

EDUCATION (ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING) (SCOTLAND) ACT (2004): WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE WAY TEACHERS WORK TOGETHER?

GILLEAN MCCLUSKEY

ABSTRACT

The introduction of the Additional Support for Learning Act (2004) has been a significant milestone in Scotland's understanding of issues of inclusion. The Act is already beginning to have a significant and far-reaching impact on the work of schools; requiring staff to reconceptualise what was traditionally known as 'special needs' and asserting a much more complex and dynamic view of the potential barriers to inclusion.

This paper explores the experiences and changing understandings of key staff (pastoral care, learning support, behaviour support) in three mainstream secondary schools as they worked to translate the new legislation into a coherent, holistic and sustainable set of practices. The paper raises some critical and timely questions about the tensions between competing priorities and roles and responsibilities for those working in education in such challenging times but also offers comment on the emerging potential of the legislation for building new confidence and capacities.

GLOSSARY

ASL	Additional Support for Learning
DHT	Depute Head Teacher
PT	Principal Teacher (Head of Department)
Guidance	Branch of support in high schools. Guidance teachers have a remit including pastoral care, curricular and vocational advice and teaching of personal and social education
SFP	Support for Pupils – replaced the term 'Guidance'
SFL	Branch of support in high schools. Support for Learning – replaced the term 'Learning Support' and /or 'Special Needs'
EAL	English as an Additional Language
SQH	Scottish Qualification for Headship

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the Education (Additional Support for Learning)(Scotland) Act (2004) (Scottish Parliament 2004) has been a significant milestone in Scotland's understanding of issues of inclusion. The Act is already beginning to have far-reaching impact on the work of schools; requiring teachers to reconceptualise what was traditionally known as 'special needs', strengthening children's rights, increasing the power of parents and asserting a much more complex and dynamic view of the potential barriers to inclusion. One of its clearest expectations is of an increase in collaborative working to ensure a more holistic and coherent framework of support for pupils. Hamill and Clark note, that, 'every document or report written since the early 1990s about special educational needs or additional support needs gives priority to promoting inter-professional collaboration' (2005: 45). Lloyd, Stead and Kendrick (2001) found strong evidence for the efficacy of inter-agency working in support with vulnerable young people. Parsons, however (2007), has called this 'the underpowered dream'. He suggests, 'forces... to create joined up ways of working are considerable. The resistance built into the system is also strong... the huge good will and the unarguable rightness of the case for inter-professional working has disguised the difficulty of training for it, managing it and doing it' (2007: 1).

Although there is a large literature about inter-professional and inter-agency collaboration, much less is known about how the different branches of support within schools themselves work together. This paper explores the experiences and changing understandings of fifteen key staff (pastoral care, learning support, behaviour support) in three mainstream secondary schools in one large urban local authority, as they worked to translate the legislative drive for effective and constructive collaborative working into a coherent and sustainable set of practices in defining 'support for pupils'. The focus in this paper is on Parsons' (2007) 'resistances and difficulties', specifically for those teachers who often saw themselves 'in the front line' of support, in all its different aspects. While the paper explores only one way of working and one set of experiences, it nevertheless raises some critical questions about tensions between competing priorities, roles and responsibilities for those working in education more widely. It asks whether there are now new grounds for hope and if so what this might mean for the ways teachers work.

BACKGROUND

The Education (Additional Support for Learning)(Scotland) Act (2004), or ASL Act as it is often called, was implemented in 2005 within a political context which had recently embraced the UN (United Nations 1989) principles on the rights of the child (Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000, Children (Scotland) Act 1995) and which had also seen the extension of disability and anti-discrimination legislation to education in Scotland (2002). The national Government had recently reiterated a need for all teachers, regardless of subject commitment, to see themselves as responsible for 'promoting and safeguarding the health, welfare and safety of pupils' and 'working in partnership with parents, support staff and other professionals' (Scottish Executive 2001a). This need for school staff to work more closely together had also been reinforced by a national review of Guidance (Scottish Executive 2004; HMIE 2007, 2004a, 2004b) and policy guidance on the links between behaviour and learning (Scottish Executive 2001b).

