Developing multi-agency working in urban educational contexts

Andy Howes and Samantha Fox

University of Manchester

School of Education

Educational Support and Inclusion

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Abstract

Increasingly, key issues in urban education cut across the traditional support structures in local educational authorities. The needs of pupils in a particular school may be addressed more effectively where learning support staff are able to access the expertise of staff whose focus is on dealing with behaviour issues. Furthermore, it is increasingly important for school and LEA staff to link with the work of agencies from disciplines outside education, such as health, housing, and family workers. Addressing such issues entails a process of learning to work with different people, developing new fields of knowledge, understanding unfamiliar assumptions and addressing problems together.

This paper draws on the experience of working collaboratively with a particular LEA that was engaging with these changes. The data derives from a series of meetings and interviews with LEA and school staff, and from observations in primary and secondary schools. The research highlighted the wide range of needs and expectations of support, within and between schools. LEA structures in various geographical areas differed considerably from each other in terms of the amount and type of connection between educational services.

Multi-agency working aimed to link areas of expertise to form a more effective system, but more often led to the loss of professional identity and risked the marginalisation of particular agencies. Building capacity to deal with these new challenges in this context involved working less narrowly, and more expansively – aiming, for instance to make connections between disconnected initiatives in schools, and to build trusting relationships with staff and pupils. Many of these issues are illuminated through the analysis of a multi-agency meeting within a school, which was led by the special needs coordinator and which involved LEA and school support staff, educational psychologist and family workers from a neighbouring non-governmental organisation.

Introduction

> Among the major societal issues facing those of us living in the West are: unemployment, homelessness, poverty, crime, care of the elderly, the young, the disabled or ill, youth violence, ethnic conflict, drug abuse and protecting the environment. Tackling such problems is obviously not a simple matter. One factor which contributes to the complexity is that they tend to span a wide range of aspects of society; many even span national boundaries. An inherent feature of such situations is therefore that no single agency can ever have responsibility for tackling them (Huxham and Vangen, 1996).

In September 2003, Northwood Local Education Authority (LEA) instigated a reorganisation of its support provision. As a part of the change process, a team of university researchers were commissioned to act as ‘critical friends’. This involved attendance at meetings, visiting schools and talking with those who were at the cutting edge of the reorganisation, that is, teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) who had worked for a particular provider of support before the reorganisation. One intention of the reorganisation was to create teams whereby the different providers of support worked together, benefiting from each other’s specialism, in order to address the critical issues in urban education more effectively, and making capacity building in schools a more central concern. The teams, arranged into several districts, included those who had provided support for pupils with learning difficulties, the Behavioural Support Service, the Traveller Service and the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service who had a long history of supporting pupils for whom English is a second language in schools. The university team were aware that the staff were embarking on a challenging process of learning which would test many assumptions about roles, resources and priorities – not only those held by support staff, but also those held by managers and researchers. No detailed picture of multi-agency working was available. In reflecting on this experience, we pose the following research questions:

- Who benefits and how from coordinated multi-agency provision – eg. schools, teachers, or pupils?

- What are the key conditions leading to usefully coordinated services, and how do they depend on context?

A real dilemma

A recent report (Tomlinson, 2003) provides policy makers and practitioners with a bank of examples of successful interagency practices from specific fields including drug education, early childhood, re-engaging disaffected youth in education, social inclusion, special educational needs, lifelong learning, LEA research and partnerships between education providers. Such examples are helpful, but may have the unintended effect of allowing policy makers to gloss over the real tensions and problems which arise in such work. This paper describes the advantages but also the difficulties arising through a coordinated attempt to develop more inter-agency working around education in one local authority.

Problems in society tend to an a wide range of aspects, as suggested by Huxham and Vangen, (ibid). It is also beyond dispute that the uncoordinated involvement of many different agencies in children's lives can actually result in counterproductive actions, duplicating services and inefficiencies, contradictory messages about ways forward. In the worst cases, uncoordinated services can miss signs of child abuse, with potentially damaging and even fatal consequences for the children concerned (Laming, 2003) The image is created of a network of related but separate services, leaving significant but unnoticed gaps between them:

> 'Concerns were primarily about the way agencies worked together and standards of practice' (para 17.79 ibid).

