant but the school’s delegated budget would be expected to be used also. The home-room teacher’s and classroom assistant’s salaries would be met centrally from the Board budget.

We were informed that the boys are not aggressive but often become upset and disturbed. They are very much individuals with different characteristics and degrees of ability. The school would have to identify a home-room where the home teacher would be based. The aim would be to start off with the boys being taught in the home-room for most of the time, with the home teacher or the classroom assistant accompanying them to classes, e.g. practical classes. When they felt able to cope, the home teacher would withdraw gradually from accompanying them in this way.

The board officers realised that we already had a considerable number of pupils with special needs. Some of these pupils were very obvious due to physical disabilities, while others had less obvious learning difficulties. They realised that these special needs pupils coped very well in the school. There were very few incidents of them being bullied and they were ‘accepted’ every bit as well as other pupils. In relation to the proposed new provision, it was pointed out that it was important that the boys’ parents would be happy with what the school could offer. It was also agreed that, if the school decided to accept the new pupils, a meeting would be set up to talk to the parents.

The SMT were reassured by the Board’s answers. Of course some questions just couldn’t be answered and there would have to be a ‘leap of faith’. Clearly, it was also
possible that there would be some resentment in relation to the resourcing and relatively generous staffing of the class. However, there is no shortage of resources generally if teachers make a case. Furthermore, there is a precedent in the school for such ‘small classes’, in that some teachers already spend substantial time with small numbers of pupils withdrawn from mainstream classes. Also, A-Level groups are often very small and, thus very generously resourced. Why should pupils with special needs be denied similar levels of ‘expensive’ resourcing?

At a whole-staff meeting, there was overwhelming agreement that we should proceed with caution and at least see how the initiative would go for a year.

I informed the Governors of our decision. I brought them up-to-date with the story to date and asked for their blessing. They were very excited by the project and gave it their whole-hearted support. They saw many benefits for the school and believed it would enhance its standing in the community.

I met the parents last night. Carol, the SENCO, and I gave brief presentations on the school. The principal educational psychologist and the special needs officer from the Board outlined what they would put in place. It was well received. The questions weren’t too difficult to answer. The parents were willing to trust us. But now, one of the biggest problems: where do we get a home teacher with the range of skills we need? The Board expressed willingness to give this teacher non-teaching time from Easter to prepare for the job – lots of reading! She would also meet the boys and get assistance from their primary teacher as well as getting training from those with experience in teaching and managing pupils with Asperger’s. It will be my task as principal to find a home-room. The Board can, at best, promise a pre-fabricated building but I don’t think this is suitable. These boys need to be in the heart of the school buildings, to feel part of the school and not be out on a limb. However, if I put someone out of their room will this cause resentment?

I invited parents to visit the school. They seemed impressed with our plan.

Fortunately, Dora, one of my most experienced teachers and one who has been acting as assistant to Carol, has come to me expressing an interest in the home teacher’s job.

It also turned out that Dora and the boys’ primary school teacher were good friends.

I posted the job description, as agreed with the Education and Library Board (ELB), in the staffroom.

Dora got the job and she was delighted. I’ve a feeling we couldn’t have done better. Now, to decide on a release date for Dora to begin her preparations. The home-room issue can also be resolved without acrimony; a simple swap within the main building. The swap will also result in the modern languages classrooms being next door to each other.
I signed lots of orders for equipment for the home-room. I met the new boys today and showed them around the school. Ben asked me every thirty seconds if the school bell was about to go off. I managed to get them all safely back to my office before it did go off and indeed I don’t think he would have noticed it if I hadn’t mentioned it. Fred’s a delight. I don’t think I’ve ever been addressed as ‘Principal’ before by a pupil! Ultra polite! Dora asked for one of our current classroom assistants, Grace, to work with her. She felt that she was particularly suitable in terms of personality. I agreed. We now need another classroom assistant.

Dora is really enjoying her new role. She did an excellent assembly today and prepared the whole school for the arrival of the new boys in September. We’ve given her class her initials, as we do with all other classes. Tonight we had our induction evening for the new Year 8. Dora’s class just went out with her in the same way as all new classes. I’ve a feeling the new year will bring lots of interesting situations but at least we have managed to make the transfer.

**Key learning points from the principal’s story**

- Keep an open mind to change and innovation
- Plan thoroughly and secure sufficient resources
- Keep all concerned up-dated and ‘on board’
- Remain focused on the children and your capacity to help them
- Celebrate success
4.1 John’s story (aged 8)

John began to manifest problems by the age of three and was referred to a consultant paediatrician for assessment. His mother expressed serious concerns regarding his pending commencement of education. The paediatrician acknowledged that John was one to one-and-a-half years behind his peer group, and was experiencing specific difficulties with his speech and social skills. The paediatrician felt that John would require at least resource hours and possibly a special needs assistant to support his mainstream education. An assessment was carried out, though it took some time to access psychology services, and a diagnosis of ASD resulted.

John commenced school without additional resources in place to support his very specific needs. At this stage, the school felt out of its depth. They had no experience, knowledge or skills in the area of ASD. It very quickly became apparent to the teacher that this was a very difficult situation. She felt she could not successfully manage a class while this child was experiencing such difficulties in engaging in the simplest of tasks. He constantly ran around the room and created a serious disturbance.

John was unable to interact socially. He didn’t want to take part in games with other children, taking turns was a problem for him and if he didn’t get his own way in the school yard he would kick or scratch the other child. He found it very hard to mix with other children. When the bell went for class, John would run and hide.

He found it very difficult to cope in the classroom. He had very poor co-ordination, and very weak motor skills. He found it very hard to filter information, to listen and to respond. He was very easily distracted. He hid under tables, ran around the classroom and spoke very loudly and inappropriately. Most of the time he simply wanted to amuse himself.

John was not interested in school work except playing with building blocks and painting. He found it very hard to stay focused on what he had to do. Because of the potential dangers to himself and to other pupils, he required one-to-one attention at all times.
What the school / teacher did to help John

- The school contacted the local health board and explained the situation.
- The health board helped secure the services of a special needs assistant (SNA).
- The SNA experienced massive difficulties in settling John into school life.
- The school accessed the service of a newly appointed psychologist with ASD experience who suggested that John be enrolled in the special school on a part-time basis (dual enrolment) with both schools having equal responsibilities for the child’s education. All parties involved with the child agreed that this was clearly the way forward.

John began his dual enrolment and the SNA travelled with him to the special school, where she was offered specific ‘on-the-job’ training under the guidance of the teacher in the special school, as well as very specific training in the areas of speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and sensory integration.

The teacher in the special school introduced TEACCH, which brought structure into the child’s life at school. The entire staff in the mainstream school received a full day’s training on structured teaching and an introduction to the TEACCH methodology, while John’s teacher was enabled to access a three-day TEACCH course run by the local health board.

John continued to attend both mainstream and special schools until June 2005, when it was suggested that it was time to return him to full-time education in the local mainstream national school. John, who did not enjoy the bus journey to the special school, particularly welcomed this.

At this stage, the mainstream school reported that John was making progress, settling well, making friends and enjoying some lessons. The school felt more confident as a result of the extensive training it had received over the previous two years.

John continues to make steady progress and, more importantly, is a very happy, contented member of his class and school.

Key learning points from John’s story

- Partnership between a special and mainstream school enhances the outcomes for the pupils
- Dual enrolment is a useful practice
- Psychological assessment aids planning
- Training is vital to helping teachers and SNAs to develop their skills and the confidence to work collaboratively
4.2 Mary’s story (aged 11)

‘My new friends are here.’

By the age of four, Mary had a diagnosis of autism and moderate (ROI) general learning disability and a recommendation that she attend the local special school for children with general learning disabilities. The parents, wanting what was best for their child, embraced this recommendation and placed their child in the local special school.

Mary began her education with one word in her expressive vocabulary and presented with classic autistic characteristics, including poor eye contact, diminished social skills and volatile tantrums.

What the teacher / school did to help Mary

- The teacher employed mainly the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and TEACCH methodologies and parts of the ABA Programme as an eclectic approach to Mary’s education.
- The teacher often felt isolated, but was very grateful for the in-service training she had received in such methodologies as TEACCH, PECS, ABA, and Sensory Integration, as well as informative generalised courses on ASD.
- The teachers found, through her teaching, that Mary had considerable intellectual ability and suggested that Mary might do well in a mainstream school and planning began to explore this possibility.
- An SNA was approved, who was to receive specific training in the area of ASD to help the integration programme. (A delay of two years ensued before an appointment was made and unfortunately this caused a high degree of frustration to the parents and school staff alike).
- A video was prepared for Mary of her new school, class, peers and teacher.
- Mary’s mother accompanied her on a number of short informal visits to the new school.
- Mary began a phased-in programme of integration commencing with just a half day per week. Mary herself was allowed to dictate the pace of integration. As she demonstrated her ability to cope, the amount of time spent at mainstream was stepped up.