However, the ASL Act was also introduced within a context where there is still significant pressure on schools to seek continuous improvements in attainment and achievement (AHDS 2005; NAHT 2007; Mortimore & Whitty 2000; Munn 2000; Tomlinson 2000) and where there are, on the one hand, still widespread concerns about pupil disengagement and disaffection (Head 2007; McCluskey 2007, 2005; McCluskey, Lloyd & Stead 2005; DFES 2004; Webb & Vulliamy 2004), perceptions about increasing violence in schools (Cowie *et al.* 2003) and the 'ASBO generation' (Verkaik 2005); and on the other hand, a growing awareness of the complex pressures on children and young people in modern post-industrial societies (Sutton, Smith, Dearden & Middleton 2007; Lloyd & McCluskey 2007; Scottish Executive 2007; YoungMinds 2007; DFES 2006).

Prior to the introduction of the ASL Act, Scotland in common with the rest of the UK, used the term 'special needs', often based on a deficit model, and often leading in the past to segregation, and a 'process of labeling which encouraged the creating of stereotypes that are to the disadvantage of those involved' (Ainscow 1991: 2). In recent years, moves towards a much broader understanding of how best to respond to pupils' needs had been gaining ground in policy and practice (SOEID 1998; SOED 1994; SED 1978; DES 1978) but this seemed to offer breadth only within clearly drawn boundaries of what was meant by 'special needs'; what was happening in the silo was changing and evolving in more pupil-centred ways, but it only made occasional forays outside its silo; it was an expansion of the paradigm rather than a paradigm shift.

The ASL Act, by contrast, outlines a new framework for supporting pupils in schools. It introduces a more functional definition of Additional Support Needs, conceptualised

in terms of barriers to learning that may include pedagogical, institutional and social as well as those which may be individually focused. Importantly, the Act (2004) and its Code of Practice (2005) recognize a dynamic notion of need and that this requires a dynamic understanding of what support can mean: that support can and must adapt over time; and that not all pupils in similar circumstances will have the same needs and that the connections between circumstance or context and need constitute an important set of factors. It also recognizes a much more complex notion of need itself and that children and young people may, at any one time, experience a range of different barriers to full participation in education. These different barriers may be related, or they may not. It may, for example, be necessary to offer support to a pupil who has a specific learning difficulty and who has become withdrawn or indeed disruptive because she is unable to fully access the curriculum. Equally, a need for support may arise when a pupil who is a young carer is due to go on a work experience placement. The Act continues to make provision for what might in the past have been considered special needs and disabilities but also now includes, for example, recognition of the needs of pupils who have experienced family bereavement or who are particularly able or talented, or those with interrupted learning or who have suffered racism. It recognizes that some pupils may need extra help either long or short term in order to make the most of their educational opportunities.

This recognition of complexity is immensely helpful but, importantly for the discussion in this paper, also significantly challenging for staff traditionally trained to support pupils who *either* have learning difficulties *or* personal and social difficulties.

THE ‘PILOT’ COURSE: ‘HOW WILL AN INTEGRATED SUPPORT TEAM WORK IN OUR SCHOOL?’

In 2006, a pilot course called ‘How will an integrated support team work in our school?’ was offered to mainstream high schools in a large urban local authority in Scotland which has around 20 high schools overall. Three schools opted in to the course and the table below outlines some brief contextual background information. The attainment levels relate to statements made in recent inspection reports for the individual schools. The details on free school meal entitlement offer a proxy indicator of socio-economic status in the local catchment area and are also drawn from recent inspection reports. The aim of the course was to support schools to understand and develop a coherent and child-centred response to the new legislation.

	Roll	Free School Meal Entitlement	Attainment Levels
School 1 Brankfield High School	1400	Slightly above average	Adequate
School 2 Carmiston High School	600	Above average	Unsatisfactory
School 3 Harbourside High School	1400	Average	Adequate

Figure 1: Pilot schools

The course was structured in a series of six sessions: three sessions where schools met together and, between these ‘all schools’ sessions, three further sessions with each individual school team in their own school. In the ‘all schools’ sessions, participants were offered input on current research and examples of good and developing practice in integrated support. The more informal in-school sessions were planned to provide for closer focus on each team’s own needs, and to allow staff to reflect on how the necessary changes could be addressed within the context of their own particular local needs and priorities.