Even if the risks of children 'falling through the net' (Roaf and Lloyd, 1995) may be relatively small, the potential seriousness of the outcome in terms of consequences for the child is a strong motivation for high quality interagency work. As Paul Boateng says in the introduction to the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' (DfES 2003), "we need to address the underlying problems identified in the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report – weak accountability, and poor integration". It is notable that this report is prepared by the Treasury – it is worth noting that it is in connection with finance that government departments become most integrated.

However, the tragedy which sparked the Laming enquiry is of a different order to the issues which prompt the need for more multi-agency work in most schools. In comparison to child abuse, educational failure is much more common[1], but has not historically been considered as serious, because the consequences are less horrific. Currently, child protection issues continue to be at the heart of most intensive interagency work in schools, with the school is seen as a key agency in early identification when children first come to be at risk.

Nevertheless, the case for multi-agency work beyond the issue of child protection is increasingly strong. The following list of 'how inter-agency work contributed to supporting pupils' gives some sense of the reasons for this:

- providing a joined-up, child-centred perspective on young people's lives;
- offering a supportive forum for staff to exchange views and generate ideas;
- widening awareness of other strategies and resources outside school;
- assessing and planning for individual needs;
- planning the contribution of a range of professionals;
- reviewing and revising plans and developing additional or different approaches;
- providing an avenue to out-of-school provision;
- supporting school staff to keep trying with challenging pupils;
- supporting staff in relation to school management or colleagues over issues of exclusion;
- encouraging professionals to respond to the views and experiences of young people.'

[1] There are about 11 million children in England and Wales, of whom 3–4 million are seen as vulnerable; 300–400,000 seen as children in need; 25,700 on child protection register, and 50-100 die from abuse or neglect per year (source: Every Child Matters, DfES 2003). By contrast, 23% of 11 year olds failed to meet the expected level in English.

> (Lloyd et al, 2001)

In respect of particularly vulnerable groups, there is already a growing body of opinion demanding more child-centred and joined-up services. In relation to work with disabled children and their families, a recent report challenges services to keep the whole child in view, the child who is more than a patient, pupil or social work client, and more than the sum of these parts (Petrie et al, 2003).

> 'It is unreasonable to expect schools to solve the intractable problems of disadvantage alone. A long-term strategy, in which schools play a part but which also addresses some of the underlying factors in which they are unable to intervene effectively, might help to overcome these disadvantages' (Lloyd and Roaf, 1995).

Where failure to succeed in school is taken seriously (influenced partly through the systems of financial and other penalties which the government has introduced in relation to exclusion, for example) the issue of children falling through the gaps becomes critical, and there is reason to look critically at the systems which have built up to serve particular needs over the last decades, but which do not necessarily provide the best solutions for current or future contexts. Previous research has found schools working with other agencies to try and prevent exclusion:

> 'It seemed that the schools were really making an effort to hold on to these young people, not only because they were trying to reduce their exclusion figures, but because they had a sense of the difficulties faced by the young people and a willingness to keep trying. A major contribution of the meetings was that they promoted an understanding of the complex and sometimes very distressing outside world of children's lives. School staff valued the support from other professionals, particularly when the school was holding onto very challenging young people and there was pressure from other school staff to exclude them. When a plan did not seem to be working, the meetings offered an opportunity to develop other strategies or identify further resources.' (Lloyd et al, 2001)

What we can say is that difficulties in interagency work should no longer be a surprise. There is a large body of research suggesting that multiagency working in any sphere is associated with significant costs. These costs include the need for additional resources and structures to facilitate coordination between services (Lloyd and Roaf, 1995). In this respect, one of the most complicating features of interagency working is that the structure needed to make it work is at odds with the freedom required by some of agencies to operate. For example, the community project managers in Easen et al (2000) considered that they worked most effectively precisely where they are 'operating free of the bureaucratic and statutory constraints that hampered professionals within the established services' (pp.363-4).