Mary continued to make progress in school, becoming more socially mature. The special school kept in contact with the mainstream national school offering support as requested. The SNA continued working between both educational settings until Mary’s integration was complete. When Mary was asked about her new school, she replied, ‘My new friends are here and I’m happy.’ If that does not underscore the success of this particular child’s integration, nothing could!
Key learning points from Mary’s story

- A ‘phased-in’ approach is worth trying
- The ongoing support from the psychologist can help parents to accept provision
- Working collaboratively is a sensible strategy with positive outcomes for all concerned with the pupil
- Preparing the pupil in advance for new situations eases the level of worry and stress
- Monitoring progress informs planning and helps to measure the success of the strategies in use
4.3 A teacher’s story

Despite the fact that, as a student-teacher, I had endured lectures on the topic and had performed very well in a three-hour written exam, my first reaction to dealing with ASD on a practical level was … ‘What’s autism?’ At the end of my first year of teaching, a child with ASD came to my school for one day a week. Personally, I paid little attention, as she wasn’t a part of my class, therefore she was not any of my business. In my second year teaching, she was attending mainstream classes for two days a week, and going to a special school for the remainder of the week. Again, I paid little attention, as my kingdom behind my classroom door was all that mattered to me.

After Christmas of that year, it occurred to me that I would have this child in my class the following September and I actually didn’t even know what she looked like. I’d never met or spoken with her. I stood in the yard during a lunch-break and surveyed the usual chaos as the children chased balls or each other and wondered which was she?

I went in search of information and literature on ASD and I was horrified by the possibilities – screaming tantrums and physical violence!

I consulted with her current teacher, who assured me that she was very pleasant and well mannered, and I observed her in the yard where she seemed perfectly ordinary to me.

I found out about her academic abilities and, over the summer, incorporated them into my school plans. I was really pleased with myself as I made a subject timetable to hang in the class, as well as other visual elements, which the guide book suggested.

On the first day back in September, my new troops, 34 in all, assembled before me in the class. I got stuck into work immediately. About an hour later I was delighted as I surveyed the room. There wasn’t a sound except for the excited scribbling of new pens on new copies. It was then I really noticed her for the first time. She sat in the middle of the room but, unlike the other children, she was sitting bolt upright and was staring straight at me. I reacted instinctively; I flashed a huge smile and waved, humour and theatrics being the biggest weapons in my teaching arsenal. I love to engage the whole class in play and fun as much as possible, but she never blinked, smiled or even moved. She continued to stare at me for a few more seconds, and then looked away.

I was completely disarmed. It hit me that my concept of communication was entirely inadequate to deal with ASD. But, more important was the blow to my personal pride! I actually felt insulted for a moment. I thought, ‘Oh God, I am not able to do this!’ and was fearful of any direct contact for most of the day. How could I? Would
she ignore me again? Would she understand? Would I upset her? In fact, I think I would have reacted better to a tantrum than to this passiveness.

It was the children who taught me how to communicate properly. The girls on either side of her spoke very animatedly and purposefully to her, but were very tolerant in their expectations of her answers, despite the fact that often she didn’t answer at all. Even more impressive was the no-nonsense direction with which they guided her when things, such as tidying the desk before art, were required. To them autism was nothing at all, allowances were given but not liberties, she was special … but not that special!

**Key points from the teacher’s story**
- Always be willing to learn
- Children are good teachers and can help individual children with ASD to communicate
- Learn by doing
SECTION 5  Assisting Inclusion: the wider school community

5.1 The special school as a resource: a principal’s story

Although it may be argued that there are many excellent inclusion practices throughout our schools in Northern Ireland, many of our colleague-principals continue to remain disillusioned and frustrated. This is so because they have to cope with inadequate and inconsistent funding arrangements when accessing resources, training and expertise to support colleagues who are currently encountering many challenging and complex learning disabilities on a daily basis. Many mainstream schools, for example, are not fully aware of the invaluable resources available to them from a special school sector which often seems shy in marketing its own expertise and successes.

We need to develop our knowledge of the expertise available to support inclusion that is already within schools. Inclusion is a wonderful process for those pupils who can benefit from an environment that is ‘best’ resourced to meet their needs, whether in mainstream schools or units, special units, MLD schools or SLD schools. It is also essential for the local special school to ‘cluster’ with nearby mainstream schools in order to support the inclusion process more effectively. Special schools have been largely an untapped resource in the past and, under Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SENDO) legislation, they are more than enthusiastic to change their role and to use their knowledge, skills and expertise to support teachers, classroom assistants, pupils and parents throughout the system. This would ensure that all pupils would receive their full entitlement to an inclusive education system which promises so much for all pupils.

Increasingly, therefore, special schools recognise and are supportive of the inclusion process. However, the further development of this concept raises a number of challenges:

Enhancing the inclusion process under a new partnership in education

The special school (or ‘specialist school’ – as is the vision for the future) must work in collaborative partnerships with all sectors in order to promote this ideal. Our special school aims to support inclusiveness by transforming ‘an idealistic ideal’ into a more seamless reality.

Our school is committed to establishing dual enrolment or dual registration / placement:

‘We aim to work with our colleagues to fully develop the concept of ‘dual enrolment’ or placement for those pupils we believe would benefit most from such an arrangement.’
A shared placement involving a dual enrolment arrangement between the special school and the mainstream school will have many benefits for the child and the respective schools, such as:

- developing a shared vision and commitment to inclusion
- developing a more positive attitude toward inclusion
- increasing the pool of professional expertise
- accessing more inclusive curricular opportunities
- accessing better inclusive teaching and learning opportunities
- more effective and efficient use of shared school resources
- planning staff exchanges
- sharing good practice
- collaborative planning, monitoring and assessment
- continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities on both sites which focus on the translation of knowledge and skills into practice
- promoting high expectations of, and respect for, all pupils
- developing a stable and experienced team working with teaching assistants
- ensuring clear and consistent collaborative school policies, with an emphasis on early intervention and effective programme implementation
- developing an outreach and in-reach support system which aims to support the needs of the child, the teacher, and the classroom assistant more effectively than the traditional model of outreach support
- ensuring a more confident environment to build upon inclusive practice
- enabling pupils to benefit from the support structures set up within each of the environments
- developing parental satisfaction and support.

Establishing quality teaching and learning environments ‘fit for purpose’

A mainstream-special school partnership should be encouraged to accept responsibility for developing a more effective continuous professional development system which prepares and equips staff with the knowledge, skills and expertise to address the process of inclusion more confidently and competently! Together, we must develop quality teaching and learning environments with high expectations for all pupils, staff members and parents alike!
Special school and mainstream school staff are hands-on practitioners who, between them, have the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise to work with pupils with learning disabilities, and can learn further from each other about what works best within their respective settings. It is essential, therefore, to build an effective CPD system around this productive partnership. We must develop an effective and appropriate inclusion advisory service based on existing best practice and training needs, reflecting the range of experiences and expertise currently available in our special schools.

Specific areas of support which can be shared with mainstream schools are, among others, the development of individual education plans, target setting, assessment and recording of individual learning needs as well as monitoring the effectiveness of provision.

**Developing more effective collaborative practices and partnerships between schools as a pre-requisite for collaborative partnerships with other agencies**

All schools should develop collaborative partnerships with one another to fully realise the range of services that they can provide to support inclusion.

Special schools have also had significant experiences in working in collaborative partnerships with statutory and voluntary bodies. They can share their experiences with mainstream colleagues by clustering with them to discuss some of the following areas which are often challenging, but which are essential to the promotion of positive inclusive practices:

- leading and managing teams
- collaborative working and planning with other professionals and agencies
- developing inclusive practices with the local community
- developing parental partnerships.

**Developing more effective curriculum planning, delivery and organisation for individual pupils within a collaborative network of schools**

Mainstream schools have built up extensive and considerable expertise in organising and managing the curriculum, but may struggle to provide for the needs of pupils with severe developmental delay. Special school staff can help in this and are particularly experienced at:
• curriculum flexibility, access and adaptability
• use of ICT programmes and devices to enhance curriculum access
• breaking a task into sequential component parts
• developing age-appropriate and interest-related materials
• developing specialised resources, e.g. for autism
• physical education (PE) for SLD pupils
• creative arts for SLD pupils
• occupational study programmes
• employability programmes
• social and life skills programmes
• functional literacy and numeracy programmes
• training programmes for independent travel
• the multi-sensory curriculum.

Come on everyone! The gauntlet has been thrown! The expertise is there. Develop a successful partnership with your local special school or unit and together we can use our expertise to make all our schools more inclusive. With this commitment, we will continue to enhance our own capabilities to meet the needs of all pupils.

**Key learning points from the principal’s story**

- Foster links with mainstream neighbours
- Audit your school’s level of experience and expertise
- Develop the capacity to support other schools
- Remember we are all learning together
5.2 Shannon’s story (aged 16): exploring the world of work

Shannon is on the autistic spectrum and attends a school for pupils with Severe (NI) Learning Difficulties (SLD). Shannon transferred from the Moderate (NI) Learning Difficulties sector last year and has just moved into the leavers’ department (sixth form). Shannon is one of six pupils with ASD in this department. Shannon and the teacher in her new class had only communicated in the past about her excellent drawings or to greet each other in passing.

