More than a Change in Name?

Remedial services are now becoming 'special needs support teams'. But is this merely a case of 'Plus ça change', ask Dr. Caroline Gipps and Dr. Harvey Goldstein, Institute of Education, London University

Remedial education has undergone tremendous change over the last 10 years. The aim of this article is to look at the state of provision for children with special educational needs (for the first of the changes is in nomenclature); to set it in the context of recent developments; and to comment on the extent and nature of change.

The remedial teaching of reading has long been part and parcel of primary school life. Over the last 10 years, however, there has been a radical rethinking of its role. Four factors have contributed to the new approach.

The first has been a concern, supported by research, about the lack of medium and long term effectiveness of traditional remedial teaching methods.

The second has been the impact of cuts on local authority expenditure: some LEAs cutting their part time and temporary remedial staff because they are easier to shed than full time permanent staff; some looking for more cost-effective models of service delivery; others doing both.

The third has been the Warnock Report which adopted the term 'special educational needs' and conceptualised special education in a much more global way than before, advising that distinctions between remedial education and special education could no longer be maintained (DES, 1978, 3.39). The report suggested that up to one fifth of the school population should be seen as likely to have special educational needs of one sort or another during the course of their school careers and therefore these special needs should, as far as possible, be fulfilled by class teachers and subject teachers.

The fourth factor, echoed by the report, has been the general shift in professional, and to a lesser extent perhaps public, opinion against segregating children who are handicapped. This shift in opinion has been only partly due to the disappointing progress made by children in separate special provision. A more powerful influence has been the general demand for equal opportunities for all kinds of minority groups which extended to fuller participation in mainstream schooling for children receiving special education.

The remedial teaching profession had been grappling with the issue of changing models of provision since the early Seventies. Changes in education, including the move away from streaming, the breaking down of subject boundaries in the primary school and new ideas about the nature and acquisition of reading, were making remedial teachers face up to a change in their role. The new role, advocated by the National Association for Remedial Education, emphasised prevention rather than cure, early identification and remedial work across the curriculum (Gains and McNicholas, 1979).

The result of all these moves has been that many LEAs have renamed their remedial teams (some also reducing the numbers of staff) and changed their model of provision. They have moved away from withdrawing children for specialist tuition towards supporting the class teacher with advice and resources, so that special help can be given to children in their own classrooms.

Part of the role of our current research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council at the Institute of Education is to investigate these changes and the extent to which they are taking place, and to attempt to understand some of the implications for teachers and schools.

The situation in the mid to late Seventies

According to the Bullock Report in 1975:

> The arrangements for providing 'remedial' education vary greatly; from remedial classes or withdrawal groups within an individual school to peripatetic advisory services, area classes, or specialised help in remedial centres. (DES, 1975; 18.10)

Around the time of the Bullock Report and the Warnock Report local authorities commonly had a remedial service which was run either alongside or as a part of the schools psychological service (SPS). Typically this service would include a number of peripatetic remedial teachers working to an adviser or the principal educational psychologist, often based in a remedial or learning or reading centre; and some services incorporated advisory teachers.

The Warnock Report (1978) suggested that every LEA should restructure its advisory staff to provide effective advice and support to teachers.

The function of Warnock's special education advisory and support service would include: helping teachers to improve the quality of their teaching through the mediation of specialist advice and support; visiting schools to work with teachers in helping particular children; planning and organising induction programmes for teachers taking up posts of responsibility for special needs; organising short courses for teachers, ancillary workers and others: ensuring that schools are knowledgeable about assessment procedures.

Changes in the model

The main change which the Warnock Report implied and which was precipitated in some LEAs by the cuts (as well as general dissatisfaction with traditional withdrawal methods discussed earlier) is a move towards supporting the class teacher rather than supporting the child.

Moving towards a model in which class teachers take on the main responsibility for children with special needs is problematic. The class teacher must be persuaded that it is a good thing for her to take on this responsibility on top of others that she is being encouraged to pursue more actively: maths, computing, CDT and now science (*Education*, 13.7.84). Another problem is that primary school teachers like withdrawal, particularly for children with behaviour problems associated with their learning difficulties (Croll and Moses, in press) for it gives them a welcome respite. Class teachers will therefore need practical help, advice and materials as well as training if they are to be expected to cope with this change and make it work well.

The new model demands different skills from the support staff too. A peripatetic remedial teacher who has previously taught individual children reading cannot immediately be expected to have the right skills to advise class teachers on how to deal with

a variety of individual problems. Her credibility in the eyes of class teachers may be at risk if this change — which may be seen as a soft option particularly if accompanied by a rise in salary — is not clearly accompanied by some form of in-service training for the support staff. In short, this move, which looks more cost-effective (and indeed may be so in the long run) cannot be effected overnight nor without some expenditure on training and materials.

