

Hamilton Oxford Schools Partnership(HOSP) Integrated Support Services

Evaluation Report - October 2001

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Integrated Support Services strand of the Hamilton Oxford Schools Partnership aims to maximise the responsiveness, effectiveness and coherence of the LEA Pupil Support Service to school communities within the Partnership. The Partnership consists of 15 schools, 1 secondary, 2 special, 3 middle, and 9 first schools. The Pupil Support Services include Educational Psychologists (EPs), Educational Social Workers (ESWs), EBD outreach teachers (EBDOTs) and Advisory Teachers for Special Educational Needs (ATSENs).

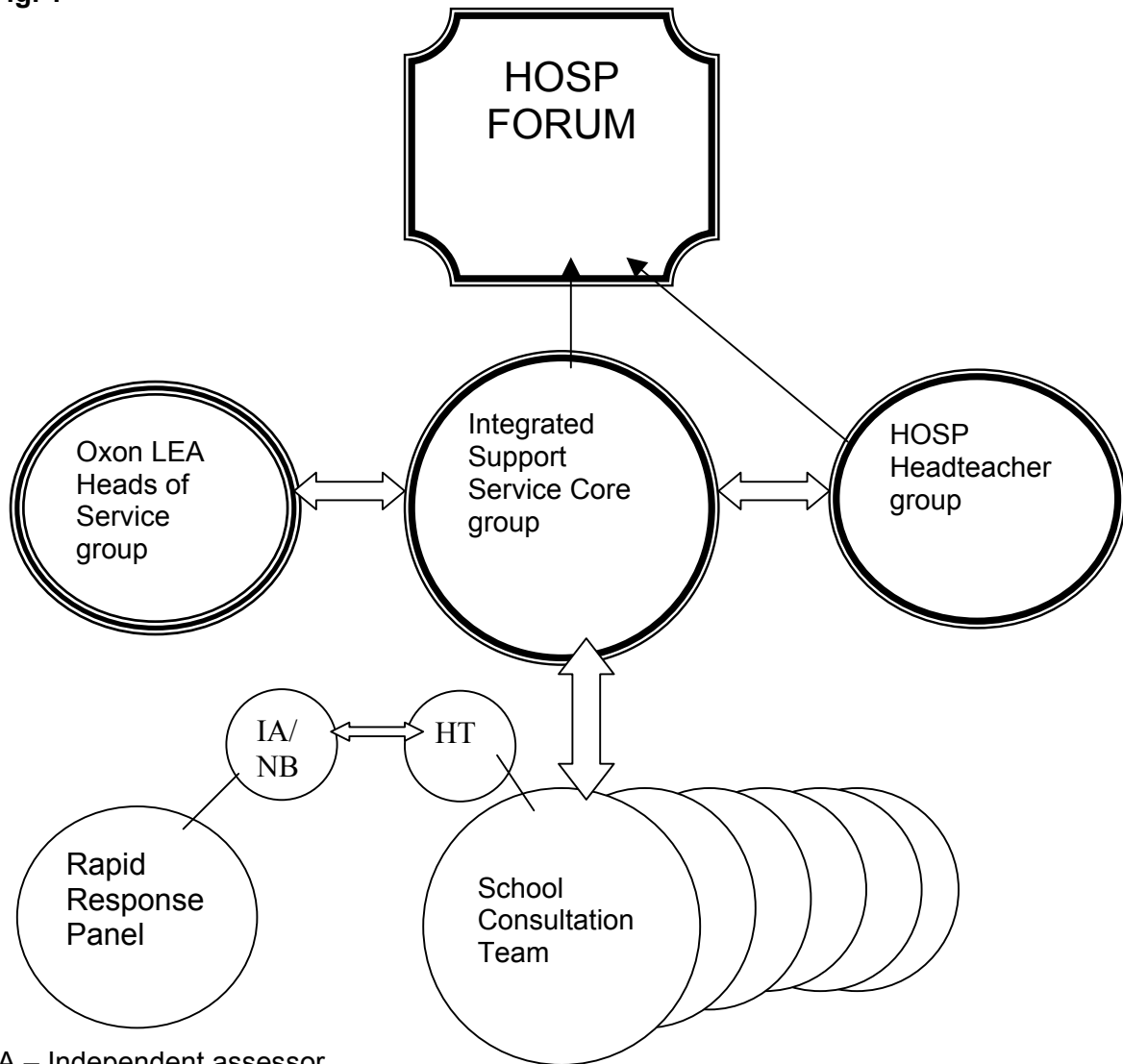
1.2 To achieve the aims of the Integrated Support Service (ISS) initiative, a steering group was set up, namely the ISS Core Group. This group is chaired by the ISS coordinator and includes:

- the Director of Hamilton Oxford Schools Partnership (HOSP),
- representatives from schools,
- representatives from the Pupil Support Services,
- a representative from the Parent Development Education Team,
- a representative from the Youth Service,
- LEA officers and advisors
- local voluntary agencies.

1.3 The Core Group functions as a clearing house for issues and concerns raised by schools and services and provides a forum for problem solving and strategic decision making. The group holds a small budget to provide new resources to support initiatives. Typically the group has focussed on identifying issues regarding access to and/or gaps in provision. Responses have included information finding exercises, reviewing protocols, and setting up pilot projects to meet identified needs. Strategies proposed by the group are further discussed and agreed by the LEA Heads of Service group and the HOSP Headteacher Forum (see fig 1).

1.4 The ISS core group set up *School Consultation Teams* as a strategy to achieve coherence in the relationship between the support services and schools. These teams meet in school and consist of school representatives, normally the head or deputy and the SENCO, representatives from the Pupil Support Services attached to the school and other peripatetic personnel regularly involved in supporting the school. The latter group sometimes including representatives from health (school nurse, speech therapist) and social services (Surestart workers).

Fig. 1



IA – Independent assessor
NB- Network broker
HT – Headteacher

School Consultation Teams meet twice termly in each school, first to consider issues and plan action and then to review progress. Reports from these plan / action / review cycles are fed back to the ISS core group. The collating of evidence from the School Consultation Teams provides the ISS core group with regular and comprehensive data about patterns of provision and school priorities, issues and concerns.

1.5 The HOSP Action Plan for the Integrated Support Service Initiative demonstrates a clear commitment *to promote and enable inclusion in all HOSP schools* (Action Plan 2000-2001) meeting David Blunkett's concern to: *look at ways of shifting resources from expensive remediation to cost effective prevention and early intervention; to shift the emphasis from procedures to practical support...*(DFEE 1997 p.5).

These themes are represented in the action plan through strategies to:

- develop positive intervention in the early years

- plan for inclusion
- prevent exclusion
- establish in school support groups
- facilitate the involvement of external agencies
- work more closely with parents
- develop strategies for improving attendance

2. The Evaluation

2.1 It is evident from the Action Plan headings that there are a number of strands to the Integrated Support Service Initiative. Two meetings were held with the ISS evaluation group to clarify the aims of this evaluation and to discuss the research proposal. It was decided that the report should focus on the evaluation of the impact of School Consultation Teams on schools' perception of the effectiveness of support for pupils with special educational needs. The purpose of the evaluation is to identify models of good practice in relation to developing schools capacity for inclusive education.

2.2 The first consultation teams met in the spring term 2000, and so have been in operation for one year at the time of this study.

3. Evaluation methodology

3.1 Evidence was sought to review both process and outcome measures through mapping and sampling the system of support created by the ISS initiatives and in particular through the action of the School Consultation Teams. A simple systems analysis was used (Checkland and Scholes, 1999).