The teacher managed on the third attempt to chat to Shannon, though she did not ask her what she would like to do after she left this school in case it caused her undue anxiety. She initiated the conversation by asking what she liked best about school.

Shannon highlighted the fact that she liked her friends, going into detail about their different personalities and listing them in an analytical way. The teacher fast-forwarded to the main question; she asked what she wanted to do in the future, and nearly brought the conversation to an abrupt end when Shannon stated, ‘Don’t you know? I’m a now girl. I do not think about the future.’ She continued to stare intently at the teacher with arms folded.

The teacher mentally struggled to restructure the question in order to rescue the conversation and move on. Shannon declared that her mother had said that she could be a chambermaid but Shannon added disdainfully that she did not want to clean up other people’s dirt. In response to the question as to what did interest her, she said she was very worried about birds dying of bird flu. The teacher linked this interest to having an interest in animals and referred to jobs such as dog walking or grooming. This idea was met with total disdain. Her arms remained folded and her stare intensified. She stated that she had ‘obsessive compulsive disorder’.

The Sixth Form Department Head joined in and stressed that Shannon was working on this issue and was doing very well. Shannon added that it was all part of her Asperger’s Syndrome. She recited that this meant that she had to work hard at not being obsessive, being sociable, listening to others and waiting and listening while others talked. The bell rang for dinner and, at this, Shannon concluded that this was why she was a ‘now girl’.

What the teacher / school did to help Shannon

The school maintains a leavers’ programme which provides opportunities for the pupils to develop their personal and interpersonal skills as well as aptitudes considered essential for participation in personal, social and economic life in the community today.

- Shannon was given access to a broad and relevant practical programme and an overall individual programme was created based on an assessment of her needs, particularly her anxieties and her issues around travelling alone.
The school made contact with the relevant health authority to support Shannon’s transfer from school and the teacher secured a work-experience programme supported by the employment support officer.

Shannon’s first job contract is planned within the school and involves the delivery of roll books from her sixth form department to the office, progressing to include external buildings on the school site. Her responsibilities are graded, structured and paced to suit her. Given that the school is committed to recycling, a further job opportunity in a conservation scheme is planned for Shannon.

Plans were also made for Shannon to attend the local Further and Higher Education College one day each week where she has chosen the option of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and is working towards gaining an accreditation.

Shannon is also participating in the school’s Occupational Studies Programme which is a work-related accredited programme, and can be continued after she leaves the school.

The school is also piloting an Education for Employability Programme providing Shannon with the opportunity to add to her career portfolio.

Team Enterprise is another school programme designed to equip Shannon with ‘real world’ work skills, by learning to design, make and sell decorative wooden products.

In her final year, Shannon will have ‘an evening’ when she will receive a Record of Achievements portfolio, celebrating her achievements with her family and friends. No doubt Shannon will have had many experiences and will receive a unique and interesting portfolio of achievements, when her time comes. All those who have met her on the way will hold very special memories and will be the richer for the experience.

**Key learning points from Shannon’s story**

- Leaving school will be stressful for pupils and parents alike
- Planning should begin well in advance
- Involving key people is the way to best practice
- Accessing the support of the careers service and the local FE college is helpful
- Assessing the pupil’s interests and abilities is very important
- Thinking about health and safety issues will give a sense of security to both the pupil and the parents
- A school leavers’ programme should focus on lifelong learning
- It is important to celebrate achievement
5.3 Two systems: co-ordination of SEN at whole-school level

5.3.1 Co-ordination of SEN in schools in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (1998) requires every school to designate a teacher to take the on role of SENCO.

Responsibilities associated with this role are:

- the day-to-day operation of the school’s Special Educational Needs (SEN) policy
- to maintain the school’s SEN register and SEN records
- to co-ordinate provision for pupils with SEN
- to support and advise other teachers
- to liaise with parents
- to identify and contribute to the in-service training needs of staff
- to liaise with external agencies.

In practice, this can be broken down further as:

- ensuring the school adheres to procedures as specified in the Code of Practice
- keeping the principal (and hence the Board of Governors of the school) informed of the needs of pupils on the SEN register
- liaising with the educational psychologist
- arranging referrals of pupils for further assessment
- arranging the Annual Reviews of pupils with SEN statements
- encouraging teachers to meet the needs of pupils with SEN within the classroom
- supporting teachers in the writing of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for pupils on the SEN register
- ensuring provision, as identified in SEN statements and IEPs, is made for the pupils on a daily basis in the classroom
- supporting classroom assistants working with pupils who have special needs
- in some cases, taking responsibility for the school’s resource budget for special needs
- liaising with staff of other schools (for pupils who are transferring).
**Primary schools**
In most schools, a classroom teacher takes the role of the SENCO. The current administrative burden is such that it is helpful if schools recognise this and provide additional non-contact time for the SENCO to carry out these responsibilities. It is also advisable for the SENCO to be a member of the school’s Senior Management Team, ensuring the needs of SEN pupils are incorporated into the general running of the school. A supportive principal will also arrange the timetable so that additional time is made available for the SENCO to meet with classroom teachers at key points in the year. This will enable the staff to share concerns and information about the pupils, ensuring their needs are adequately met. The effective education of pupils with special needs remains the responsibility of the class teacher.

Some schools are able to free up the SENCO for part of the school week in order to teach pupils with additional needs on a regular basis.

A few schools are able to employ a SENCO in a full-time post. This enables the SENCO to develop a working relationship with many of the pupils with SEN, working with them, either in the classroom alongside the teacher, or on a withdrawal basis. A greater understanding of their needs is therefore achieved, making liaison with parents and outside agencies more effective.

**Post-primary schools**
The increased numbers of teaching staff in the post-primary setting makes the SENCO’s task of liaising on a regular basis with individual teachers far more difficult to achieve. Much thought and organisation is required to ensure teachers are kept informed of the individual needs of pupils.

The age of the pupils and the increasing social and emotional demands placed on teenagers can result in more complex special needs.

The SENCO:
- will usually take responsibility for the timetabling of classroom assistants to ensure effective support is maintained
- liaises primarily with the mathematics and English staff in the setting of targets and production of IEPs
- may run withdrawal groups for children who have difficulties accessing the curriculum
- has, primarily, an organisational role
- is a point of contact for parents with pupils on the SEN register
- has a budget for SEN resources.
Special schools
The organisation of a special school is obviously quite different to the mainstream setting, but the designation of a SENCO is still legally required. In reality, every teacher in a special school is a special needs co-ordinator.

All pupils should have Statements of Special Educational Need. Class teachers are responsible for producing IEPs.

Special needs may be co-ordinated by an Intensive Support team. This will include specialist co-ordinators with expertise in behaviour, autistic spectrum disorders, multi-sensory needs etc. Regular support is provided by educational psychologists, clinical psychologists, disability social workers and nurse therapists. Most schools have a resident speech and language therapist (SLT), occupational therapist (OT) and physiotherapist working with the pupils on a regular basis.

Regular meetings are held to review the needs of the pupils. These may include input from parents. Whilst a pupil’s needs are regularly reviewed, an Annual Review is a statutory requirement where schools provide official feedback to the Education Board.

5.3.2 Co-ordination of SEN in schools in the Republic of Ireland
In the Republic of Ireland, the role of the SENCO does not formally exist. While the primary responsibility for all pupils rests with class teachers, schools have been encouraged to adopt a whole-school approach to meeting special educational needs. While responsibility for meeting the needs of all pupils in the school lies with the principal and the board of management, organisational duties in the area of special educational needs may be delegated to a specific teacher.

Under the General Allocation Scheme, schools receive an allocation of support-teaching personnel in line with the size and type of school. The General Allocation Scheme is designed to ensure that all schools have enough resource teaching hours to meet the immediate needs of pupils who require learning-support and those whose special educational needs are in the high-incidence category. It reflects the fact that most schools would have children with these needs. As pupils whose special educational needs are in the low-incidence category are not found in every school, individual resource applications for these pupils are made.

A team approach
The formation of special education support teams in individual schools or across clusters of schools was advocated in 2003. The teams should consist of learning-support and resource teachers who are allocated on behalf of individual pupils, with assistance from other specialist teachers. Members of the support team should collaborate closely with principals and assist class teachers in the planning and delivery of education provision for pupils with special educational needs. Interventions with pupils may be undertaken by either a learning-support / resource
teacher or a resource teacher, depending on the needs of the pupils in question. Both class teachers and members of special education support teams may avail of additional support from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Council for Special Education, the Visiting Teacher Service, the Special Education Support Service, the Primary Curriculum Support Programme, and the School Development Planning Service.

**Staged approach – Republic of Ireland**

The staged approach consists of three stages:

Stage 1 – The class teacher draws up a short, simple plan for extra help to be implemented within the normal classroom setting. If concern remains after a number of reviews and adaptations to the plan, the special education support team or the learning-support / resource teacher in the school may be consulted.