Some of the costs can most easily be seen as coming from the need to work across subcultures; ie. from the 'marked differences between the ways in which different professional groups conceptualised their roles, purposes and practices' (ibid p??). In this sense, working with others invites the possibility of uncomfortable interprofessional comparisons, with regard to pay, perceptions of status and expertise, and so on. Effective interagency work involves overcoming historical prejudices and judgements arising from these interprofessional rivalries and jealousy. There was evidence that many of the professionals in Northwood support services understood this – some of them having been on other sides of those divisions in the past:

> 'In my experience it's the teachers who are most resistant, and most blank you – "I've been teaching for 30 years, I'm not having this Jill come lately in with a new idea and a new bandwagon". They are the teachers that, if you can do a *solid bit of work* either in their class or somebody else's, are often the ones that will come on board most fully than anybody else. And I respect that. *I was that sort of teacher, I have to say*… (interview with Northwood learning support staff)

Other literature also suggests that differences in conceptualisation were the product of the different assumptions made by different professions (Hallett and Stevenson, 1980). In one example, the secondment of two health visitors from the health authority to a project was acknowledged as a failure by both the community project manager and the health visitors' line manager (Easen et al,

2000). They both explained this in terms of the ‘culture difference’ between two professional groups. In other words, their training and conception of professional expertise had led the different professionals to conceptualise their purposes differently:

> ‘Health visitors who are trained to be expert in certain aspects of child rearing and to dispense that expertise to their clients came into conflict with community workers whose expertise lies much more in the ‘political’ activities of challenging and empowering the members of the community within which they work. Such differences can be fundamental: as one of the health visitors herself pointed out, the two groups operated with radically different notions of what constitutes ‘health work’ (p.357-8)

Within the communities of practice in which many practitioners work, notions of what constitutes effective and successful work are strongly linked to professional identity (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In this sense, multi-agency working constitutes a threat of the loss of identity of individuals with particular expertise or position in relation to children and young people – and loss of practice groups with the resources to deal with common difficulties, crises, for example where insufficient attention is paid to mechanisms for preserving institutional memory. Working in new interprofessional groups makes it difficult to properly account for all that is tacitly known in groups. In their important study of interagency working, Roaf and Lloyd (1995) provide the example of a young person, Bill, who was seen by a psychiatrist while in foster care but, when he returned home, the psychiatrist had left and his report had not been passed on to anyone. Bill's case was sent to a different social work office which closed the file; his behaviour deteriorated.

> I could see the whole thing happening again, just like it started before ... if they had just talked to each other instead of going through us, making us go here and there, maybe things would have got done a lot quicker. (parent quoted in Roaf and Lloyd, 1995))

There are of course real differences in approach associated with many of these tensions. The time scale of proposed solutions varies greatly from school to health to social services.

> Headteachers spoke of the conflicts between themselves—with their desire for rapid solutions to the immediate problems of the individual child—and social workers with their expectation of working over a longer time scale with whole family units. The general practitioners (GPs) pointed to similar contrasts between their own long-term commitment to entire families and the focus of community project workers on short-term impact. The existence of these cultural differences was acknowledged by respondents and the need for effective communication between them was seen as essential for understanding both differing perspectives and different expectations of what each could do (Easen et al, 2000 p.358).

Other recent attempts to develop multi-agency work include the Children’s Fund, with the explicit intention to provide more effectively for the needs of children and young people by developing productive connections between voluntary and statutory agencies. The problems experienced in many local authorities demonstrate again that this is not a short term approach.

Any systematic attempt to develop more multi-agency working risks another difficulty; that any such working already underway gets overlooked as a result of the imposition of standard models and arrangements. Establishing successful multi-agency working involves so many factors that there is considerable variability in the form it takes in different contexts, and this variability is unavoidable. These and other issues are unpacked in what follows in relation to one LEA’s attempts to promote multi-agency working.

Developing multi-agency working in one LEA

Within Northwood LEA, additional support for children with learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, children for whom English is a second language, traveller children, pupils with statements and so on, has been provided to schools through a number of centrally-organised teams, each of which has, over several years, developed its own way of working in schools. For

example, support for pupils with learning difficulties has been managed by ‘Service for Inclusive Learning’ (SIL) who in the main, worked in the context of particular schools, developing and training teaching assistants to provide support for individual pupils. In some cases, this leads to significant extensions of role in those schools:

> “When I first joined the service I found that I was training teaching assistants in each school, to support children at school action plus. But now what I’m finding is, I’m supporting the teaching assistant generally in the schools by delivering the training or whatever, and then it’s come that you’ve got members of the teaching staff joining the training who can feed back to the teachers. So that’s sort of the model that seems to be developing. Once you’ve been in place for a while, and they can see things are in place, they can see the good practice of others, and they start to realise that it’s beneficial to filter that through the whole school” (learning support teacher)