3.2 The evidence base for the evaluation consisted of:

- Interviews from a sample of members representing seven School Consultation Teams (5/6 people interviewed from each team). These included four first schools, two middle schools and one upper school within the HOSP group. Individual perceptions of both process and outcome issues were sought. Following the interviews, interviewees were sent an edited written record of the interview for further comment or correction. For the interview outline see appendix 1.
- A comparison of current findings with baseline data collected in a review of Pupil Support Services in the Blackbird Leys area carried out in March 1999 – the same schools were studied in both samples.
- A review of the literature of current national developments in the organisation of pupil support services to enhance schools capacity for inclusive practice.
- Observation of the ISS core group meetings held during the period September 1999 – May 2001.
- A review of documentary evidence from ISS core meetings, school consultation meetings and service review meetings.

- Discussion of initial data collection with the ISS evaluation group.

3.3 No direct evidence was collected from the client group (young people and their parents) because of the difficulty of establishing any means of comparison for their experiences. Indirect impact was investigated through the case examples elicited from the field workers interviewed.

4. Evaluation findings

4.1 The impact of School Consultation Teams (SCTs)

Of the 31 people interviewed all regarded the SCT as a successful or very successful innovation. A number of common themes were mentioned by interviewees to explain why they felt the SCT had been effective and these are summarized in the table below. Interviewees were not directly asked about these issues, so ticks have been entered when the theme was mentioned by a particular person (see appendix one for interview questions asked).

4.2 Strengths of the School Consultation Teams

It is clearly the case that the frameworks of support set up by the ISS, and in particular through its key operational structure the School Consultation Team, are helping schools to develop more inclusive policy and practice. There are a number of interesting features of this support:

- i) The SCT meetings take their agenda from individual schools so that the discussions in the meetings vary considerably between schools reflecting their particular interests and needs.
- ii) The SCT review cycle and the tendency for the meetings to move from individual case examples to issues, provides structures and processes for supporting schools in reflecting on the inclusiveness of their own policy and practice. This is a process that Dessent (1987) has identified as crucial to *Making the Ordinary School Special*.
- iii) Individual casework seemed to be facilitated by the SCT as communication between professionals was enhanced by getting to know each other through the meetings and being able to have informal contact around the meetings. The meetings also provided good opportunities for setting up further joint work around individual children / young people.
- iv) In order to ensure that the proactive role of the SCT was maintained, and not submerged in crisis management it became clear at an early stage in SCT discussions that head teachers needed access to a quick acting, high quality system to support them in managing individuals in crisis. This resulted in the development of the *Rapid Response System* (see section 4.3 iii).
- v) Some members are common to a number of SCTs and are available to share problem solving protocols and solutions developed in one team with other teams where similar themes emerge.

- vi) The SCT develops a way of working in a particular school that ensures continuity of practice when team membership changes, for example one new head teacher commented on how quickly she was able to get a good picture of SEN issues because of the knowledge exchange gained through the SCT.
- vii) Members of the SCTs gave examples from meetings that demonstrated the teams have many characteristics of what Senge et al. (1999) called a *learning organization*. That is participation in the meetings supported team members in having a better understanding of others roles and responsibilities and provided a quality of dialogue that allowed team members to learn from each other's experience. For support service workers, the SCT meetings provided a good opportunity to understand how particular schools worked, so that they could shape their service to the school's interests and needs.
- viii) The *plan / review* structure of the SCT ensured good follow through into action and clear accountability for all participants.

4.3 Issues and concerns

- i) The majority of heads expressed some uncertainty about what was required in setting the agenda for the meetings. This would seem to reflect a change in the locus of control between members of the pupil support service and schools. Schools now lead the process of defining what support they need, rather than receiving a service defined elsewhere. This would seem to be an important change, very much in the interests of pupils and schools, but in creating a new role for heads has staff development implications.
- ii) Three head teachers noted that it was important for the SCT to have good communication links with school staff not able to attend the meetings, both to ensure good quality information was getting to the meeting and that essential feedback was received by staff. They identified communication channels between the SCT and the school as an important area for development.

SENCOs also commented on the role of the SCT in improving internal school communication. They seemed to experience particular benefits from the meetings, and described feeling more empowered and in one case enjoying "the opportunity to sit down with senior management"!