Stage 2 – If intervention is considered necessary at Stage 2, then the pupil may be referred to the learning-support / resource teacher, with parents’ permission, for further diagnostic testing. If supplementary teaching is deemed beneficial, this can be arranged. The parents and the class teacher should be involved with the learning-support / resource teacher in drawing up the learning programme, which would include appropriate interventions for implementation in the home, in the classroom, and during supplementary teaching.

Stage 3 – Some pupils who continue to present with significant learning needs will require more intensive intervention at Stage 3. The school may formally request a consultation and, where appropriate, an assessment of need from a specialist outside the school, e.g. psychologists, paediatricians, speech and language therapists. In the case of pupils identified at an early age as having very significant special educational needs, intervention at Stage 3 will be necessary on their entry to school.

**Code of Practice – Northern Ireland**

In Northern Ireland, the Code of Practice governs the identification and organisation of additional support and intervention for pupils with special needs. There are five stages in the Code of Practice (COP) and parents must be kept informed at all stages and agree to the suggested course of action.

Stage 1 – The class teacher identifies pupils with special needs. The pupil’s needs are discussed with the SENCO. The pupil’s name is then placed on the special needs register and an education plan is designed. The class teacher differentiates the curriculum to address the pupil’s needs.

Stage 2 – The pupil will move to Stage 2 of the COP if there is little or no progress at Stage 1. The pupil will receive additional support from within the school resources, e.g. support from the special needs teacher.
Stage 3 – Continued lack of progress, despite additional support, will result in the pupil moving to Stage 3, where the school refers the pupil to outside agencies, e.g. educational psychology and Board Support Services.

Stage 4 – Statutory Assessment. If the interventions put in place have not met the pupil’s needs and the pupil is still experiencing significant difficulties, then a statutory assessment would be initiated. This involves the Special Education Section of the ELB seeking advice from the pupil’s parents, school, educational psychologist and the designated medical officer in order to determine the pupil’s special educational needs. This is a legal procedure bound by specific time limits.

Stage 5 – At this stage of the COP, the pupil has a Statement of Special Educational Needs which identifies specific difficulties and the resources / support the ELB is putting in place. This may mean a change of school placement.

A personal view
For the majority of schools, the steps as outlined above may seem like a large and frightening jump forward from the way they are currently working with pupils. As a recently appointed SENCO in a mainstream primary school, I have been faced with a steep learning curve, particularly in relation to the number of pupils on the autistic spectrum whom we are supporting in our classrooms. I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity of attending a number of awareness-raising sessions which have been run by the local ELB and various support agencies and charities. This has been extremely helpful in enabling me to support both the pupils and my colleagues in school.

The following points are key ways I feel the SENCO can assist the inclusion of pupils on the autistic spectrum:

**Liaison with parents**
The individual needs of children can vary considerably and it should be acknowledged that parents have an understanding of their child which other experts may not have. The support of parents is important for all pupils to have an effective education but a productive working relationship with parents of pupils on the autistic spectrum is essential.

Class teachers are very busy people, with many pupils to support. With the best will in the world, they will not always have additional time to spend with parents outside of regular parent interviews. While it is vital that class teachers are not excluded from the picture, the SENCO can provide an additional ear to parents when situations occur which are impacting on their child’s ability to cope in school. As communication difficulties constitute one of the triad of impairments, pupils are not always able to express their concerns to their teachers. They can often hold themselves together emotionally in school, but it is at home that these stresses manifest themselves. Awareness of the issues means that many problems can be
resolved in the classroom. The SENCO can then feed back to teachers and classroom assistants at an appropriate time, exploring the implementation of strategies that may be beneficial.

**Liaison with staff**
While all teachers will discuss the needs of individual pupils when passing their class on to the next teacher, the SENCO is able to have an overview of the pupil’s needs.

A new teacher may be struggling to manage a pupil’s difficulties, but being aware of the progress that the pupil has made in a particular area, e.g. coping with changes of routine, may help to put current difficulties in perspective. Strategies that have worked in previous years may need to be revisited. A strategy that a teacher has found to work with one pupil may be helpful to another teacher experiencing similar difficulties.

The SENCO is able to draw teachers’ attention to strategies that have been suggested in psychology reports. The SENCO may have access to a bank of resources that can provide support for teachers, classroom assistants and pupils. An overall view of the pupil’s needs means that specific resources can be ordered to support pupils as they progress. The experience of the SENCO can be helpful to teachers in setting appropriate targets for pupils.

Often the difficulties the pupils have will manifest themselves in unstructured and social settings such as the playground or dinner hall. Often these times fall beyond the remit of the class teacher. The SENCO can liaise with supervisory staff to ensure they are aware of pupils’ needs and difficulties.

**Supporting pupils**
It is very helpful if the SENCO has the opportunity to get to know the pupil on a personal level. If the structure of the school allows for this, the SENCO can provide a listening ear for any pupil who is having difficulties coping with a situation in school. This is perhaps more pertinent for older pupils.

Pupils on the autistic spectrum will benefit from specific social skills training. While general issues can be tackled in class through the use of circle time and work on the social and moral aspects of the curriculum, some pupils may require personal work on developing and maintaining friendships or appropriate ways of communicating with adults in school. They may have a rigid interpretation of rules, being inclined to ‘police’ other pupils inappropriately in games when they feel they have broken the rules. Playground games tend to be very fluid in nature. Pupils may have difficulty keeping up with these changes of direction and can give up, leaving them isolated and unsure of how to access the fun others seem to be having. Their difficulties with imaginative play can also have a big impact, particularly in primary schools.
Coping with losing and being a member of a team are issues that often cause conflict in the playground and PE sessions. Football is not easy! The use of role-play in structured settings with peers, the rehearsal of favourite games or group rule-setting can be helpful in overcoming difficulties. It may also be helpful to set up social structures to support pupils through a circle of friends or playground buddies.

I feel schools should give careful consideration, through consultation with parents, to raising awareness of the difficulties ASD pupils may have, e.g. coping with situations they find stressful, managing anger, feeling left out. Pupils can often offer the most appropriate support to each other.

The SENCO can also have a role in ensuring the school’s discipline procedures take account of the needs of pupils with ASD. Systems that incorporate visual warnings / rewards can be very effective. Pupils may need time to be spent with them working through social conflict situations using social stories or comic strips. This may need to involve pupils from different classes / year groups. This can be time-consuming and is best carried out by someone who has an awareness of the pupils’ difficulties.

Pupils with ASD can have difficulty generalising skills. Supporting the development of social skills in this way can go a long way to preventing problems in the playground. While all pupils need time to let off steam, for some pupils with ASD, break time can be the most stressful part of the day. The noise and lack of structure in the playground and the implicit social demands can be too much. Encouraging pupils to participate in lunchtime clubs which are structured or providing an indoor activity, such as construction play for a small group of peer’s a few times a week may be more beneficial in providing ‘downtime’ and developing friendships. Even the opportunity to stay inside and read a book on occasions may be more relaxing for the pupil.

Another way we have found of relieving the stresses pupils with ASD have in school is the provision of a ‘chill-out zone’. This is a space pupils can use when the stresses of the classroom become too much. The constant social interaction required in class can become too much and the provision of an acceptable place to escape to can prevent serious ‘meltdowns’ occurring. This needs to be carefully regulated by the class teacher and a time limit given. (The use of a ‘visual’ such as a sand timer, works well.) It may be helpful if this provision is available to all pupils and not seen to be only for a specific pupil. Hence, pupils who are upset by playground conflicts, events at home etc. can also be given a period of time out. The space, ideally, needs to be private, calm and soothing – a cordoned-off corner of a resource area or even a corner of a classroom with headphones and soothing music etc. Younger pupils could be taken there by a classroom assistant when concentration wavers too much and they are in danger of disrupting the rest of the class. Often a walk around a quiet playground can do equally well.
Liaising with outside agencies
A lot of my time is spent making phone calls — the key person being the educational psychologist. Schools mostly have designated psychologists and developing a good working relationship is invaluable. Unfortunately, their time is limited, they are overstretched and the number of referrals schools can make is usually restricted. It is important for the SENCO to ensure that the psychologist is kept up-to-date on the school’s concerns over individual pupils. This is usually done through consultations once a term. It is also important for the SENCO to keep parents up-to-date on the provision that may be available to their child, particularly when moving towards statutory provision.