Session	Date	Purpose
1	October	Introductions, course context and content Input: Managing Change
2	March	Feedback from schools Input: Research and Practice: integrated support in Scottish schools - what can we learn?
3	June	Feedback from schools Input: Key Issues and Challenges, Forward Planning time

Figure 2: Focus of meetings

The course was offered on the basis that those attending should include the ASL Team Leader (a Depute Headteacher with specific responsibility for ASL in each case), Principal Teacher, Support for Learning (PT SFL, previously known in Scotland as learning support teacher) and Principal Teacher, Support for Pupils (PT SFP, previously known in Scotland as Guidance teachers), up to a maximum of 5 staff per school.

In Brankfield, the headteacher encouraged the team’s participation. In both Carmiston and Harbourside, the Depute Head/ASL team leaders themselves opted to participate. This was perhaps significant in terms of sustained engagement with the aims of the course.

Two school teams attended all three of these sessions and one team, Brankfield, attended two sessions, missing the last session. Although there was an explicit expectation that the same staff would attend each session this did not always happen, mainly due to staff changes. The number of changes in staff over the relatively short period of one academic year was substantial and worth examining in some detail in view of the likely impact on successfully implementing and sustaining this, or indeed any, major change. In Brankfield, for example, a new DHT took up position from January, and the Acting DHT returned to his substantive post as PT SFL but remained in the ASL team and continued to attend the course. An Acting PT Behaviour Support also joined the team during this year while another staff member went on secondment. In Carmiston a new PT SFP was appointed from Easter so that their group grew to six people. In Harbourside, an Acting DHT attended the first ‘all schools’ session but from the New Year, a newly appointed permanent DHT took over, and the Acting DHT, on returning to her substantive post, no longer attended the course. These changes of personnel were outwith the control of participants but are summarised here to highlight the high level of change in terms of personnel alone over one academic session. Anecdotal

evidence would suggest that this is typical of Scottish schools and the impact of such frequent and significant change should not be under-estimated simply because it is so prevalent.

Each school team participated in three in-school sessions and identified issues of pertinence particular to them. For Brankfield this was the opportunity to develop a new ASL structure and improve internal communication as part of the move to a new build for the whole school in 2009. For Carmiston the focus was on effective working of the inter-agency pupil support group and communication with other staff in school. In Harbourside there was a more general focus on integrating the policy and practice of all those involved in ASL and on communication about these changes with other school staff.

At a local policy level, it is important to note that the local authority's own guidelines to schools interpreted the need for coherence and collaboration emphasized in the ASL Act (2004), by requiring each school to have an Additional Support for Learning (ASL) team led by a Depute Head Teacher (DHT). The requirement for leadership from within the school's senior management team is an indication itself of the impact of the Act, in this local authority at least. Within each school, the ASL team is required to incorporate Principal Teachers (PTs) SFL and SFP and also, for example, Behaviour Support and English as an Additional Language teachers depending on local circumstances.

THE RESEARCH

The research on which this paper is based arose out of work undertaken to develop and facilitate the pilot course, 'How will an integrated support team work in our school?' From the outset it was agreed that the development of this course, and the research alongside it, be collaborative in design and process and that this might then offer a model of collaborative working based on a 'community of enquiry' (DfES 2006) for other high schools across the city. The overall aim of the evaluation was to assess the successes and challenges of the pilot course overall and to evaluate progress made in each school. The research focused on gathering and reflecting back the views and changing understandings of key staff in these schools as they began their 'learning journey'.

Understandings of evaluation usually revolve around monitoring, auditing, assessing and inspecting, in order to establish value; utility; relevance; practicality; generalisability; and causality. Scriven (1996) describes evaluation as either formative (to support process of improvement by identifying strengths and weaknesses), or summative (reporting on a programme), but the research here often did both, and sometimes in quite messy ways. Each in-school session, for example, was written up and a summary note which reported on progress (as identified by them) and also identified strengths and weaknesses (identified by them) sent to the school to give the team the opportunity to add, amend or challenge. The research did not, as is more often the case perhaps, provide only an interim and final report, but sought to develop an iterative process of engagement with the emerging concerns and questions raised by staff in these three schools. The debate about participation in social research has particular relevance for research related to professional contexts such as schools where there may well be no polarity between the aim of 'knowledge production' and aims relating to 'change'. Some support is offered by the model of action research suggested by Joyce *et al.* 1999: 11), of a 'fluid, continuous enquiry... [making] all schools into learning communities for teachers as well as students'. Orme (2000) talks about 'the production of knowledge for practice' as well as the distillation of 'knowledge from practice.' This is seen as a reflection of the complexity of the teacher experience in a learning community (Fullan 2007; Fullan, Hill & Crevola 2006; Fullan & St.Germain 2006) where open discussion is not a prerequisite but part of a larger aim, and the time for reflection

relies on a growing development of trust and awareness of the importance of common purpose over time.