In contrast, the Behaviour Support Service had established a tradition of providing support to several pupils in different schools for shorter periods of time, much more focused on individual children. Different services have developed different views of ‘need’ and ‘support’. For some support was within class, for others it was one-to-one outside the lesson. Some had a tradition of building relationships with the whole school, while others viewed the pupil as an isolated individual as being at the centre of their concern. The Behaviour Support service, for example, saw themselves as working through the relationships that they were able to develop with individual pupils.

> “I think my team are the only team that work in perhaps 20 schools. So we have a very short time as you can imagine. And developing relationships has taken four years in the job to develop really strong relationships. And your credibility is certainly on what you’ve done. If you’ve achieved something with an individual pupil then everybody wants you and is willing then to get to know you and you can develop your role. But its harder for our team because we are in so many schools for a relatively short period of time”.

Reorganisation of these different professionals into area teams was aimed at greater coordination of these services, so that staff could better share their expertise and skills with each other and with teachers in schools. LEA officers wanted to establish relationships which more readily developed the capacity of schools to work efficiently with all these different services. Building capacity was seen to involve working less narrowly, and more expansively – increasing the connection between hitherto disconnected initiatives in schools. In reflecting during the research process, members of these teams recognised aspects of their practice which could benefit from closer links with members of other teams, but also that the links had to be ‘real’:

> ‘When it’s convenient and when it’s worthwhile we will do it. I will do it, but I’m not going to start manufacturing occasions, because there are times when I’m not in the same school as someone from another team. And with the workload I have I can not in all conscience spend an hour on a meeting with somebody when I don’t even work with the same children or we’ve not even got the very same issues. But, I do meet with colleagues when there are relevant issues to discuss. I’m quite happy to that’ (interview with Northwood learning support teachers).

There was also, however, a fear from those who had worked in a particular service for some time that the formation of the teams would lead to a dilution of their specialism and therefore a decline in the quality of their support. There were those with professional reasons to maintain a distinction in their role and expertise. For example, some in the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service feared that in reorganised teams, the children they supported would increasingly be seen to have learning difficulties, and that they themselves would be considered to be increasingly interchangeable with SIL staff, in line with common assumptions which they had actively resisted for years concerning the nature of difficulties faced by children speaking English as an additional language.

Many people working in the support services were of the view that the school was the key unit in bringing about greater coordination, and that the key (again) to the possibilities available was the relationship with the school leadership and staff. They saw building the capacity of teachers to deal with diversity as very valuable, but also a 'quite difficult, intensive thing to do… you have to get to know that teacher and find out how they work':

> 'There needs to be release time [for school staff to work with us], and high status. We can't just go in and say to heads, we want this release. That has to be something that builds from our relationship. And also, there are lots of different ways of doing that. But it's very difficult to do. … In some schools the climate does shift, and it does work. But its taken a lot of years. If I think about one school in particular, [it's taken] years. You know, four or five years' (interview with learning support teachers)

Initially, LEA officers driving the reorganisation were less concerned with such detail, maintaining a belief in the value of bringing people from the different services together to discuss working arrangements. However, staff in the services resented this rather remote managerial approach, and relied instead on rather informal and ad hoc arrangements to learn about each other:

> A: We're told to all work together, but nobody seems to have looked at the realities of it, if you will…. we've not had the time to sort of share experiences… we've not had time to talk and discuss…
> B: It all happens incidentally... We get together as a team in difficult places and we'll talk amongst us and eventually it gets back into the school. So, it's an incidental procedure rather than a managed procedure.

We could group the relevant differences between services in relation to three kinds of categories:

- Conditions: resources, time, personnel, management, perceived status, flexibility:

  > "I was responding to the question how can flexible support be encouraged?
  > And I was making the comment that I work very differently in different schools, it's how flexible the school allows you to be. Some schools are very strict in what they want you to do, others are very flexible in their approach and open to new ideas" (support / district team meeting).