Most ELBs operate an Autistic Spectrum Advice Service. This is available for children with ASD who have been referred via the educational psychologist. The team who provides this service has a broad range of experience and can be very helpful in suggesting strategies for teachers to incorporate into their classroom management.
SECTION 6 Assisting Inclusion: teaching tips

6.1 Helpful hints for teachers

The principal has just informed you that a new pupil will be starting in your class next week and the pupil has ASD. You know nothing! Here are some suggestions on how to survive:

- Don’t panic! Don’t delay in finding out as much as possible about the pupil and the difficulties being experienced. Collaborate with your SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) or other relevant personnel in the school.
- Try to make contact with the previous teacher for a good chat if the pupil is transferring from another school. It may be worth considering trying to visit the pupil in the current school setting, if this is at all feasible.
- Request any paperwork available about the pupil and read it! Be aware that the pupil may be entitled to additional classroom assistance or outreach support. An educational psychologist’s report may suggest strategies you can employ. Try and get hold of the pupil’s current educational plan.
- Ask whether there are any resources in school giving information about ASD but don’t try to read it all. It may be better to get to know the child first, as not everything will be relevant to your pupil.
- Make contact with another local school if you know it has pupils with ASD. You should find some other helpful teacher to talk to.
- Use the Internet, as there are many good websites and teacher support networks which you may find helpful (see Contacts – Appendix 3).
- Find out if there are any support structures for children with ASD in your area.
- Ensure other staff who will be coming into contact with the pupil are aware of possible difficulties.

Building a relationship with parents

- Make contact with the child’s parents, as they know their child better than you do.
- Invite the parents and the pupil to meet you, to see the classroom and look around the school when the other pupils have gone home. This will make a big difference in helping to acclimatise the new pupil.
- Give the pupil photos of the classroom and key places around the school to take home and look at. If you can, give the parents a list of the pupils’ names so that they can chat to their child meaningfully at home. Maybe even identify who the new pupil will be sitting next to or who you will ask to look after them for the first week or so – a classroom buddy.
● Find out what the pupil’s interests are. Many pupils with ASD will have an area of special interest. Try to incorporate this into a lesson fairly soon to give the pupil a safe area to talk about to the rest of the class.

Planning your first week

● Consider talking to the other pupils before the new pupil starts school. It may be helpful for them to know a little about difficulties the new pupil may have, e.g. making friends, joining your game, understanding rules etc.

● At the beginning, try to put as little pressure as possible on the new pupil and give plenty of support.

● Consider using a visual timetable for each day so the new pupil knows what to expect. Use picture symbols or words depending on the pupil’s age and abilities. Transitioning from one activity to another or from place to place may be hard to cope with at first.

● Consider phasing the new pupil into the playground. Accompany him / her yourself for the first day and introduce him / her to the lunchtime supervisors and maybe allocate a specific person to keep an eye on the new pupil.

● The noisy lunch area may be very stressful to deal with. Consider letting the new pupil go early with another child to avoid having to queue.

● Consider suggesting to the parents that their child attends for half days initially. It may be helpful until everything becomes more familiar to the pupil.

● Establish a home / school diary to keep parents informed so they can communicate more easily with their child at the end of the day. Try and keep this positive and note things the pupil has done that day.

● Keep work tasks short and achievable. The pupil may not cope with a long explanation. You may need to explain tasks on a one-to-one basis after your initial class explanation. Break the task into manageable sections. The pupil may have difficulty getting started on a task and may be very afraid of failing. Often pupils with ASD have a perfectionist attitude. Try and encourage independence as soon as possible, but in a manageable way.

● Consider a visual incentive scheme if necessary to help build the pupil’s self-esteem, e.g, sticker chart, token system.

● Use as many visual cues as possible during your lessons. Pupils with ASD find too much talking very hard to process.

● If the new pupil is finding it difficult to answer questions in class, model responses. Don’t ask the new pupil first. Ask the pupil privately and give plenty of praise, whatever the response.
- The pupil may have difficulty generalising instructions. Use the pupil’s name frequently to help him/her understand what it is you want done.
- Consider giving the new pupil frequent breaks from work or the noisy classroom by allocating jobs or sending on messages with another pupil.
- If a situation becomes stressful, try to arrange a quiet place for the pupil to go to for a specified period to calm down. Maybe arrange a visual signal which can be given to you if a break is needed.
- If any conflicts arise, allow plenty of time for the pupil to calm down before trying to discuss what happened.
- It may be helpful to use a comic strip format for discussing problems – draw simple stick diagrams with speech/think bubbles to go over what happened, what people said and what they were thinking.
- If the pupil is having difficulty coping with a particular situation e.g. tidying up, going to assembly, etc., consider writing a simple social story (see section on social stories, section 6.3).
- Consider environmental factors which may be making it hard for the pupil to concentrate due to sensory issues, e.g. noise levels, bright lights, visual distractions from wall displays, the movement of other pupils.

### 6.2 Helpful hints for special needs assistants / classroom assistants

SNAs/CAs should be aware of the pupils’ needs and problems. These may include:

- possible problems with organisation
- difficulties with time management
- rigidity in thinking
- problems with sharing
- poor listening skills
- problems with participating in a group
- interrupting or speaking out of turn
- being indifferent to how others feel.

SNAs/CAs need to recognise that:

- each pupil is unique and will have individual problems, strengths and weaknesses
- they should maintain a safe and appropriate working environment
- they should provide academic or practical assistance as required by the teacher
- they should not try to deal with issues while the pupil is frustrated, angry or upset
- it may be necessary to move the pupil from the classroom to a quiet area if the pupil is finding it difficult to cope.
SNAs / CAs should:

- encourage pupils to stay on task, to work independently and be confident of their own ability
- encourage pupils to adhere to school rules and report breaches of discipline to the teacher (pupils with ASD respond well to praise)
- have a ready supply of Post-it notes for unobtrusive communication with pupils
- check that the pupil understands the set tasks and any homework that is given. They may need to structure tasks into a series of steps.
6.3 Social stories

‘Social stories are short, written stories, originally intended for children with autism, to help understand a small part of their social world and behave appropriately within it. Each social story provides a child with clear, concise and accurate information about what is happening in a specific social situation, outlining both why it is happening and what a typical response might be’. (Smith, Caroline, ‘Writing and Developing Social Stories’, 2003)

6.3.1 Social story 1

Louise started school when she was four years old. She is in an ASD-specific class. There are six children in the class and four special needs assistants (SNAs). Louise presents with very challenging behaviour and requires rigid structures and routines in the classroom to help her cope in the environment. She uses a written schedule. Academically she is at an age-appropriate level. Louise loves social outings but unless structures and visual cues are in place, she finds it difficult to cope.

What the teacher / school did

When I first took Louise to ‘The Diner’ I observed the following problems:

- She only wanted chicken curry, rice and chips, nothing else would do!
- She wanted to sit in a particular seat (in view of the television).
- She would stand and wait with her tray in her hand at the counter while the food was being cooked. She refused to sit down and demanded her food from the waitress and chef.

These behaviours occurred each time we visited ‘The Diner’. Negative reinforcement had had no success, e.g. ‘if you don’t sit down, you will have to go back to school’. As I was using social stories to address other behaviours, I thought I would use this approach to address the problems Louise was having.

The first step was to sit down and write the general rules I felt that Louise should adhere to when in ‘The Diner’.

I used a board marker to present the rules visually.

I used a combination of written words and symbols as Louise can read but also enjoys the visual cues of the symbol.

I took Louise to a quiet corner in the classroom and we read through the story. She enjoyed the story and seemed to accept the rules as presented to her.
Social Story 1

Going to ‘The Diner’

When I go to The Diner I must choose a table that no one is sitting at.

Sometimes the food I want is not on the menu and I must choose another dinner.

When I place my order I must sit and wait for my food.
I must wait until everybody has finished their food.

I will take my money to the till with an adult and pay for my food.

Everybody is happy when I am good in The Diner.
The following week when we went up to ‘The Diner’, Louise, for the first time, chose fish and chips from the menu. She waited (albeit impatiently) at the table for her food to be cooked. We noticed a marked improvement in her behaviour. Since the social story has been introduced, Louise’s choices now include a wider variety of food e.g. chicken and chips, lasagne, chips and coleslaw.

Over the next three weeks, two problems arose. On one occasion there was no menu at our table, so Louise walked over to another table and took the menu from under a woman’s plate. I verbally corrected her for this, but I had to revise the social story and include, ‘If there is no menu at my table, I must ask another person if I can borrow their menu’.

On another occasion, a gentleman asked to borrow a menu from our table. I gave it to him as we had ordered our meal. Louise got very upset and kept shouting, ‘Are you finished with my menu?’ I realised that although the social story worked well in this scenario, I needed to constantly monitor it and change it accordingly.

**Special needs assistant’s story**

When we would visit ‘The Diner’ as a class group, Louise had difficulty waiting for her turn to order. She also had difficulty waiting for her food to be cooked and in choosing different meals, as she tended to opt for the same thing every time. Since the introduction of the social story, she is now willing to wait her turn and sit quietly while her food is being prepared. She will now choose different food from the menu. I thought she was doing brilliantly until recently. While on a visit to ‘The Diner’, a man came over to her table and asked to look at the menu (which she had sitting in front of her). As she had placed her order for her dinner, the teacher said, ‘Yes.’ Louise got very annoyed by this and kept referring to it as ‘her menu’. She kept looking towards the man to see if he had finished with it. The social story had to be changed to include a scenario like this.