Furthermore, to be both course facilitator and course evaluator brings its own tensions, and maintaining a constant vigilance about the kinds of issues this raises, only serves to increase the messiness. It is important to recognize the difficulty of interpreting the findings where the authors have had these dual roles. Caution is needed then when interpreting the findings. This is a small-scale, qualitative study, with a complex relationship between the data gathered, the data givers and the data gatherers. The findings, therefore, do not seek to make any large claims to generalization. They are offered here as a snapshot of progress at a point in time, and as one example of how the questions raised by the drive for more 'joined-up' thinking, are being worked out in these teachers' daily practice. They constitute one set of insights into the experiences of some staff as the legislative drive for more integrated working begins to have direct impact on the work of these schools.

Data were gathered in a number of different ways. At the end of each of the 'all schools' sessions, each participant completed a brief written evaluation questionnaire. In addition, a written note of the process and outcomes of each of the school-based sessions was sent to participants, inviting comments, questions or corrections. This written note was only shared with that individual school and not with other schools. These regular opportunities for respondent validation were taken up in varying ways by school teams, some preferring a face-to-face review of the note and others communicating via email. In addition, individual interviews took place with the Team Leaders/DHTs with responsibility for ASL in each school at the end of the pilot.

FINDINGS

The findings explored below are based on the data gathered over the course of the year and also the final evaluation forms completed by participants, which asked them to reflect on key learning points as well as practical successes in bringing about change in their ways of working. The findings are grouped around the major issues and questions identified and explored through the course.

Sharing responsibility

The individual in-school sessions revealed some key issues about collaboration and Additional Support. It was clear from evaluations, for example, that SFL staff often felt that they were having to work hard to convince their SFP colleagues that the new Act affected their work, for example in sharing responsibility for preparation of Co-ordinated Support Plans, Additional Support Plans, Individualised Educational Programmes or providing in-class support. The Act's emphasis on a holistic understanding of need was strongly supported by staff in principle, and indeed, it was often noted that the legislation was following good practice rather than leading it; but a change in thinking about how to work out the possible implications in this particular area was largely resisted, reminding us of Parsons' concerns (2007). This was partly explained by participants in terms of lack of resources and the need for more specialist trained teachers. Such explanations resonate with a more broadly held view among teachers of the need for more staff with more specialised knowledge (Dyson 1997) and a belief that they do not have the skills to teach all children; a view robustly challenged by Florian and Rouse (2001).

Sharing information

Another key question emerged within one school but subsequently became a focus in the larger meeting for all 3 schools. In Brankfield, as part of their aim of developing a new ASL team structure, there was a strongly argued discussion within the ASL team in one session about sharing pupil information with subject

staff. Most high schools operate a system where a confidential file on pupils' needs is passed to departments at the beginning of each academic year and updated as required by memo or email. SFP staff in this school expressed a view that information about a pupil's personal circumstances was private to that pupil, and not something that could or should be shared with other staff in the same way that information about, for example, a learning difficulty or visual impairment. SFL staff argued that all relevant information about pupils should be available to staff to enable them to help support pupils more effectively.

This issue was subsequently brought to an 'all-schools' session, where it proved to be just as keenly debated. This question, and this discussion, in some ways go to the heart of the challenge within the new legislation; raising fundamentally important questions about trust among fellow professionals, about how responsibility for pupils is interpreted differently by different branches of support within schools, about training for different specialisms, about children's rights - and reinforces the need for just such discussions to take place.

Change processes

A further key finding to emerge was concerned with change. Shaped, perhaps, by the constancy and rapidity of change within education in general, it seemed that these teams anticipated a speedy move towards more coherent integrated working, to learning about the new Act, adopting a new policy and implementing it effectively. Discussion within the first 'all-schools' session revealed that the ASL Act was seen to some extent as one of a range of imposed short- to medium-term targets, to be met and then overtaken. However, the course aimed to ensure that understanding of the reach and depth of this new legislation was fully explored, that this understanding was strongly embedded and that foundations for structures for sustained change were developed; aims which are not achieved well at the frenetic pace of daily life in schools. Teams, therefore, were asked to reflect on recent research about how long it takes to make change and embed change in organisations (Lee 2004; Cameron & Thorsborne 2001; Senge 2000), and to consider how the course itself could assist Fullan's (2003) suggestion that social interaction is the process by which mere information becomes knowledge.