- Shared values: educational priority; blame discourse; exclusive focus on one group

- Location of the problem – within or without the child

'Schools lack clear and coherent expectations as to their roles and are therefore heavily influenced by head teachers' views, funding and local factors. A role could perhaps be defined which draws upon each of the approaches identified above but which determines the precise contribution of schools in the light of a locally agreed strategy'.

Case study 1: Green Meadow Primary

The struggle of the ethnic minority achievement service to avoid being seen as a special needs service meant that no special needs coordinator (SENCos) had been involved in discussions about multi-agency working, as already mentioned. It was all the more notable then, that in one primary school serving a multicultural community which experienced significant levels of deprivation, the SENCo had a multi-agency meeting up and running well before the reorganisation took place. We make this meeting a subject of attention here, because of what it reveals about the importance of a proactive school level coordinator. This school-centred meeting was mainly about sharing knowledge between practitioners, through discussion of individual children on the SEN list held in the school. No extra money had been made available for this school based meeting, beyond the allocated time of the participants. Other research has suggested that the individual child focus of interagency meetings in schools is still most common, although sometimes joint working

arrangements are discussed and developed. 'In one local authority, school-based inter-agency meetings were case-based (ie they only discussed individual pupils); in the other two, their purpose included strategic planning of service delivery as well as individual case discussion' (Lloyd et al, 2001).

During one multi-agency meetings at the school in November 2003, we observed the discussion and were drawn to an analysis of the kinds of knowledge that was shared, and the different working assumptions that were implicit in the practices of the different professionals involved, who included the SENCo, speech / language therapist, two representatives of a housing charity working with families evicted for anti-social behaviour, a learning support worker from the LEA, a behaviour support worker from the LEA, the school nurse, and an educational psychologist.

The discussion of two children on the list began with issues of their phonics levels, C-V-C word recognition; in other words, with the technicalities of their relative educational achievements. It was clear that some of the external support staff did not know that the two were siblings. The second child, then in Year 2, will here be called 'Mercy'.

The SENCo reported some of Mercy's characteristic behaviour in class 'going into herself, absence, rocking', and that she would love to go horse riding, although she saw little hope of that. She was seen to have made good progress with sentences. The EP responded by asking what techniques had been useful with her so far, and the teacher from the learning needs team summed up 'multisensory – magnetic letters, etc'. The EP was persistent, wondering about variation in Mercy's achievements: 'Why on some occasions, not on others – is she getting enough practice? Or is she overlearning…?' The SENCo explained that she had been receiving daily support, with the 'class teacher helping her all the time with it'.

The learning needs teacher had prepared an assessment report, showing some of the rather marginal changes in Mercy's educational level; recognising 14 rather than 6 words, spelling from 3 to 4; and that another review was due. She concluded, 'I'm very concerned about her'. At which point the SENCo pondered, 'But I do wonder, how much is educational, how much is emotional?'

In its own terms, this was a reasonable enough discussion. Differences of professional opinion were aired without rancour. Such information as they had was shared, with the SENCo's comment about horse-riding demonstrating her knowledge of family circumstances. The school staff defended their actions and the support that had been offered to Mercy, and although there were continuing concerns about educational achievement, there was no sense that anyone speaking felt that they should have been doing anything less or differently than they had. However, there was a sense of issues under the surface in the question posed by the SENCo.

It was in response to this question that the staff from the housing charity spoke up, in a matter-of-fact tone. One described Mercy's home environment, five children living with an alcohol-dependent mother and a father out of picture for a year after violent argument in which he had broken her collarbone. The housing association was going for repossession of the house because the mother had breached the terms of her tenancy through the behaviour of her older children. On this basis, the family would be 'intentionally homeless' and not offered rehousing. There was no prospect of affording a deposit on a private house, but in any case the mother was in denial about the problem, which for her was only about damp upstairs. The mother was reported as saying that 'Mercy has always been like this'. The children were managing to keep the house relatively clean, to the point that social services were reported as seeing 'no cause for concern'. Mercy's brothers were involved in car crime, and Mercy too had been seen driving a car. The mother was being taken to court for their non-attendance at school. The workers described a culture of sleeping during the day, staying awake most of the night. Meanwhile, a series of agencies had been involved in a succession of initiatives:

- The Catholic Church had bought a washing machine, paid for a holiday and carpets
- Housing worker had got mother to a detoxification project for 10 days where she had made good progress, but had gone back to drinking.

