
Evaluation of Impact of DCSF Investment in Initiatives Designed to Improve Teacher Workforce Skills in Relation to SEN and Disabilities: The First Six Months

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Introduction

This is the 1st Interim Report of a longitudinal study to evaluate the impact of investment by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to improve teacher workforce skills in relation to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The evaluation started in December 2008 and this report covers work carried out over the period January – July 2009. The evaluation continues until March 2011.

This project includes several strands each of which comprises research into initiatives designed to further the government's policy of increasing workforce skills. In this case the focus is on pupils with SEND. A second major policy driver, the development of inclusive education, is also fundamental to the initiatives within the overall programme for which this study provides research evidence.

The two main developments are the Training Toolkit developed by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) for students in initial teacher training and the Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) for teachers in practice. Each comprises the development of materials and has a planned national dissemination strategy with phased implementation. The TDA Toolkit was made available to providers of primary undergraduate courses in initial teacher training (ITT) in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Phase 1 (2008-09), to be followed by materials in 2009-10 for providers of secondary undergraduate courses and providers of the PGCE primary/secondary. Phase 1 of the IDP (2008-09) comprised two sets of Continuing Professional Development materials focusing on speech, language and communication needs and on dyslexia. Materials on supporting pupils with autism spectrum disorders (2009-10) and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (2010-11) are being disseminated in Phases 2 and 3.

This is an innovative and challenging programme of work which represents a comprehensive attempt to enhance the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the teacher workforce through a range of initiatives to support nationally both initial teacher training and the continuing professional development of teachers.

The strategy of developing the IDP as both a SEND and school improvement issue has the potential to avoid its marginalization as 'only' a SEND issue, to bring school leaders into the initiative and also to embed SEND/inclusion as a whole school issue.

It must be stressed that the research reported here represents the early phase of the programme which was primarily focused on development and the beginnings of dissemination. This study, therefore, sets a *baseline* and the current research is examining the further development, dissemination and consolidation of the initiatives within the programme. The NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey (November 2009) suggests this is occurring, with an increase in teacher awareness of the IDP and a small increase in the use of materials. We will continue to examine the development of the programme over the next year and present our results in the final report to be published in Spring 2011.

Key findings

- The Training Toolkit on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) developed on behalf of the Training and Development Agency for schools (TDA) has been well received by higher education institute providers of undergraduate primary teacher training, with most finding its format useful or very useful. Tutors were using the Training Toolkit in different ways to integrate with existing course material: content was judged effective or very effective.
- The electronic network for SEND tutors, hosted on the Teacher Training Resource Bank, had little recognition and no active users among the interviewees at time of interview (March/April 2009).
- The extended placements in specialist settings were regarded by the majority of tutors as offering important benefits for staff and trainees. These placements had only been experienced by a minority of trainees but over 9 out of 10 of those trainees rated them good or excellent.
- The Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) was welcomed in principle but most schools accessed the materials too late in the school year to incorporate their use into school development/improvement planning for 2008-09.
- The National Strategies' role in disseminating the IDP was welcomed, supporting the alignment of the IDP as both a school improvement and SEND issue.
- The Regional hubs were a strength of the national dissemination of the IDP but the Pathfinders' effectiveness as pathfinders was limited by their starting at a similar time to non-Pathfinders.
- Engagement with the IDP was stronger at LA than school level, reflecting the stage in the dissemination strategy; large numbers of schools had attended an IDP event but at this time relatively few schools had engaged with the IDP at school level. The high level of engagement of both head teachers and SENCOs at LA events indicated that the strategic objective of bringing together both SEND/inclusion and school development/improvement was being achieved.
- Problems were identified with the Phase 1 materials for speech, language and communication needs and for dyslexia, but these are being addressed by a review and revision process; the Phase 2 materials (autism spectrum) were generally viewed more favorably although here too there were accessibility difficulties resulting from IT incompatibility in many schools.

Methodology

Data were collected for the three main components of this stage of the study: i) the introduction of the TDA Toolkit, ii) extended placements in special schools and specialist provision for primary undergraduate initial teacher training (ITT), and iii) the dissemination of the IDP Phase 1 to schools, which focused on dyslexia and on speech, language and communication needs. Data were collected by two approaches: semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys.

With respect to ITT, telephone interviews were held with 30 tutors with responsibility for SEND (February – March 2009). An online survey was completed by 306 trainees from 18 primary undergraduate ITT programs (April – May 2009)

With respect to the IDP, 30 local authorities were selected as follows:

- LAs taking the lead for the IDP within each SEN regional hub ($n = 10$)
- LAs awarded Pathfinder status for the IDP ($n = 8$)
- One other LA from each SEN regional hub ($n = 10$)

- Additional LAs from two hubs that did not have Pathfinder LAs ($n = 2$)

As well as building in a range of levels of responsibility towards the IDP, this sample also provided geographic coverage across England and a range of LA types (London, unitary, metropolitan, county). Within the 30 LAs, 50 schools that had engaged with, or were about to be engaged with the IDP, were identified by IDP leads as willing to be contacted about the research. Of these, twenty eight schools (17 primary, 11 secondary) took part.