Current provision in LEAs

In July 1983 we sent a questionnaire to every LEA in England and Wales asking about their support services for children with learning difficulties. We received replies from 90 (87 per cent) and this relatively high response rate enables us to talk in global terms about provision over the country as a whole, particularly as all three types of authority were reasonably well represented. Forty one out of 47 county authorities (87 per cent) returned questionnaires, 29 out of 36 metropolitan authorities (81 per cent), and 20 out of 21 London boroughs, including ILEA (95 per cent).

Of the LEAs which completed our questionnaire 96 per cent had a service dealing with children with learning difficulties in the ordinary school. These services had a tremendous variety of names but 'remedial service' was *still* the single most popular title (33 per cent).

Although only one LEA used the name suggested by the Warnock Report ('Special Education Advisory and Support Service'), the words 'support' and 'advisory' or 'advice' feature in many of the new names: the former 15 times, the latter eight. Other titles, each occurring in only one local authority, included 'peripatetic remedial teacher service', 'reading and language service', 'service for learning difficulties' and 'tutorial units'.

The variety of names — 38 in all — for these services suggests that there is an underlying confusion about the best way to restructure 'old-fashioned' remedial services. Such restructuring has had to take account of not only the Warnock Report and the 1981 Education Act, but also the specific characteristics of individual LEAs and the lack of money for new posts or training.

Numbers of peripatetic SEN/remedial support staff — whether peripatetic remedial teachers (PRT), remedial advisory teachers (RAT) or SEN support teachers — vary from five or fewer in 18 per cent of the LEAs (including the three without a service) to over 40 in another 18 per cent of LEAs (see Table 1).

Table 1. Numbers of Peripatetic Remedial Teachers/Remedial Advisory Teachers/SEN Support Staff in LEAs

	Number of staff							
	0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41 +	N.A
Number of LEAs	5	11	14	20	17	6	16	1
Percentage of LEAs (n = 90)	6	12	16	22	19	7	18	1

Of those LEAs with over 40 such staff, one had 108 and one had 70, so the variation is considerable. We also analysed these figures by size of school population in order to put them in context.

What table 2 shows is the tendency, as we might anticipate, for the smaller LEAs to have smaller numbers of staff and bigger LEAs, bigger numbers. However, there are some important exceptions: four of the smallest LEAs have 21 or more support staff (one Welsh county and three London boroughs) while two of the biggest have 10 or fewer (both counties).

Table 2. Numbers of Peripatetic Remedial Teachers/Remedial Advisory Teachers/SEN Support Staff by Size of LEA

LEA size by primary and secondary population		Number of staff 0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41 +	Total
up to 36,000	N	1	6	7	3	3	0	1	21
	%	5	29	33	14	14	0	5	100
36,001-60,000	N	4	4	4	6	5	1	11	25
	%	16	16	16	24	20	4	4	100
60,001-100,000	N	0	0	2	8	6	3	5	24
	%	0	0	8	33	25	13	21	100
100,001 +	N	0	1	1	3	3	2	9	19
	%	0	5	5	16	16	10	47	100

Although we also asked LEAs how many school-based remedial teachers there were (i.e. not centrally controlled peripatetic staff) four fifths did not have this information. Similarly, when asked what number of their SEN/remedial staff had a *relevant* qualification, three quarters were not able to say.

Changes in provision

Two thirds of LEAs reported that their *pattern* of provision had in fact changed over the previous five years. Of those that gave details a move towards working with the class teacher as client was the most common change (26 per cent, ie 16 of the LEAs which had made some changes). The next most frequent change — in eight LEAs — was ceasing to withdraw individual children to units outside the ordinary school (13 per cent). The nature of these and other changes will be explored more fully in future work.

The majority of LEAs (79 per cent) also had changes in their support *staffing* over the previous five years, notably increases in educational psychologists because of the 1981 Act. Interestingly, far more LEAs (66 per cent) had gained staff (proportionately more often in the London boroughs) than had lost staff (13 per cent and proportionately more often in metropolitan boroughs) because of cuts or falling rolls. A number had both lost and then gained staff.

Staff lost were most likely to be support staff such as PRTs and RATs rather than educational psychologists. LEAs seldom attributed staff losses to expenditure cuts *per se*. The situation is typically far more complex, with falling rolls, cuts and reorganisation of the service all playing a part. While the loss of remedial staff has been documented by the NUT (NUT, 1982) it seems, from LEAs in which we have interviewed, that more schools have had cuts in their general staffing, which has reduced the remedial or floating staff, than have lost central support/remedial staff.