- The worker had taken Cornflakes for children one morning, and they had asked, ‘can we do this tomorrow too?’

The powerful learning that was then possible in this discussion was due to the range of perspectives brought to the table. The housing agency workers had what others have called a **patch** perspective, whereby the problem is seen to be irretrievably associated with housing and wider factors. These workers concentrated less on the individual and more on the social issues deeply linked with the social networks operating on particular estates, associated with crime and chaotic lifestyles in families lacking sufficient resilience and resources to deal with problems as they arose.

It became clear that the education staff round the table had been operating more in terms of their various **lists**, and mainly with the SEN list held by the SENCo, concerned with relatively less significant aspects of the problem as a whole, and with the details of reading difficulties and speech now appearing to be no more than symptoms of family circumstances quite unconducive to school learning. This raised the question as to whether there is something in the structure of schooling which makes it difficult to see the bigger picture of children’s lives, and to make appropriate responses in circumstances of such multiple difficulty.

Significantly, this detailed information about social circumstance had been unknown to most people in the educational services prior to this meeting – so that the sharing of this information was in itself an important outcome. The reaction around the table included some surprise, but also an acknowledgement that something like this had to have been going on – it was as if the veil of ignorance (Rawls, 1971) under which they had been constrained to work, had been stripped away so that their positions became clear. But the group had no established lines of action for responding jointly to such cases, and there was a feeling of uncertainty about who should or could do what. This was apparent when the teacher from the LEA’s behaviour needs team asked if the two children could have milk when they get to school, to which the SENCo replied, ‘They can’t have milk unless they pay for it…. But we could ask the head for discretion’. For the SENCo, the wider context of this position was that these children among others causing concern were not making use of the free breakfast club provided. Unsurprisingly, they weren’t making it to school early enough to take advantage of this offer. It now seemed likely that the SENCo would coordinate a more appropriate strategy to help solve the immediate problems faced by these children. She ran the meeting quietly, grasping the issues as they emerged, periodically summarising key information, and appearing likely to be able to coordinate the next stage of response to the situation as it now presented itself, from the school perspective.

Up to this point, no adaptation of practice had been made in respect of the information shared. Each person on the team had been exposed to how others saw things, but the flexibility of their professional practice seemed to vary, as did willingness to take others’ understanding seriously. The speech and language therapist was asked to see the child while she was in school, but refused, saying ‘I can’t see her without the mother for an initial meeting. It’s against my professional code’. In addition, the EP was working from a relatively narrow frame of reference, commenting regretfully that ‘it seems like education is way down the list of priorities’. She suggested asking the mother, ‘How can we help you? What do you need?’, at which others round the table pointed again to the mother’s denial – ‘We do start from there. It doesn’t help’. Developing a coordinated strategy from this meeting required several further steps in acknowledging each other’s contributions and professionalism. Further steps were planned, however. The LEA’s learning needs teacher proposed ‘another meeting – with social services’ This was agreed, and the group followed up the EP’s suggestion to agree who should be present at that meeting.

Case study 2: Green Lane Primary

Green Lane Primary School has established a reputation for its increasing capacity for multi-agency working. For ten years, it has been a barrier free school, and has developed a team approach to management, involving the Headteacher, the SENCo, and the barrier-free coordinator. About 80% of the pupil population is from the local Bahari speaking community, and the school has developed in such a way that the acting Deputy Head is currently also the full time support teacher

from the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service. This factor that has undoubtedly contributed to the integrated way in which the school has worked with external support.

In line with the intention behind the reorganisation, this was a school which had become more central in the coordination, control and ownership of the support services working there. Consequently, it was not only knowledge which is shared. The headteacher has used the presence of people with different expertise and ways of working in such a way that they all participated in the core of the school, altering their roles in such a way that their sense of professional identity is not dependent on their isolation, but on effective communication between them. As noted by Payne (2000), professionals play many roles in teams and networks in different contexts and at different times, and the key in this school is the effective sharing of professional practice by people working alongside each other, with a shared purpose. This fits with the LEA intention of facilitating more joint working between people from different services, so that they learn more from each other and share their different expertise within the team.