During the summer term 2009, semi-structured telephone interviews were held with 28 IDP leads and with staff from the 28 schools: 25 SENCOs, 16 CPD managers, 22 experienced teachers and 18 newly qualified teachers (NQTs). In addition, an online survey was carried out with 156 newly qualified teachers.

Detailed findings

The Training Toolkit on SEND

- 30 of 40 providers of primary undergraduate initial teacher training were interviewed
- Just over two-thirds had incorporated selected material from the Toolkit in existing elements of primary undergraduate teaching at the time of interview (March – April 2009); others expected to do so before the end of the academic year
- In two institutions, the material was, or would be, used as a stand-alone module
- In one institution, students had access to the Toolkit but there were no plans to incorporate material from it in teaching
- Estimates varied widely of number of students exposed to teaching based on the Toolkit but collectively they amounted to around 3 000
- 9 out of 10 tutors found most aspects of the *format* of the Toolkit ‘useful’ or ‘very useful’ – the DVDs, the memory stick and the ability to tailor it for personal use were particularly useful
- Among those tutors familiar with the Toolkit *content* at time of interview, 9 out of 10 or more found it ‘effective’ or ‘very effective’ in enhancing a range of trainees’ knowledge, skills and understanding around SEND

The electronic network for SEND tutors

- The electronic network for SEN tutors, hosted on the teacher training resource bank (TTRB), was rarely recognised and there were no active users among the interviewees at this early stage.

The extended placements in specialist settings

- Over two-thirds of trainees had taken up, or planned to take up, the offer of the extended placements in specialist provision.
- Among the other third, reasons for not taking up the offer varied – for example, carrying on with existing special placements, not having enough support for the necessary organisational aspects.
- 9 out of 10 or more of those who had undertaken a placement rated the effectiveness of different elements ‘effective’ or ‘very effective’.
- Positive views about the four-week placement in special schools of mainstream resources or units reflected three themes: helping to equip students with important skills and knowledge; enabling tutors to enhance their own knowledge and awareness around SEND; and that they were valued by colleagues in special schools.
- About a third of tutors believed there was particular value in placements in special schools arguing that the special school sector had been sidelined in ITT for too long.
- Trainees who had undertaken a placement were more likely to consider a career in a special school or mainstream school with a specialist unit or resource base.
- A small minority expressed negative aspects of the placements – for example, that they did not help students to achieve the practical experience needed to reach the professional standards.

The Inclusion Development Programme

Role of National Strategies and development of materials

- The role of the National Strategies in the IDP was seen as supporting the alignment of SEND and school improvement work at LA level and as adding 'clout' to the initiative in terms of engaging schools.
- There was a substantial time gap between the launch of IDP and the availability of materials resulting in criticisms of 'lateness'. The timing of availability also made it very difficult for LAs and schools to include Phase 1 (SLCN and dyslexia) in their school development/improvement planning for 2008-09.
- There were also concerns about timelines for LAs to return evaluation data to the National Strategies.
- There were, not unusually, various teething problems with presentation, accessibility and content of the SLCN and dyslexia materials. Most criticisms concerned accessibility as familiarity with content was at an early stage; the need for the materials to reflect the thinking of the Bercow Report (SLCN) and Rose Report (dyslexia) was identified – the planned revisions should address this.
- Views about the Phase 2 materials (autism spectrum) were more positive although there were again accessibility difficulties resulting from a mismatch between the more advanced technology used and the IT system in many schools.

Role of the SEN regional hubs

- The hub IDP strand meetings were a strength of the national dissemination model.
- The key benefits of the IDP strand regional hub meetings highlighted by IDP strand leads were the impetus they gave to the initiative, the opportunity to focus on the IDP, to meet with others from outside their own LA, to share resources and ideas (including via hub websites), to share ways of disseminating the materials to schools, to share experiences, and to learn from each other.

Role of the Pathfinders

- There was negligible impact of the Pathfinders in terms of modelling dissemination to schools from which other LAs could learn. This was mainly because the Pathfinders had not happened far enough in advance of roll-out in other LAs.
- IDP leads in Pathfinder LAs valued the involvement of staff from I CAN and Dyslexia Action because of their knowledge of the IDP materials and of SLCN or dyslexia.
- Of the four dissemination models, Model 4 (intensive work in selected schools) was viewed most positively.