Increases in staff have occurred in 47 LEAs (66 per cent), decreases in nine (13 per cent) and both decreases and subsequent increases in 11 (16 per cent).

As well as the increases they had already had, over a half of the LEAs were planning staff increases because of the 1981 Act. Again this was most likely to be educational psychologists (35

per cent) but extra advisory/support and remedial teachers were planned for a quarter and a fifth of LEAs respectively.

These responses, and the information about changes in the names of services, support the view that LEA support and advisory services are undergoing change. However, while the pattern of LEA provision may be changing away from withdrawal, in particular to units and classes outside the school, the vast majority of LEAs reported that part time withdrawal was still available in some of their schools. This applied in 90 per cent of LEAs at primary, and 79 per cent at secondary level (see Table 3). Full time remedial classes in primary schools were not unheard of either (in 42 per cent of LEAs).

Table 3. Availability of Provision

Type of provision	LEAs aware of this at: Primary level		Secondary level	
Full time remedial classes outside ordinary schools, e.g. in progress centre	15	17%	3	3%
Full time remedial classes in ordinary schools	37	42%	55	61%
Part time withdrawal to groups *outside* ordinary schools	42	47%	23	26%
Part time withdrawal to groups *within* the school	80	90%	71	79%
Special programmes for individual children in ordinary classrooms	69	77%	54	60%
Support to the teacher via advisory teachers, advisers etc.	78	87%	63	70%

These figures are, however, very gross measures of whether or not a particular type of provision was available *at all* within an LEA and carry no information about how widespread that practice was within the LEA. At the same time, too, large numbers of LEAs reported the presence of support to the class teacher via advisory teachers and individual teaching programmes in the classroom. Clearly, practice is diverse with varying facilities and different models operating side by side in some authorities.

Illustrations of change

To return to our question in the title of this paper — is it more than a change in name? At this point we are forced to admit that we do not yet know the answer where it counts: that is in individual schools and for individual children. Researching that is going to be our task over the current school year. What we can do though is to illustrate, albeit briefly, changes as they are perceived at the local authority level by decision makers in one LEA which we shall call metropolitan borough X.

The remedial teaching service (RTS) in metropolitan borough X is changing its role, from a primarily peripatetic teaching role to a more advisory one. This is in line with the changing model we have already described. RTS staff used to be allocated to schools for a certain period per week and withdrew children for individual or small group help with reading. This has now changed and RTS staff go into schools for much longer periods, maybe up to a year, and both teach children and run courses for members of staff within the school.

In addition, advisory teachers visit those schools where the remedial teachers are not stationed to do diagnostic testing and help teachers develop programmes and materials for children with special educational needs. The aim is to get the staff attached to schools to advise and assist with assessment, identification and resource allocation within the school itself. The LEA is also intending to redeploy special school teachers in an advisory capacity in ordinary schools.

In order to help them in their changing role, members of the RTS are encouraged to make use of secondments to courses and one or two people have been seconded each year for the past five years. The process of change within the local authority is, according to LEA officers, a consultative one and relies to a great extent on the willingness of staff, both in the RTS and schools, to change and cooperate.

The intention within the authority is to get mainstream schools 'tooled-up' to cope within school with all children with special needs. In-service training is very much tied up with this change in emphasis. The aim is to get schools to cope by using teachers trained by the RTS staff, who then disseminate skills throughout the school. This approach is based on the SNAP model (Muncey and Ainscow, 1983) and, at the time of our interview, the plan was to invite two members of the Coventry team to run a week's course. The LEA is not keen to have skills concentrated within a narrow band of staff, hence the emphasis on advisory functions for RTS staff and the adoption of the SNAP approach. The LEA has also run 'awareness' courses for heads,to encourage change.

The LEA is putting RTS staff only into schools which are willing and able to have them. Even so, they cannot meet nearly enough need and there is, of course, some resentment from schools which feel they have a need and cannot get help. This is partly a deliberate policy by the officers responsible in order to get evidence about the effectiveness of special educational provision. This is interesting; we have commented elsewhere on the lack of evaluation of provision (Gipps and Goldstein, 1984).

To conclude, there are clearly considerable changes afoot in metropolitan borough X. It is significant, however, that the three senior officers involved have all been recent arrivals in the borough, agree that change is necessary and that the 1981 Act offers the ideal opportunity to effect this. These changes seem, at LEA level, to be substantial though, interestingly, X is one of the LEAs that has not yet changed the name of its remedial service. What heads, teachers and support staff think about the impact of this type of change we hope to report in 1985.

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