

## **NUFFIELD POLICY SEMINAR : EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIFIC SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLAND AND WALES**

Professor Geoff Lindsay, Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research, University of Warwick, and Professor Julie Dockrell, Psychology and Human Development, Institute of Education, University of London, together with research assistants Clare Mackie (CEDAR) and Becky Letchford (Institute of Education). The work was funded for a 1 year period from January to December 2001 by the Nuffield Foundation.

### **BRIEFING DOCUMENT**

The present study investigated the policy and practice, at LEA/health trust and school level, concerning the current provision for children with SSLD by considering the:

- Views of 97 LEAs in England and Wales through questionnaires (49.5% response)
- Views of 129 speech and language therapy (SLT) services in England and Wales through questionnaires (72.1% response)
- In-depth interviews with 37 representatives of the LEAs and 39 representatives of health trusts' SLT services
- In-depth interviews with heads or principals of 38 speech and language units/resources, 7 other special schools and 10 special speech and language schools

The study mapped in detail the provision made by LEAs and SLT services and explored the rationale and decision-making processes. These are reported for practitioner level (teachers, SLTs and parents) through to policy level - LEA/health trust. The study explored the interface between stated policy, and policy as interpreted, enacted and redefined in practice.

### **AIMS OF THE SEMINAR**

- To provide participants with a summary of the key findings of the project.
- To provide an opportunity for a critical analysis of the findings from a multidisciplinary group.
- To consider the implications for practice and policy developments that will enhance the provision of services to children with speech and language difficulties.
- To identify key questions to be addressed by further policy oriented research.

### **SUMMARY OF OVERARCHING THEMES FROM THE RESEARCH**

#### ***Provision***

- Support is not limited to language units – almost all LEAs support children with SSLD in mainstream.
- Language units are common at reception/Key Stage 1 and 2.
- Language unit support at KS3/4 continues to be very limited, but is being developed in some LEAs.
- Children with SSLD are also supported in a range of all special provision, especially MLD schools – this raises questions about expediency to meet needs because mainstream schools are not meeting these children's needs.

### ***Autistic spectrum disorders***

- An increase in children designated ASD is generally reported.
- Earlier and better assessment contributes to this.
- However, different policies on diagnosis, and the use of the term 'ASD' rather than 'autism' are factors.
- Provision for children with SSLD is commonly used for children with ASD, because
  - Differential diagnosis is problematic
  - But needs may be similar

### ***Diagnostic approach***

- Educationists prefer a *needs-based* approach to assessment.
- Health professionals continue to use *diagnostic* categories.
- Use of these conceptually different approaches can cause difficulties.
- Also, there is variation in diagnostic criteria and terminology within as well as between professional groups, e.g. SLT services do not all have agreed criteria or terminology.

### ***Consultation***

- Speech and language therapists, particularly those working in mainstream education, are developing a consultative model of practice, with advice to teachers and assistants replacing direct therapy.
- Those in special schools/units are more likely to undertake direct work with children.
- Use of a consultative model must be negotiated to avoid confusion and resistance among educationists and parents.

### ***Parent involvement***

- Parents are actively involved at policy level in some LEAs.
- Most SLTs support parental involvement with children, and consider it effective.
- Despite good intentions and examples of good practice, parental involvement is an area requiring further development.

### ***Funding***

- Concerns about funding are general.
- Access to SLTs is problematic in many areas.
- Standards Fund has provided an important contribution, but the effect has been lessened because of SLT shortages.

### ***Inclusion***

- General support for inclusion as the predominant philosophy.
- There is variation in interpretation of inclusion, and consequently in both policy and practice.
- Inclusion is driving the development of support in mainstream schools rather than in language units/Integrated Resources.
- However, some consider language units/IRs examples of good practice in inclusion.
- Development of inclusion requires shared understanding and agreements between education and health professionals, and parents, on policy and practice.