**Parent’s story**

Louise was always difficult to take to a restaurant. She was very impatient and always wanted her food right away. If she didn’t get her food when she wanted it, she would start to cry and scream. Louise loves chicken curry, rice and chips and she would always request this when in a restaurant. We didn’t realise the problem that this would cause until, one day, when this was not on the menu, Louise would not settle for any other food and started to cry. She eventually accepted chips. Louise’s behaviour has improved at the restaurant and she will now wait for the food. Before we go to the restaurant we now say, ‘If there is no chicken curry on the menu you will have to choose something else.’ She does agree, and most of the time this is not a problem anymore. I give her money and she will come up and pay for her food when the meal is over.
Staff at ‘The Diner’
I found it difficult when the class came to ‘The Diner’ to begin with. When the young girl would shout and scream, I didn’t know what to do. I would ask the chef to have the children’s meals ready as quickly as possible, as I knew they found it difficult to wait. I soon realised that it was easier for me to take the orders from the table than to have them come to the counter, as they would take some time deciding and then the queue would build up. The children now wear uniforms and I find this helps, as I can identify them as having special needs. I can have tables joined together, give them longer time to choose their food and, if there is screaming, I don’t pass any remarks. I feel that the class has settled in ‘The Diner’ and are well behaved.

Targets for visiting ‘The Diner’
These are the targets as outlined in Louise’s IEP.

Targets year 1
- To choose a table at which no one is sitting
- To wait at her table for food (not at counter)
- To choose a meal that is on the menu
- To wait until everyone has finished his / her meal
- To pay for food at the till when finished her meal

Targets for year 2
- To borrow a menu from another table if there is no menu at her table
6.3.2 Social story 2

Transitioning to a new school can be a difficult time for young pupils with ASD. It could be a move from special to mainstream, mainstream to special or primary to secondary.

With this in mind, the following story was written by a member of the Education Board’s Support Service. It has eased the transition for several pupils who have moved to our school.

My name is ........................................................................................................................................

Soon school will stop for the summer holidays.

........................................................................................................................................... will tell me when this will be.

For ................................................... weeks I will not go to school.

........................................................................................................................................... will tell me when the
holidays have finished and when school will start.

When it is time to start school I will be going to a different school.

My new school is called ..................................................................................................................

I will have a new teacher too.

My new teacher will be called ........................................................................................................

The name of my new classroom will be .....................................................................................

........................................................................................................................................... will buy me a new school uniform.

This is a special uniform for my new school. Most of the other boys and girls in my new school will wear this special uniform.

It can be fun to have a school uniform.
When I start my new school I will meet new friends. 

................................................................. ................................................................. will tell me the names of the boys and girls in my new class. It is good to meet new boys and girls.

................................................................. ................................................................. will teach me some interesting things. Most boys and girls like the teacher to show them new things. It is good to learn new things.

This can be fun.

At the end of my first day at my new school, my teacher will tell the other children and me when it is time to go home. I will see ................................................................. ................................................................. and the other children the next day.

When I see my mummy and daddy I can tell them all about my new school. Mummy and Daddy will be pleased to hear all about my new school.

It can be fun to go to a new school.

The above story is a template which is useful in a variety of settings and especially when customised for individuals. It is clear and simple in its presentation and the visual format (we often include photographs) is particularly valuable, as our pupils often have a difficult time understanding most of the verbal information presented to them.
Appendix 1

Steering Committee – SEN Cross-Border Professional Exchange Programme

John Hunter, Department of Education, Northern Ireland

Breandán Ó Murchú, Department of Education and Science

Susan Carnson, Department of Education, Northern Ireland

Jimmy Malone, Department of Education and Science (to January 2005)

Carmel Reilly, Department of Education and Science (to June 2005)

Niall McLoughlin, Department of Education and Science

Siobhán Fields, Department of Education and Science

Michael Travers, Department of Education and Science

Marina Ní Threasaigh, Department of Education and Science

Joan Crowley O’Sullivan, Special Education Support Service

Seamus McDermott, Monaghan Education Centre

Joan Walshe, National Educational Psychological Service

Maureen Costello, National Educational Psychological Service

Lynda Shields, Psychological Services, Southern Educational and Library Board

Eugene Toolan, St Angela’s College, Sligo

Stuart Rooney, Psychological Services, Southern Education and Library (to February 2005)
Resources


**Spacekraft** – sensory resources  
Titus House  
29 Saltaire Road  
Shipley  
West Yorkshire  
BD18 3HH  
Tel 01274 531966  
www.spacekraft.co.uk

**Incentive Plus** – resources to promote social, emotional and behavioural skills  
Unit 6 Fernfield Farm  
Whaddon Road  
Little Horwood  
Milton Keynes  
MK17 OPS  
Tel 01908 526120  
www.incentiveplus.co.uk

**Harcourt Assessment** – educational assessment and intervention for learning support  
Procter House  
1 Procter Street  
London  
WC1V 6EU  
www.harcourt-uk.com

**DTP** – special needs guides for teachers and classroom assistants  
Desktop Publications Ltd  
11 Chapel Court  
Brigg  
DN20 8JZ  
Tel 01652 656552  
www.desktoppublications.com

**Rompa** – Sensory equipment  
Goyt Side Road  
Chesterfield  
Derbyshire  
S40 2PH  
Tel +44 1 246 211777  
www.rompa.com
**Winslow** – special needs resources  
Goyt Side Road  
Chesterfield  
Derbyshire  
S40 2PH  
Tel +44 1 246 210470  
www.winslow-cat.com

**Jenny Mosley & Positive Press**  
Circle Time Resources  
28A Gloucester Road  
Trowbridge  
BA14 OAA  
Tel +44 1 225 767157  
www.circle-time.co.uk

**REMI** – Educational Software  
Great Western House  
Langport  
Somerset  
TA10 9YU  
England  
Tel +44 1 458 254700  
www.r-e-m.co.uk

**Boardmaker**  
A computer programme for making visual resources  
Publisher : Mayer-Johnson

**Writing with Symbols**  
A computer programme  
Writing with Symbols 2000 is a language, literacy and communication tool that uses symbols, speech and activities to help anyone read and write. It is also useful for making visual resources.  
Publisher : Widgit
Appendix 3

Contacts

Some Useful Addresses North and South

Mr Enda Galligan
Development Officer Autism Services
HSE North East
Local Health Care Unit
Rooskey
Monaghan
PH: 00353 47 30400

Disability Team
HSE North East
Local Health Care Unit
Rooskey
Monaghan
PH: 00353 47 30400

National Education Psychological Service
24 / 27 North Frederick Street
Dublin 1
PH: 00353 1 8892700

PAPA
PAPA Resource Centre
Knockbracken Healthcare Park
Saintfield Road
Belfast
BT8 8BH
PH: +44 28 9040 1729

National Autistic Society
393 City Road,
London
EC1V 1NG
PH: 0044 20 7833 2299

Special Education Support Services
Cork Education Centre
The Rectory
Western Road Cork
PH: 00 353 21 4254241
e-mail:info@sess.ie
Department of Education and Science
Special Education Section
Cornamaddy
Athlone
Co. Westmeath
PH: 00353 1 8734700

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
24 Merrion Square
Dublin 2
PH: 00353 1 6617 177
e-mail: ncca@educ.irlgov.ie

The Irish Society for Autism
Unity Building
16/17 Lower O’Connell Street
Dublin 1
PH: 00353 1 8744684