One key member of staff from the support service (EMA) saw support beyond her own specialism and herself as a key player. She is already doing what the LEA intended as a result of the reorganisation, with her focus very much on the school, rather than the team. She is fully part of the school, and with others, notably the Head, had worked to share knowledge – as practice. Her specialism as EMA is not diminished but shared:

> "What catalysed change in that school I think, it was a school that wasn't being very successful at all, there was a change in head, half the staff, nearly all the staff changed, the SENco changed, the head changed. The only person who'd been in that school any length of time was two teaching assistants and me. So I think my role in that school had to become central and hold the special needs bit together, and I think because of that, I'm embedded in that school.' (EMA teacher).

Two children have learning disabilities and one child has Down syndrome with full time support. It was clear that in relation to these and other differences, the school had worked hard to remove distinctions both between teachers and support staff. They had also worked on reducing the distinction between corridors and rooms, with many groups working in different spaces at different times. Children worked in wide work spaces in the corridors. Support staff and teachers work together in this school, and training in literacy and numeracy support is provided so that the barrier-free staff too can support all pupils when they are in lessons. In all these ways, the work of each separate service is easier for all to see as part of the work of the school as a whole, rather than as a distinct provision.

The SENCO recognises the need for further coordination with the external professionals who are not part of this community. In seeking to extend the relationships between agencies involved with the school, he has established a meeting of the Educational Psychologist, the Behaviour Support Service, the Learning Support and Ethnic Minority Achievement. The focus of the meeting is on provision of support (an 'Index for Inclusion approach', according to the SENCo) rather than on individual pupil need.

In general then, in this school, LEA support staff also work flexibly in the school, which suggests that the idea of different services working according to incompatible models is sometimes exaggerated. For example,

> *'The behaviour support staff spends most of his time working proactively with small groups of children, developing their social skills' (SENCo).*

Case study 3: Traveller Education Service (TES)

The final case study is short, and is a reminder that the dilemma raised in the introduction is not easy to solve in all cases. There are structural difficulties in the integration of a service which takes as its basis not a list (really) or a patch, but a series of individual children and families who are known and related to as individuals, with the professionals taking an advocacy role and a very

child-centred one on their behalf. Their role then becomes one of linking in and arguing for services from many other agencies on the child's behalf.

Many of the structural contradictions in relation to travelers go beyond the education services, extending into housing:

> 'All the authorities are responding to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act. In one in four authorities, the Traveller education service had made a significant contribution to this work. Many authorities have clear statements about the inclusion of all pupils in education. However, in too many authorities, the ways in which they deal with unauthorised encampments contradict the principles set out in their public statements on inclusion, educational entitlement and race equality. Such contradictions undermine relationships and inhibit the effectiveness of the Traveller education services and other agencies.' HMI 2003, p5)

However, even the possibility of greater coordination on behalf of such marginalised groups, and of learning from the TES approach to support depends on much greater understanding of the need for the position adopted by TES, from the other services involved (schools, SEN, etc), and a weakening of the defences associated with professional isolation on the part of TES staff themselves.

For currently, the widespread ignorance about the roles performed by the TES only serves to reinforce the separation of its staff from the other support services, and from the mainstream schools.

TES support staff see a considerable part of their role as assisting pupils to be able to enter and access education in their local school. This presents considerable and varied challenges, and it is illustrated by the following dialogue between workers from the different services.

> **TES staff:** Different styles, certainly management styles in the secondary schools do reflect differently the different schools. I work in all primary schools in Northwood and I do see different styles. And you're quite right sometimes it's the SENCO and sometimes it's a different person, head of learning support or mentors and sometimes it's head of year….. I do honestly feel that schools need to reflect more the communities they serve and outreach more… and understand the whole child…
> **Staff of other LEA service:** But schools main aim is to get that child in school. They're not interested in the community side. They're not interested in that child once it's outside school
> **TES staff:** You won't get that child through the door of school sometimes unless you address the other issues…
> **Staff of other LEA service:** It's very difficult being able to try and bring the community in…into school. It's such a negative place, school, for the community…

Conclusions

There are lessons for staff in LEA, schools, support services and for researchers in this report. Multi-agency working aimed to link areas of expertise to form a more effective system, but imposed a massive load in terms of learning and adjustment, associated for many with the fear of loss of professional identity. The dangers of ignoring what already exists in searching for neat solutions are very real – and very damaging.

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