The good systemic communication required for the SCT to function effectively draws attention to the linking communication systems with, on one side, schools and on the other side, the local education authority. Clearing the blockages / sluggish movement within one system illuminates the blockages within linking systems.

- iii) Evidence in this review suggests it is important to recognize the integral nature of the structures set up by the ISS project. For example the Rapid Response meetings were almost universally recognized as being highly effective producing "exciting packages" and "creative solutions". However there was strong evidence to suggest that this intervention would not have had the same impact without the background support of policy and practice development taking place in the

School Consultation Teams. Arguably Rapid Response is an effective form of crisis management precisely because of the underlying framework of early intervention and good inclusive practice provided through the SCTs. It seems likely that its crucial function in ensuring children / young people do not *fall through the net* of agency provision (Roaf, 2002) can not be fulfilled if it becomes identified as just another conduit to resources.

Roaf (2002 in press) has argued that intra / inter agency systems need to incorporate three key roles in order to ensure children / young people do not fall *through the net* of interagency support: the role of the *Independent Assessor*; the role of the *Network Broker* and the role of the *Key Worker*. If youngsters do not seem to be able to be managed within the system, the Independent Assessor is asked to draw together a range of evidence in order to decide how to proceed. The Network Broker acts as a broker between different support services to ensure appropriate help is available and the Key Worker follows through and monitors the youngster once a decision on intervention has been made.

Rapid Response seems to contain within it the operation of these three roles. The first stage of Rapid Response is mediated by the ISS coordinator who effectively acts in the role of Independent Assessor in deciding whether a RR panel should be called. Once the panel has deliberated the ISS coordinator then negotiates the provision to be made, in effect acts as an *Intra/Inter agency Broker*. A member of the Rapid Response Panel is allocated the role of monitoring and following through agreed action in relation to the young person.

- iv) Linking up a number of different institutions and services is a notoriously difficult task. In situations of crisis, organizations turn in upon themselves and the extra energies that quality partnership requires can lose the priority they need for success. The evidence from this evaluation provided a number of examples of a tendency to this kind of entropy, however in each case the discipline of the SCT was maintained at a satisfactory level because of the external expectation that prevailed. It is clear that this external organizational and accountability role is crucial to the successful long term running of SCTs. The system of relationships established within and between schools needs "minding". The effective coordination in evidence in data collected throughout this evaluation is a crucial feature of the projects success. The importance of this facilitation role in supporting interdisciplinary collaboration matches the findings of other similar evaluations (Glenny 2000). The complexity of the role is evident in a number of examples given in this study, for example in the extension of the role from a coordination function to an independent assessor and brokering function as seen in section (iii) above.
- v) The coordinated support from The Heads of Service meeting seems to be ensuring full involvement of all services in the SCT. For example, one of the support service workers felt under pressure because discussion was not always relevant to her and other aspects of her work seemed more pressing, however she was clear that there was an expectation for her to attend and so had not missed any sessions. Interestingly, other team members had independently commented on the importance of this person's presence at the meeting. This seems to indicate that the most experienced practitioners have particular value for the SCT but may not feel the need for it as strongly as other colleagues. If

this is the case then it would be useful to stress the professional development potential of the meetings and the key professional development role played by the most experienced practitioners.

Congruence between senior management policy and fieldwork practice seems to be a feature of this innovation. Explicit and clear links have been set up between the policy makers, the middle managers and the fieldworkers and the feedback structures in place are operating in both directions, there is clear evidence that SCT data is influencing decisions at the policy level.

4.4 Interagency representation

A number of people interviewed felt the SCT and ISS Core group meetings would be enhanced if representatives from health (mental health and speech therapy in particular), social services and the police, were present. Some groups did have such representation (e.g. the school nurse, *Surestart* representatives) and noted how useful this was. The absence of social services representation had distorted the working of one SCT, where the chair had not brought important child protection issues to the group because they would not be able to be resolved. This had left her unsupported with the issues and the SCT remained unaware of the intensity of the problems. This indicates the importance of all SCT members understanding the relationship between the SCT and the ISS core group, and the need to identify and report on gaps in provision to the ISS core group.