For addresses of further ASD Support Services, refer to Taskforce booklets

Copy of report available from Government Publications, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2
## Websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTO Downloads</td>
<td><a href="http://www.into.ie">www.into.ie</a></td>
<td>INTO has a comprehensive download section, and in this there is a dedicated special education element. Teachers are also encouraged to contribute their own resources to share with colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to Read at Starfall</td>
<td><a href="http://www.starfall.com">www.starfall.com</a></td>
<td>An excellent site for online reading lessons; starting with c-v-c words in Zac the Rat. Higher levels of ability also catered for. Very colourful and interactive for children. Check out the 'Alphabet' movie!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funschool</td>
<td><a href="http://www.funschool.com">www.funschool.com</a></td>
<td>Hundreds of interactive educational games and activities for children, sorted by grade level. Also has printable worksheets and activities, and downloadable programs. Another excellent site for children of all ages and abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Ideas</td>
<td><a href="http://www.teachingideas.co.uk">www.teachingideas.co.uk</a></td>
<td>A UK site for primary teachers, sorted by subject. The time-filler ideas are quite useful. Its sister site ‘More Teaching Ideas’ has a special needs ideas section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Society for Autism</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iol.ie">www.iol.ie</a></td>
<td>This is a good starting point for finding out about ASD, with facts, symptoms and a list of schools providing services for children with ASD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Europe</td>
<td><a href="http://www.autismeurope.org">www.autismeurope.org</a></td>
<td>An umbrella group for ASD organisations across Europe. It produces a journal called Link and holds an annual conference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and Professionals &amp; Autism</td>
<td><a href="http://www.autismni.org">www.autismni.org</a></td>
<td>PAPA is the Northern Ireland charity for Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome. It has a detailed list of resources for sale, and many links to other ASD sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Address</td>
<td>Comments</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASPIRE</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aspire-irl.org">www.aspire-irl.org</a></td>
<td>ASPIRE is the Asperger’s Syndrome Association of Ireland and this is a particularly good site. A list of upcoming events is updated regularly. Their events page is worth checking to see what's coming up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Online</td>
<td><a href="http://www.autismonline.org">www.autismonline.org</a></td>
<td>A parent-designed website on autism, with Picture Exchange (PECS) products featured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JaynaGirl</td>
<td><a href="http://jaynagirl.cwd-cragin.com/">http://jaynagirl.cwd-cragin.com/</a></td>
<td>This large website is designed by a parent of a girl who has ASD, AD/HD and Tourette's Syndrome. It features information on all of these categories, but it is also one of the better sites for information on PDD-NOS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACCH</td>
<td><a href="http://www.teacch.com/">www.teacch.com/</a></td>
<td>The TEACCH programme for children with ASD originated in North Carolina. It has become recognised in Ireland as a successful teaching approach in the field of ASD. This site outlines the structured approach in detail. Very useful for teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Attwood</td>
<td><a href="http://www.tonyattwood.com.au/">www.tonyattwood.com.au/</a></td>
<td>Tony Attwood is a recognised expert in the field of Asperger’s Syndrome. His videos and books are available to buy online, or you can access his 'Workshop Notes'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ouch – My Family and Autism</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/ouch/tvradio/autism/">www.bbc.co.uk/ouch/tvradio/autism/</a></td>
<td>Follow Luke Jackson and his family as they reveal to us what it's like growing up with ASD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health – ASD</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/conditions/autism1.shtml">www.bbc.co.uk/health/conditions/autism1.shtml</a></td>
<td>Index of information about ASD, including causes, symptoms and support organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diet and ASD</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/consumer/autism.shtml">www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/consumer/autism.shtml</a></td>
<td>People with ASD often are intolerant of gluten (a protein in four types of cereal) and casein.</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for the Study of Autism</td>
<td><a href="http://www.autism.org/">www.autism.org/</a></td>
<td>Check out the updated <a href="http://www.autism.tv">www.autism.tv</a> website – an internet portal for websites containing videos and audio files on ASD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASD Resources</td>
<td><a href="http://www.autism-resources.com/">www.autism-resources.com/</a></td>
<td>An index of online information and resources on ASD and Asperger's Syndrome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism therapy centre and clinic</td>
<td><a href="http://www.light-and-sound.co.uk/">www.light-and-sound.co.uk/</a></td>
<td>Autism, National Light and Sound Therapy Centre for ASD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treehouse</td>
<td><a href="http://www.treehouse.org.uk/">www.treehouse.org.uk/</a></td>
<td>This is a website for Treehouse, a national educational charity for children with ASD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Awareness</td>
<td><a href="http://www.autism-awareness.org.uk/">www.autism-awareness.org.uk/</a></td>
<td>This website was created for anyone who cares about increasing public understanding of ASD.</td>
</tr>
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Training Advice and Support

(A) The ASD Advisory and Support Service

The ASD Advisory and Support Service is provided by one of the education boards in the North of Ireland. In this ELB there are approximately 230 schools with a total school-aged population of around 63,500 children. The Board’s ASD Advisory and Support Service currently know of approximately 600 children with ASD.

Background Information

The support service for Autistic Spectrum Difficulties (ASD) was established in 1989. Specialist support was provided by one teacher for pupils who fell within the autistic spectrum. Initially, this support was mainly provided within schools for pupils with severe learning difficulties. The service now covers all areas of education with a notable increase in referrals of children and young adults within mainstream schools. Currently there are five teachers employed within this service, one of whom is specifically assigned to pre-school support.

General Aim

The purpose of the service is to provide a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach that will endeavour to produce positive change in the lives of pupils with ASD, their families and those professionals working with them.

Specific Aims

- To assess and identify how the deficits of ASD are inhibiting access to the curriculum.
- To advise on the preparation of an appropriate teaching / management programme that can be implemented within the school context.
- To help the person with autistic spectrum difficulties develop strategies to become as independent as possible within their environment.
- Through training and consultation, to seek to raise the awareness and understanding of parents and school staff with regard to ASD.

Implementation

Organisational Procedures

Referrals come to our ASD Advisory and Support Service through an educational psychologist or appropriate board officer.

At present the ELB area is divided into four sections. One teacher is allocated to each section and will receive most referrals for that area. The pre-school teacher works throughout the ELB.
Before support begins, consideration is given to the following:

- current demands on the service
- involvement of other support services, e.g. from the voluntary sector
- input from health trust personnel, e.g. speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, clinical psychologists
- parental concerns.

Support teachers will:

- liaise with other professionals involved through organised meetings and telephone calls
- attend regular meetings between the five support teachers
- attend regular meetings with the Officer for Special Educational Needs
- have regular liaison with the Senior (Specialist) Educational Psychologist ASD.

**How the Service Operates**

**Referrals**

**(i) School Age**
On receipt of a referral, the support teacher contacts the named school as soon as possible to ascertain the degree of the pupil’s difficulties and the level of support the school requires. Due to the increase in the number of referrals, the length of time of this process may vary.

Following initial contact, the support teacher meets with the class teacher, the Special Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in the school, and sometimes the principal to discuss concerns. At this time, the support teacher may give some information on ASD and general advice on strategies.

**(ii) Pre-school**
Nominations to the pre-school service are received from the Educational Psychology Service and local Health and Social Service Trusts. These nominations are considered by a panel at the Board and they are prioritised according to the following selection criteria:

- The child must not be older than four years; however, preference will be given to those in their pre-nursery year.
- The child must have a confirmed or probable diagnosis of ASD.
- The child must live within the geographical area covered by the South Eastern Education and Library Board.
- Parents must agree to participate in the programme and be willing to implement programmes within their home.

Preference will be given to children who are not receiving any other intensive intervention.
**Assessment**

Arrangements are made to complete individual assessments in order to evaluate:

- the deficits of ASD and their impact
- the strengths and interests of pupils
- the developmental level of ability for specific pupils.

Varieties of procedures are used, including observation, an interview with the pupil, if appropriate, and structured testing.

On completion of the assessment, the support teacher offers assistance to the SENCO, class teacher and classroom assistant in devising an appropriate teaching/management programme. If required, she will work directly with the pupil. The frequency and duration of this individual support will be based on consultation with the school, taking into account the individual needs of the pupil and the professional judgement of the service.

The service covers all levels of education, therefore, once a referral is received, the individual is supported throughout their school life. The service is accessible at any time to give support and advice.

The primary role of the service is to support the school and the child within the school environment. However, it is available for parents who wish to seek general advice and access training.

**Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation of each pupil’s progress is recorded and reviewed on a regular basis.

**Training**

(i) **Inter-agency Training**

The ASD Support Service offers inter-agency training to professionals, support staff and parents.

(ii) **Two-Day Training**

Components of the two-day training include:

- characteristics of ASD
- structured teaching
- integrating structure into the school or home to improve communication, understanding, independence and behaviour
- practical workshops on the elements of structure
(iii) One-Day Training
Components of the one-day training include:
- characteristics of Asperger’s Syndrome
- diagnosis
- comic strip conversation and social stories
- general strategies for intervention
- social communication

(iv) Five Day TEACCH Course
This training is provided in collaboration with Division TEACCH (University of North Carolina). It involves hands-on training for participants from a range of backgrounds.

(v) Additional Training
Teachers from the ASD Support Service deliver a wide range of training including:
- in-service courses for schools and nurseries
- input to the MSc in Developmental and Educational Psychology at Queen’s University Belfast
- training for voluntary agencies, e.g. PAPA (Parents and Professionals and Autism)
- in-service courses for classroom assistants.

(B) Special Education Support Service

Introduction
The Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education and Science established the Special Education Support Service (SESS) in September 2003. The service consolidates, co-ordinates, develops and delivers a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in a variety of educational settings. These settings include mainstream primary and post-primary schools, special schools and special classes.

The SESS facilitates a partnership approach involving support teams of practising teachers, education centres, the Inspectorate, the National Psychological Service, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the National Council for Special Education, third level colleges, health board personnel, teacher unions and other relevant bodies and services. In a similar spirit of partnership, the SESS maximises the benefits of North-South co-operation.

The aim of the service is to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, with particular reference to special educational provision. The SESS aims to provide a quality service that is inclusive, promotes collaboration and co-operation and provides for equality of access.
Main Areas of Work

1. Local Initiatives Scheme
The scheme involves provision of professional development and support at individual teacher, school and / or group level, as identified by the individual teacher, school and / or group, across all areas of special education. All applications are examined on an individual basis. These are examined on an individual basis. Applications are divided into ‘applications for funding’ and ‘applications for support’. Funding has been provided for a range of courses including PECS, TEACCH, Sensory Integration, Asperger’s Syndrome, Lámh, Floor Time, and Challenging Behaviour. Support is requested mainly in the area of autism and the management of challenging behaviour.