Comments offered in the written evaluation at the end of the year revealed that participants found the focus on change *per se* to be a useful starting point. One team noted as their key learning point, 'change can be made for the better but needs to be carefully planned and implemented gradually'. This statement may seem entirely self-evident, but in the context of the continuing and rapid rate of imposed change on schools, and the sense of stress about change shared by many staff, the simplicity of this statement should not blind us to its impact. This team seemed surprised to find that some change could be for the better, perhaps indicating how they feel about much of the change they experience in their work. Another team noted as their key learning point, 'Validation that we can't do everything, we have to prioritise', and again we would argue that the apparent simplicity of this statement can tell us something important about how staff have been feeling about change in general, but also about potential for the future. Significantly, each team and each participant expressed commitment to the aims of the new legislation and said they felt that they had made progress towards the goals they had identified throughout the course.

Teachers as learners

A final key finding from the research focused on the notion of teachers as learners.

Individual responses made in the 'open comments' section of the questionnaire at the end of the year identified the following as key to a sense of progress:

- Pace
- Time to reflect
- Focus on solutions
- Discussion of important issues
- Voice/credibility for previously under-valued staff members
- ‘Fit’ with SQH [Scottish Qualification for Headship]
- Time with own colleagues
- Exchange of ideas with other schools
- ‘Aha’ moments [a turning point, bringing new understanding]
- Input on realistic timeframes
- ‘Outsider’ questioning /commenting
- All aspects of support given equal weight in discussions.

Interestingly, opportunities for time to reflect and time for discussion were most commonly seen as the key benefits of the support offered. Again, these are not surprising findings but they do serve as an important reminder of the lack of time teachers have to reflect on their own professional concerns, the need for teachers to do so and the difference they feel it makes when they do have that time.

Comments from the interviews with DHTs/ASL team leaders often echoed the points made above, but in addition they wanted to have the opportunity to see what other schools do and to have ASL Team leaders meetings - especially for new ASL team leaders in which they felt comfortable to ask, ‘Have you done that?’ ‘What do you think about...?’ They noted the particular challenge for DHTs without a ‘Guidance’ background and the need to talk through some of the practical issues such as ‘What would be the implications of going from a 3 ‘house’ system to a 4 ‘house’ system?’ or support with writing an improvement plan at the level of someone saying, ‘Have you thought about...?’ They reiterated, too, a concern, shared by HMIE (2006) that the ASL Act itself was yet not clearly understood in schools and that they would like some support in identifying examples of good practice. In very practical terms, they suggested it would be useful to have a database of all the ASL team leaders in the local authority. Now that Scotland has a web-based discussion group for DHTs similar to ‘Heads Together’ in use by headteachers, this may offer a valuable way for such informal but essential conversations to take place.

In summary, then, the course led to constructive thinking about the ASL Act (2004) at very practical levels but also revealed concern with larger questions about the perceived purposes of different branches of support in school; in particular about shared responsibilities, change processes and what it meant to be a teacher. It was interesting to note that that these staff shared a view that the understanding of additional support needs identified by the new legislation followed rather than led their practice.

DISCUSSION

The discussion that arises from these findings focuses here on three main themes. The first of these is about change in general and the ASL Act in particular. The second question relates to shared responsibilities and the evolving structures of ASL teams in these and many other Scottish secondary schools and how well suited these structures might be to meet the challenges of the new legislation; are they indicative of an ‘underpowered dream’? (Parsons 2007: 1). The third key question arises from the findings about ‘teachers as learners’ and relates to the daily practices of collaboration and integrated teamwork under the terms of the Act and whether there is now cause for hope for the future.

