

Department for Education and Skills: Consultation on draft guidance on Planning and Developing Special Educational Provision

Response from the General Teaching Council for England

Summary of key themes

The GTC recommends that:

- initial teacher training (ITT) programme requirements should enable trainees to gain experience of, and build their expertise, in working with children and young people with a range of special educational needs;
- staff throughout the system should have opportunities to access “in-time” training and specialist expertise to further develop their knowledge and skills, to meet the specific special needs of children and young people as and when they arise;
- those teachers who have developed expertise in special educational needs and wish to specialise should have appropriate access and opportunities to pursue their own professional development and enhance their specialist knowledge and skills; and
- schools need better support and guidance if they are to successfully implement the Disability Equality Duty (DED) and effectively promote equality of opportunity for disabled people, both pupils and staff, and thus improve outcomes for all.

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Response from the General Teaching Council for England

Introduction

1. The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) is the independent professional body for the teaching profession. Its main duties are to regulate the teaching profession and to advise the Secretary of State on a range of issues that concern teachers and teaching and learning. The Council acts in the public interest to contribute to raising the standards of teaching and learning.
2. The GTC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) consultation on Planning and Developing Special Educational Provision.
3. Our response is focused within the core remit of the Council and so addresses:
 - the training and development needs of all education related staff when planning special educational provision;
 - the sharing of expertise in special educational needs (SEN) throughout the system in order to achieve higher standards for all.
4. The GTC's response has been informed by:
 - previous discussions within Council policy groups;
 - a briefing paper for government which originated from Policy and Research Committee;
 - our response to the DfES/HM Treasury Joint Policy Review on Children and Young People;
 - evidence and research on the nature of effective CPD; and,
 - findings from the Survey of Teachers.
5. The GTC's proposed strategy focuses on the conditions which are needed to ensure that the teaching profession has the capacity to incorporate SEN in order to effectively support the learning of children and young people. The GTC sees the main challenges as:

- providing the necessary broad and specific continuous professional development (opportunities for teachers and other staff to develop expertise, knowledge and skills;
 - how practice can best be explored and shared in a rigorous, systematic and constructive way with the wider profession.
6. The GTC is investigating the evidence for core capabilities, knowledge, skills and understandings that all teachers need to identify, plan, deliver and evaluate learning activities to improve the outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and can suggest strategic responses to enable more effective sharing of existing expertise based on research in effective CPD, strategic approaches to CPD and examples from practice.

Consultation response

7. We are pleased to see that the consultation document recognises the need for children to *attend schools and settings with skilled staff able to provide high quality teaching*. However, we would stress that when planning and developing provision for SEN, the training and development needs of all education related staff, including teachers must be taken into account. Crucially SEN expertise needs to be built through effective, relevant, sustained and timely CPD.
8. The GTC believes that expertise in SEN should be extended throughout the system and to all staff in education. Crucial to system-wide achievement of higher standards for all is the use of SEN expertise beyond centres of excellence or specialist facilities. All staff, not just SEN teachers and staff, need support and development in teaching and learning for SEN pupils, starting with initial teacher training and continuing thereafter.
9. There have been two significant recent reports focusing on special needs teaching, the OFSTED report *Inclusion: Does it matter where pupils are taught?* and the Education and Skills Select Committee ('the Select Committee') report on SEN. The first report emphasises that there is strong and weak provision in both mainstream and special settings, reinforcing the message that what matters is the knowledge and skills of those teachers and others who work with SEN pupils. The Select Committee continues this theme, in highlighting the DfES's underestimation of the workforce implications of its own SEN strategy. This suggests a need for investment in both generalist and specialist training for teachers and support staff.
10. The Select Committee recommends that SEN in ITT is a priority focus. The GTC believes that ITT should certainly give trainees an introductory sense of:
- the scope of what is meant by SEN
 - the relationship between SEN and learning
 - frameworks and resources to support SEN pupils; and,
 - relevant pedagogy.

11. However, there are many competing demands on what is a finite period of time in ITT, and inevitably, there is no time to do justice to the full range of special needs a teacher might encounter during their careers. Nor is SEN a field where knowing a little about a lot is of great help; teachers need to know a lot about a specific need in time to respond effectively to a particular child. Moreover, what is known about specific special needs is developing all the time, and practitioners also require training in emerging disorders. For these reasons the GTC recommends investment in 'in time' training for teachers and support staff working with pupils with particular syndromes or conditions. This will not be applicable in every circumstance, as schools may receive short notice of a pupil admission requiring SEN skills. In the majority of cases this would ensure the sufficiency and currency of expertise.
12. Beyond physical and learning disabilities, there are a range of specialised needs that teachers may encounter in their work, but which cannot practically be covered in sufficient depth in initial teacher training. It is neither practical nor necessary for all teachers to be experts in these fields, but essential that they have some knowledge and understanding when they encounter children who need it.
13. There is a case to be made for the general availability of high quality 'in time' training for teachers and other practitioners who will have occasional or episodic involvement with children with specific needs. The GTC contends that neither 'front end' ITT provision nor the present managed market of CPD opportunities really meets this need. A practitioner, teacher or otherwise, who is closely involved with a child with a specific need, ought to have an automatic access to the requisite 'in time' training.
14. The GTC, therefore, recommends that:
 - ITT programme requirements should enable trainees to gain experience of and build their expertise in working with children and young people with a range of special educational needs
 - staff throughout the system should have opportunities to access "in-time" training and specialist expertise to further develop their knowledge and skills, to meet the specific special needs of children and young people as and when they arise; and,
 - those teachers who have developed expertise in special educational needs and wish to specialise should have appropriate access and opportunities to pursue their own professional development and enhance their specialist knowledge and skills.
15. The consultation document also makes reference to the duties for schools under the Disability Equality Duty (DED). While it is important that the differences between SEN and disability are not forgotten, a better understanding of how the SEN Framework and disability legislation work alongside each other is needed. The DED could be effective in helping schools

to mainstream disability equality throughout everything they do and improve outcomes for all pupils. However, the GTC believes that if schools are to do this effectively, and not just as a paper exercise, they will need better support and guidance.

16. Under the DED, schools are required to produce a disability scheme and action plan. However, we know from the GTC Annual Survey of Teachers (SoT) that either many schools do not have equality policies in place or that teachers are unaware of them. In 2006, 63% of teachers told us that their school had a policy on disability in relation to pupils. Given that the DED only came into force for secondary schools in December, and does not apply to primary schools until December 2007, this is perhaps not surprising. However, it is worrying when one considers that schools have been required to have a race equality scheme since 2002, yet in 2006, only 64% of teachers responded that their school had a scheme in place. Moreover, it is not possible to tell how specific the schools' policies are, and as one survey respondent said:

"We have policies in place but equality is in the practice not on paper!"

17. The GTC recommends that schools need more support to implement the requirements of the legislation and crucially this includes the need for effective training and development for teachers. We know from the 2006 survey that only 30% of teachers had received training relating to disability and 50% of respondents have had no training in any aspect of equality. From the survey, we also know that when teachers have received equality training they are more likely to feel that they understand the implications for classroom practice.
18. In the survey, teachers also said that they wanted more professional development to help them tackle underachievement. They also wanted to support the learning of certain groups of students; in particular learners with special educational needs and "gifted and talented" students.

Conclusion

19. The GTC has consistently advised that training and development for all teachers needs to continue past ITT, with a focus on sustained, timely and effective CPD. Guidance regarding planning and developing special educational provision needs to consider all those who are involved in delivering it, and this includes the training and development needs of all staff, teachers or otherwise.

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