2. SESS Core Strategy
Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for the teams of associates’ took place in Cork in September 2005. Each team has also undertaken additional CPD days and availed of individual study days. Design teams continue to monitor and contribute to the design and content of the work of the associates. The key elements of the work of the teams are identified below.

(i) Autism

- Facilitating requests for support through school visits.
- ‘An Introduction to Autism’: A one-day seminar for classroom teachers who currently have a child with autism in their classroom.

(ii) Dyslexia

Primary:
Provision of a three-hour seminar: ‘Dyslexia in school: A Seminar on Planning and Intervention for class teachers’: In-school seminar.

Support of this nature will continue up to April 2006.

Post-Primary
In-school seminar – three hours: ‘Dyslexia at Second-Level’

(iii) Second-Level and Special Education Needs

- In-school whole-staff seminar (3.5 hours). Schools apply to SESS for access to same.

(iv) Management of Challenging Behaviour in Special School Setting

(a) Schools for Students with Mild General Learning Disability

Phase 1: In-school whole-staff session: ‘Introduction to Challenging Behaviour’
To date, all special schools (MGLD) have had this in-school whole-staff training

1 Associates are teachers withdrawn from schools on a part-time basis to undertake additional work with schools. Currently each Associate is released (with substitution) for approximately 30 days.
Phase 2: One-day seminar for whole staff on ‘Managing Challenging Behaviour’
This phase will be provided to all thirty schools and commenced on March 16th. An exceptional one-day closure has been sanctioned for the purpose of facilitating delivery of this seminar.

Phase 3: Telephone / email / follow up visit to school as required.

(b) Special Schools and Severe Challenging Behaviour
Special schools who deal with serious and persistent challenging behaviour on a day-to-day basis that requires specific interventions require specific CPD on the use of such interventions at whole-staff and whole-team level. Over seventy schools have been invited to avail of funding that will enable whole-school staff to access in-house training in this area as part of the DES summer course programme. Teachers attending the courses will be eligible for EPV days.

3. Contact and Liaison with Third-Level Institutions
SESS Co-ordinators continue to facilitate any requests from the colleges. The colleges also facilitate release of their personnel to work on SESS design teams. Some colleges make SESS aware of any relevant initiatives that may be of interest.

4. Court-Cases: Special Education, Athlone
The SESS offers appropriate, practical responses to schools and teachers in the context of legal cases where CPD is a key element. There has to be an immediate response to such requests as they are usually prioritised as ‘urgent’. In addition, SESS has been providing information and support to Special Education, Athlone on a number of court-related cases.

5. Inputs / Attendance at Conferences
- Irish Learning-Support Association
- National Council Special Education – Expert Group
- International Students
- Boards of Management
- DES Inspectorate Second-Level
- Co-operative Learning
- Second-Level Conference – CICE
- University College Cork
- St. Angela’s Sligo
6. Special School as a Resource: Pilot
The project aims to:

- develop the special school as a central resource for a group of mainstream schools / units within the hinterland of the special school
- develop and enhance the expertise both in the special school and in the outlying schools
- create networks of schools that are willing to collaborate and co-operate with each other
- create a climate of openness in schools that will facilitate the sharing of expertise and of experiences of good practice.

Selection of schools is currently underway.

7. Provision of Four-Day Course – Dyspraxia
This four-day course for resource teachers has already been provided in a number of regions. The course examines teaching and learning issues associated with both motor and verbal dyspraxia, but has a particular orientation to teaching children whose dyspraxia mainly affects their verbal functioning. Courses have now taken place in Sligo and Kilkenny with over 35 teachers in attendance at both courses.

8. ABA Provision
Work on the development of a panel of Teacher Applied Behaviour Analysts is continuing.

We have commitment from two professionals with Board-Certified Behaviour Analyst (BCBA) qualification to form a panel of supervisors for Board-Certified Associate Behaviour Analysts (BCABA). The possibility of provision of an additional college course is still being explored.

9. TEACCH
Arrangements have been made with TEACCH (North Carolina, USA) to provide specific courses over the coming year, including a two-day Introduction to TEACCH and five-days hands-on TEACCH.

Provisional arrangements have been made to provide two five-day courses in October and December 2006.

10. Website Development
The development and expansion of the website is ongoing. It is envisaged that the website would become a one-stop shop in relation to special education. The number of hits on the website has shown significant increase. For example, the number of hits for the month of January increased from 61 (Jan ’04) to 1576 (Jan ’05) to 3715 (Jan ’06)
11. On line Training
SESS continues to facilitate teachers availing of training online through courses offered by Profexcl. Profexcl will provide two additional courses in summer 2006 – ‘Gifted and Talented’ and Teaching Troubled Children EBD’.
ABA – Applied Behaviour Analysis

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is a precise, systematic and measurable method for teaching children with developmental disabilities to learn. It is based on sound behavioural principles and evidence-based research and practice. Essentially an educational method, it has a wide range of applications, particularly within the field of developmental disabilities. These include teaching children with developmental disabilities, including autism and PDD, intervention with problem behaviours, and parenting.
(www.profexcel.net/aba.html)

ABC charts – Antecedent, Behaviour and Consequence charts.
Charts are used to record what happened before the behaviour, what the behaviour was and what happened after the behaviour occurred.

Annual Review
This is a meeting of relevant staff / parents / professionals to review a pupil’s progress. In Northern Ireland, children with specific needs are granted a Statement of Special Needs. This is a legal document which specifies the educational provision to which they are entitled to meet their needs. It is a legal requirement for this to be reviewed annually, and for the findings to be reported to the ELB that has granted the Statement.

ASD – Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Asperger’s Syndrome – High Functioning Autism

BCABA – Board-Certified Associate Behaviour Analyst

BCBA – Board-Certified Behaviour Analyst

CA – classroom assistant

CASS – The Curriculum Advisory and Support Service

CEA – Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Chill-out zone
A designated area in the class or school where pupils may go to calm down if they have become stressed by a situation. This area may be enhanced by cushions or stress toys to provide a relaxing environment.
Code of Practice
In Northern Ireland, the delivery of education to pupils with special educational needs is governed by a Code of Practice, a set of guidelines outlining the procedures that should be put in place within schools.

DES – Department of Education and Science

ELB – Education and Library Board

Dual enrolment
A pupil has a joint placement between two schools e.g. a special school and a mainstream school, and spends a portion of each week at each establishment.

Home teacher – teacher responsible in the homeroom.

Home-room provision
Teaching that takes place in a room away from the main class.

IABA – Institute for Applied Behaviour Analysis (http://www.iaba.com/)

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

IEP – Individual Education Plan

In-reach support
Support provided by teachers / support staff employed by the school

INSET
In-Service Training for Teachers, training organised by the school that may take place on-site, or by attending a local resource centre. Can be led by the principal, another member of staff or a visiting professional.

Learning-Support Assistant
An additional member of staff employed to support a specified child or class in order to help children access the curriculum.

Low-incidence disabilities
Disabilities that affect a low percentage of the population

NUMICON
A maths system that uses strong visual imagery to teach children about number.

OT – Occupational Therapist
Outreach support
Additional teaching support provided by specialist teachers, usually employed by the Education Board, who visit the school on a regular basis to work with a designated pupil. In some circumstances, the pupil may travel to a support centre to receive this support with a group of pupils from several schools.

Outreach teacher
A specialist teacher who visits a pupil at school to provide additional support.

PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) (http://www.pecs.com/)

PSE – personal and social education

RDI (Relationship Development Intervention)
A programme of social and emotional development activities for Asperger’s Syndrome, ASD, PDD and NLD. (http://www.rdiconnect.com/RDI/default.asp)

RE – Religion Education

SEN – Special Educational Needs

SENCO – Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

SENDO – Special Educational Needs and Disability Order.
New legislation to be implemented in Northern Ireland in September 2006. It strengthens the rights of children with special needs or disabilities to attend mainstream schools.

SMT – Senior Management Team

SNA – Special Needs Assistant

Social story
‘Social stories are short, written stories, originally intended for children with autism, to help understand a small part of their social world and behave appropriately within it. Each social story provides a child with clear, concise and accurate information about what is happening in a specific social situation, outlining both why it is happening and what a typical response might be’. (Smith, Caroline, ‘Writing and Developing Social Stories’, 2003) (www.thegraycenter.org/socialstorywhat.cfm)

TEACCH – Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children
The principles of TEACCH include ‘Organising the physical environment, developing schedules and work systems, making expectations clear and explicit, and using visual materials as effective ways of developing skills and allowing people with
autism to use these skills independently of direct adult prompting and cueing. These priorities are especially important for students with autism who are frequently held back by their inability to work independently in a variety of situations. Structured teaching says nothing about where people with autism should be educated; this is a decision based on the skills and needs of each individual student. Some can work effectively and benefit from regular educational programs, while others will need special classrooms for part or all of the day where the physical environment, curriculum, and personnel can be organised and manipulated to reflect individual needs.’ (www.teacch.com)

**Time-out**

A short period of time when a pupil may be sent to another teacher’s room, or removed from an activity within the class in order to calm down or to redress behaviour.