The ISS group had discussed the issue of interagency involvement in the SCTs and made what at the time was a somewhat contentious decision to limit membership to Pupil Services in education in the first instance, to ensure group size did not become unmanageable. There was significant evidence to suggest that this developmental approach was a successful strategy in the first year of the project. In particular, the SCT teams benefited from the stable membership which resulted from the clear expectations of attendance set by service managers.

The commitment to closer partnership to other agencies in the longer run has been demonstrated in the developing links with health and social services. This has already resulted in a well attended half day conference (September 01) run jointly with social services focusing on the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (DoH, DfEE and the Home Office, 2000).

The decision to avoid interagency work in the first instance has had some disadvantages. There was evidence that the interdisciplinary work now developing so effectively is not currently taking advantage of longstanding interagency networks actively working with the same client group. In particular there are no direct links with *Cuddesdon Corner* and the *Oxford City Adolescent Network*. Links were maintained at the fieldwork level as several practitioners interviewed belonged to the Adolescent Network and gave examples of the value of the group in connecting up agencies at ground level. One person interviewed described how contacts at Adolescent Network meetings had enabled her to set up a Bodyzone project in her school with the help of two community nurses. Some people interviewed described how they had less contact with Cuddesdon Corner than in the past because of the competition for time with EAZ meetings. Whilst the EAZ meetings were being prioritized which could indicate greater value being placed upon them, there was regret expressed by some Head teachers and

SENCOs at the falling away of the positive link with social services that Cuddesdon Corner represented. As longstanding, low finance, loose networks of practitioners, it may be that these groups feel difficult to place in the tighter organizational structures developed through ISS.

4.5 The ISS Core group

The ISS core meeting provides an effective and representative clearing house for issues raised by the SCTs and there is a good match between the issues and concerns expressed by individual interviewees and the discussions in the ISS Core group meetings.

Models of good practice in developing schools capacity for inclusive education.

Most schools gave an example of a project to develop inclusive practice that had been supported to some degree by discussion in SCT and the ISS core group. Support included help in the formulation and / or the review of the project and in some cases financial assistance from the ISS Core group. Heads stressed the value of quite small amounts of financial aid that could be quickly available to back problem solving initiatives without having to postpone implementation until the next financial year. These included:

- a drop in center for parents
- a safe area for children to refer themselves when they needed a quiet space
- small group teaching for pupils struggling to cope in a mainstream setting
- language development initiatives
- circle of friends training
- a family support worker
- integration support for non attenders

An interesting feature of these initiatives was that in two cases the provision was only temporarily required, as a result, as old needs declined and new needs arose, resources were easily withdrawn and reallocated. However whilst this indicates the flexibility and effectiveness of school based provision, it also highlights the problems of current arrangements for centrally held resource allocation that is triggered by Code of Practice levels. If schools manage pupils with difficulties effectively through early intervention or imaginative in-school provision, they do not reach the trigger points necessary to release additional resources. Good inclusive practice is therefore not rewarded.

Other ISS Core group initiatives included:

- i) staff development, for example regular SENCO meetings and classroom management sessions for NQTs;
- ii) specialist resources to be shared by schools, for example additional EBD outreach, speech therapy and home school links workers;
- iii) support in managing difficult situations, for example the Rapid Response initiative and the social work helpline.