Role of hub IDP strand lead

- Hub strand leads were very aware of the need to demonstrate the implementation of the IDP in their own LA and to support other LAs to do so too.
- The requirement to feedback to DCSF via the National Strategies added to the pressure they felt to model good practice.
- They viewed offering support and guidance to other LAs as a key part of their role.
- Adopting a supportive role and a partnership approach were seen as facilitating the engagement of LAs in the IDP strand.
- Collecting and collating baseline data was regarded as challenging within the timelines set.

Role of IDP lead in each LA

- The requirement for each LA to have a lead person responsible for the delivery of the IDP was viewed as a good model.
- The lack of funding allocated to free time to undertake the role, however, was a significant limitation.
- Gathering baseline data was challenging because not everyone used the same measures; teachers' self-assessments could be over or under-estimations; not all schools complied with the request to do a baseline exercise; and collecting and collating these added to the pressure of work on IDP leads.
- The degree of alignment between SEN/inclusion and school improvement varied at strategic planning level and in operational delivery to schools. About a quarter of sample LAs were successful in achieving this at both levels. About another quarter tried but encountered problems, mainly at operational level with school leadership passing the responsibility to SENCOs.

- Dissemination models to schools varied across five main dimensions (approach, level, pitch, school phase and IDP module). Within each dimension, there were also a range of options. LAs varied in the options selected. This meant that each LA created a 'pick and mix' model.
- Almost all the IDP leads reported positive learning from Phase 1 and described changes they planned to make for dissemination and delivery in Phase 2.

Initial impact

- By May/June 2009, many of the IDP leads in our sample were reporting high numbers of schools having attended an event about the IDP but relatively low numbers of schools that had actively engaged with the IDP in the sense of using it within the school.
- Most LAs in the sample reportedly involved both the headteachers and the SENCOs in information and training about the IDP.
- Dissemination at group level, especially when supplemented by a specialist support or mediated uptake approach, was more effective in engaging schools to use the IDP than dissemination at a more universal level.
- There were specific LA and school level factors that increased the likelihood of school engagement with the IDP.
- The IDP had an impact on the CPD offer around SEND in many LAs in the sample. In some cases, this included a refocusing of CPD support on Wave 1 from Wave 3.
- The main barriers to a quick impact on school-level CPD were the timing of the Phase 1 roll out, which was too late to be included in schools' planned 2008-09 CPD programme, and the presentation of the materials themselves, which were perceived as not working as a training package that could be picked up and used straight away in schools.
- In schools that had used the IDP during 2008-09, overall, teachers in each school shifted up one category of the 'focusing, developing, establishing, enhancing' continuum, relative to where they had been prior to the IDP training.
- In these schools, impacts were reported at the levels of teacher confidence, increased empathy with pupils' barriers to learning; increased thinking about and reflection on current practice; increased understanding of the need (dyslexia and/or SLCN); specific changes in teaching practice and/or in the learning environment; and increased confidence about being able to talk to parents of pupils with dyslexia or SLCN.
- It was clear from the interviews with teachers that impact was greatest when the CPD had used active learning techniques – opportunities to discuss, reflect, plan, try out and review were key to subsequent impact on practice.
- The majority of IDP lead interviewees had little or no knowledge of IDP related provision during ITT in local HEIs. Among those who had good links with local HEI ITT providers, the picture they gave was of variation from institution to institution of whether or not the IDP had been included as part of ITT.
- About a third of the IDP leads said that the IDP had been included in some way in the 2008-09 LA level NQT induction, and a further six reported definite plans to do so for 2009-10 NQTs.
- It was clear from the interviewees that many of the LAs and schools were only at the beginning of the process of collecting parent data with regard to satisfaction with SEND provision.

Recommendations

- All ITT providers should be required to ensure that trainees are equipped to provide support for Wave 1 inclusive Quality First teaching
- Funding to support the regional cluster meetings for ITT SEND tutors should be continued
- The aims and purposes of the electronic network for ITT SEND tutors should be reviewed through the regional clusters and, if valued, the network should be relaunched and, if not valued, should be abandoned
- ITT extended placements in specialist settings should continue and be extended
- The IDP content should be reviewed to ensure it is all securely based on sound evidence and taking into account the Bercow and Rose Reports on SLCN and dyslexia respectively
- Interactive models of IDP dissemination should be extended and developed

- Relevant LA staff should be encouraged (and, ideally, funded) to continue to support schools to engage with IDP-related CPD promoting Quality First teaching for all, including pupils with high incidence special needs
- LAs and schools should be encouraged to use evidence-based approaches to ensure CPD activities are effective in achieving desired changes in teaching and in the learning environment – attention should be drawn to the download available through the IDP of the one page summary on 'Key elements of effective CPD'
- Induction CPD for NQTs should include a focus on Wave 1 inclusive Quality First teaching extending beyond the NQT year

Additional Information

Further information about this research can be obtained from Linda Brooks, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT

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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.