Of these three questions, the theme of change itself is perhaps the one which was not foreseen but had most impact. From thinking about the impact of change related

to this one piece of legislation, the teams broadened out their discussions to thinking about change more generally. They talked about the pressure of continuous change in their daily work, of ‘running to stand still’, and the stress associated with that. For most, the ASL Act was both a welcome recognition of a much needed change in national perspective and a daunting new set of responsibilities and procedures. It is important to consider attitudes to this change in the context of a broader sense of imposed change and flux in schools. Change is so much a feature of teachers’ (and pupils’) lives that it may almost be described as characteristic of their professional experience today. It takes many forms, and although we have focused primarily on change processes, we may also note the ways in which the staff complement of schools has expanded and altered in the last ten years to include many more specialist teachers and ancillary staff; and all this within the context of a changing teacher demographic; we know that many of the staff participating in this course and research and occupying senior positions in school will retire in the next five years.

The second question centres on the major restructuring of support in secondary schools which happened in Scotland as a result of national review in 2001 (Scottish Executive 2001). This restructuring was an issue about which the participants seemed largely resigned rather than concerned. There was a sense that there were no gains to be made by examining what seemed an inevitable and immutable set of processes; an interesting reflection itself in view of the sense of flux overall. The new structures mean that the ASL teams in these three schools and in many other Scottish schools have one PT SFL managing the work of a large number of classroom or learning assistants (typically between 6-10), often on term-time, temporary contracts. By contrast there are typically between 4-6 PT SFPs, often supplemented by a promoted behaviour support teacher. The SFP staff rarely have staff management responsibilities; the one PT SFL invariably does (see Figure 3 below).

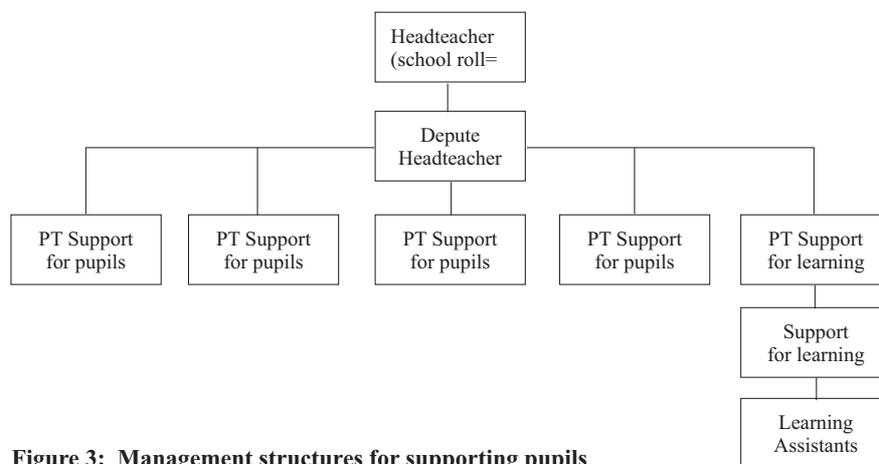


Figure 3: Management structures for supporting pupils

Equally significant, historically in Scotland, SFL staff have often been more actively encouraged by local authorities to pursue continuing professional development after initial teacher training and have often been expected to undertake extensive training prior to applying for promotion. There have not, it could be argued, been the same expectations about training for SFP staff, despite their equally extensive responsibilities. How then can there be a sense of common purpose and an equitable distribution of responsibility? Can secondary school staff re-imagine themselves as generalist support staff? Does the experience of this small group of staff in one local authority suggest that the barriers between different kinds of ‘support’ are still too great and that though this particular set of silos has grown in size, they still have ‘unclimbable’ walls?

And yet, we would argue, there are clear signs of hope. The three ASL teams' commitment and engagement with the key ideas of the ASL Act (2004) - with a dynamic notion of need and a more functional definition of additional support needs in terms of recognition of a multiplicity of barriers to learning - was explicit and clearly articulated by all. It suggests that, at least in these schools, policy has caught up with current practice, rather than shaping it. It seems, therefore, that the groundwork has already been laid for thinking about how to exploring the possibilities and the parameters of one's own role and the role of others in a much more dynamic way. It suggests that this change is likely to become embedded at least in part because it does not signal yet another imposed change, but one that these teachers feel they were already beginning to make for themselves. There are still some contradictory and partial understandings of this reconceptualisation of additional support needs; there is uncertainty and tension which fuel resistance, and we would argue, current support systems of support are problematic. However, this legislation gives permission and confidence, if not yet power, for new thinking and new ways of working.

ENDNOTE

¹ The schools have been given pseudonyms

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