THEME	sen 1	sen 2	sen 3	sen 4	sen 5	sen 6	ht1	ht2	ht3	ht4	ht5	ht6	ht7	ep1	Ep2	esw1	Esw2	ebd 1	ebd 2	fsw
Improved accessibility and quality of contact with professionals	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Clarity and focus of discussion /decisions re.action/ timetabling	√	√	√			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Improved coherence and accountability, reduced derailing by other events	√			√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Process of individual referral quicker and better quality			√	√	√				√					√						√
Opportunity for critical evaluation /support in the dev. of school policy and practice / emphasis on plan / review	√				√		√	√	√	√		√		√	√	√	√	√	√	
A venue for pupil services to access school thinking and to adapt their services to school needs and priorities	√					√	√			√			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Opportunity to share ideas / expertise / problem solve / hear other schools solutions	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Widening of perspective / staff development		√	√	√			√		√	√		√			√		√		√	√
Raises profile of SEN / pastoral support	√		√		√	√														√
Continuity maintained when team members change	√		√				√		√					√			√	√		√
Key role of ISS coordinator / independent chair	√	√			√	√		√	√			√		√	√			√	√	√
Support / facilitation for inclusion projects	√		√	√		√	√	√	√	√			√	√	√	√		√		
Troubleshooting and sharing "wicked issues"		√			√			√	√		√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√
Drawing out needs from across schools in EAZ and organizing group pressure / provision	√	√	√	√	√		√	√		√		√	√		√				√	

sen – senco ht – headteacher / deputy headteacher
 ebd – ebd outreach teacher fsw – family support worker

ep – educational psychologist

esw – education social worker

4.6 The costing of the system

The current experiment has been supported by some additional resources. Whilst Educational Psychologist time has not been increased overall, the Education Social Work service has been reorganized over the period of this evaluation, providing more support for City schools, however this will be ongoing and is not dependent on EAZ funding. The EBD outreach team have .5 of a post funded by the EAZ, but this was following through a buy in arrangement that the Blackbird Leys Schools were already operating prior to the start of the EAZ, so will not have been a significant change in SCT participants perceptions of the service.

The significant additional role, and cost, is in the development of the ISS coordinator, currently a .5 post. As this has been identified as a key role in the success of the project it will need to be retained as an addition to the normal Pupil Services budget following the life of the EAZ if the ISS project is to continue. However some economies may be achieved by locating the role within the current Pupil Services team. One senior manager described the way in which the role could be considered as a project management responsibility rather than a line management responsibility allowing any member of the current pupil services team to take the role if they demonstrated suitable skills. An issue for discussion would be the size of school cluster that would be serviced by such a system co-coordinator.

Overall, given the very positive findings of this evaluation, there does seem to be substantial evidence that resources are being used more effectively than they were prior to the start of the project.

5. Two years on:

This section of the report is based upon a comparison of data collected for a review of the Pupil Support services for the Blackbird Leys Education Partnership (Spring 1999) and the same schools taking part in the current evaluation.

Issues raised in the 1999 report appear as bullet points and commentary on the current situation follows in italics.

- The assessment process currently has a strong bias towards the establishing of need in order to make the case for more resources for individual youngsters
The amount of paperwork and 'cracking the format' of the paperwork are still seen as major frustrations, some evidence from SENCOs that the burden of paperwork has increased over the period.
- Children / young people in need are often *floating*, that is the assessment process is so drawn out that their needs are not clearly defined, for considerable periods of time
Substantial improvement in this area because of the coordinating function of the SCT (all schools could give successful case examples). Significant reduction in the stress to SENCOs because the gaining of different professional perspectives is happening automatically. Universal approval of the Rapid Response procedure, enabling the most stressful issues to be dealt with quickly, fully and therefore effectively.

Still delays because of poor paperwork / communication for new entrants, but this is being currently specifically addressed by the LEA officer and the SENCO group (transfer policy).

- Much SENCO time is spent in trying to gain advice and co-ordinate assessment and provision leaving little time for direct intervention with youngsters.

The SCT is functioning very effectively to achieve this. Strong evidence from SENCOs of reduced stress because they are able to use their time more effectively because of ease of contact with support services. The remaining issue here is the difficulty of accessing social services / mental health involvement.

- Support service personnel have limited time to work with youngsters beyond the assessment process and thus identified needs can not be met with therapeutic interventions.

Schools felt more supported in this area. Evidence of greater visibility in schools within the same allocation time and work being more valued because of the tighter focus achieved through the SCT.

The newly described ESW role working directly with the Secondary school is clearly resulting in different ways of working with youngsters and greater permeation / support to teachers throughout the school.

- Intervention is often too little too late.

No evidence that this view still pertains. In particular, the early intervention and preventative projects are clearly perceived as effective and create a really positive focus for policy and practice in SEN. All schools had examples of early intervention initiatives discussed and supported by the SCT and in some cases receiving targeted funding from the ISS core group.

- Schools spend a lot of time chasing services and resources in what they feel to be service centred rather than school centred organizational structures

A complete change here, SCT places the focus of activity clearly in the school. Schools are having much less work and hassle and much more control. Clear that improved SS personnel understanding about the schools and their dynamics is providing a much better match between the system of support and the schools needs.

- Question about the quality of decision making that results from such an episodic process.

Again a complete change, I got the impression that discussion was much more strategic than in the past and a genuine 'learning organization' was being created. Almost everybody interviewed has given an example of professional development they have experienced through the meetings (they were not specifically asked this)..

- Case conferences tend to only happen at a late stage in the referral process after many options have already closed

Case examples are being used to raise issues at the SCT and this is resulting in discussions of strategies that can be applied across groups of children. The SCT also seems to have resulted in more / earlier joint case work taking the pressure off the need for the formal case conference.

- Children and families who are perceived to have problems may well be receiving small amounts of help from a number of professionals without communication between professionals.

Clear evidence from schools of improvement in this area.

6. The National Context

In a recent review of the role of support services for special educational needs, Gray (2001) focused on what he felt might be competing imperatives for LEAs. LEAs are now required both to support schools in developing more inclusive strategies for SEN and to retain minimal central staffing with the significant majority of funding being distributed to schools through their formulae budgets. These high expectations in a low resource climate present particular challenges for the role of the support services and require new models of working.

At the same time there is a good deal of exhortation to work collaboratively from a number of sources (e.g. audit commission reports; DfEE initiatives; the social inclusion units reports; the Connexions initiative; the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families) but there seems to be little discussion of possible models for achieving this. Whilst commenting on the wide range of approaches to support service organization, Gray's study does not seek to illuminate particular models of practice. In the same year the report from the Educational Psychology working group (2000) has some reference to collaborative examples for focused specialist interagency work but presents no models for routine interdisciplinary collaboration. In a recent audit of multi-agency activity for the local Government Association, Atkinson et al. (2001) found that all examples of interagency work given to them were focused on discrete client groups such as children with autism or government initiatives covering a focused area for example looked after children, early years.

What is distinctive about the HOSP project is that it is not aimed at a particular target group but is a routine way of working for schools and services within a particular geographical area. Given that broader focus it seems to represent a particular achievement of communication and coordination. However it is also a cause for concern. Similar experiments are in place in other LEAs but they seem to be difficult to maintain (personal communication re. two such LEAs). However in the examples referred to, there are some distinctive differences in organization with the HOSP model. The first of these is the role of the systems *minder*, identified as significant in the success of the HOSP project but lacking in the other LEAs. The second notable difference was the congruence of priorities between the policy makers, middle managers and fieldworkers in the HOSP study, a feature either not present or not consistently followed through in the other LEAs.

There is clearly a need to look in more detail at the necessary and sufficient requirements for success in collaborative work. More fundamentally the changing relationship between schools and LEAs requires a new definition of priorities for the functioning of the support services. The system of support needs to have characteristics that place decision making as close to schools as possible whilst also retaining protection for individuals who challenge the schools, whether through their need for specialist skills or advocacy. If the education service is to be genuinely inclusive then

the quality of support for the most vulnerable members of the school community becomes a critical indicator of success.

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Appendix 1

Interview outline:

What is the aim of the SCT initiative?

How are meetings structured for example in the tracking of individual case examples?

What have been the successes, strengths of the SCT meetings?

What have been the weaknesses, problems?

How effective do you feel the SCT/SCTs has/have been?

Has the SCT discussion influenced policy and practice within the EAZ? If so in what ways?

What are the implications of the ISS and SCT initiatives for future practice e.g. training?

How does the current system of support from Pupil services compare with the support two years ago?

Have you been involved with *Rapid Response* and if so how effective was that intervention?