

Include ICT

Communities of schools

Special schools working
with mainstream – using
ICT to support inclusion

Background and introduction

Educating children with special educational needs

The role of special schools in an inclusive education system is a challenging one. By their very nature the provision they make is separate from that of mainstream schools, with pupils in special schools often travelling many miles from their homes. Socially this can isolate pupils. However, in many cases the quality of the provision in the special school and the expertise of staff is seen by parents as a reasonable compromise for any social separation that may happen.

The Government's strategy for educating children with special educational needs (SEN), *Removing barriers to achievement*, sets out how it plans to give all children the opportunity to succeed. One of its commitments is to:

'Clarify the future role of special schools, giving a strong focus to high standards, partnership working with mainstream schools and encouragement to participate in the full range of diversity programmes – specialist schools, leading edge partnerships, federations and clusters.'

In this vision, special schools will exist in a unified system where all schools and their pupils are included within the wider community of schools. The measures outlined by the Government to ensure that standards in special schools continue to rise will make sure that pupils with SEN are supported across the system.

About this booklet

This booklet is one in a series of publications called 'Include ICT' that examine the ways in which schools and other organisations are developing inclusive learning and teaching practices. It looks at ways in which ICT can support special schools in sharing their expertise and extend their own practice through dialogue and interaction with colleagues across mainstream schools. The schools in this case study were chosen because they undertake some activities that can be implemented relatively easily, but which can move the agenda for special schools within an inclusive system forward significantly.

How to use the materials

The booklet is accompanied by a CD-ROM containing video clips that illustrate the key issues. This CD may be viewed in conjunction with the booklet, if you wish, or the booklet alone may be used.

The material can be used by teachers in mainstream schools and special schools, special educational needs co-ordinators, LEAs and others who are leading discussion and training in this field.

Case studies

Wilson Stuart School

Wilson Stuart School in Birmingham is a large school that educates pupils between the ages of 2 and 19 who have a wide range of physical disabilities. Some also have additional learning needs, and/or speech and language difficulties.

There are currently 140 pupils on the roll, who come from all areas of Birmingham and from a wide variety of backgrounds. A few pupils live with carers or foster parents, and some pupils need full-time nursing support while in school. Thirty per cent of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. The percentage of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds is high, at 50 per cent, and over a quarter of these pupils require the support of a multilingual teacher.

The school has been recognised as a centre of excellence and was awarded Beacon status in 1999, with the use of ICT being recognised as an area of expertise. Wilson Stuart's Beacon school status (which attracts funding) requires it to support other schools in meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Many of its staff are working with and advising other schools. The school's role in outreach is recognised by the LEA, which funds this activity.

How Wilson Stuart supports inclusion

Preparing for its support role

Over the years Wilson Stuart has been involved in a number of initiatives aimed at sharing expertise with other schools. Discussion and collaboration among staff has led to a shared vision and an approach that meets the needs of the identified networks of schools and their pupils.

The importance of staff development in the use of ICT has long been recognised in the school, and to this end the deputy head has run training sessions on a range of ICT products and ways in which to use them to promote the inclusion of all pupils.

Advising mainstream schools

Wilson Stuart has a long-established outreach team of 1.8 full-time-equivalent teachers. The outreach service is part of a city-wide service, the role of which is to enable mainstream schools to include pupils with physical disabilities. This involves looking at access to the curriculum as well as the physical environment. ICT has a crucial role to play, both in making the curriculum more accessible (for example by the use of symbols) and by enabling access to written recording.

Beacon funding allowed the school to develop comprehensive in-service training packages on the use of software titles including Writing with Symbols and Clicker. The outreach team has been able to identify mainstream schools that can see the potential of the software, and are keen to develop their own expertise in its use. Staff from mainstream schools have come into Wilson Stuart on courses, and have been supported within their schools. In this way the higher levels of ICT expertise found in Wilson Stuart are channelled to mainstream schools.

Although in some cases the specialist staff work with individual children, it was found to be much more supportive of the mainstream schools' approach to inclusion to work with both staff and pupils, and follow this with professional development meetings to discuss both the technology used and the pedagogy that underpins that use.

By working with mainstream schools in this way, Wilson Stuart's staff are able to share their agreed approaches to meeting pupils' and teachers' needs. These, for example, cover the need to consider low-tech solutions as well as using leading edge software, hardware and peripherals, and basic approaches to effective teaching with ICT, such as positioning of students with physical disabilities in the classroom.

While inclusive software is often specialised in nature, and will inevitably benefit the children who have learning difficulties or disabilities, the real appeal is that its availability in the class will be of help to all pupils. Wilson Stuart's staff felt it was essential that the message should not be that the adoption of the technology would add to the workload, but that by supporting pupils with SEN in the class, personalised learning opportunities can be broadened for all students.

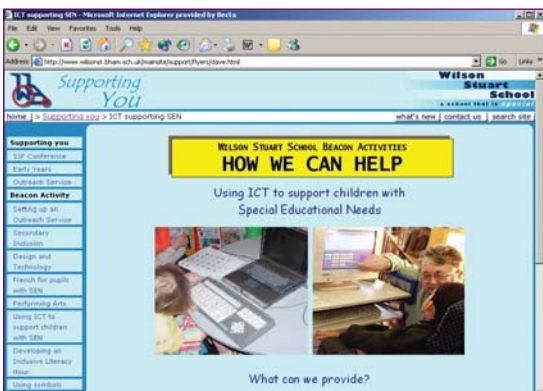
One message that was a real winner with staff in mainstream schools concerned the use of general purpose access tools. Teachers quickly understood the opportunities that using keyboards with extra-large keys, trackballs and key guards would give the pupils in their classes, including many who were not necessarily identified as having SEN.

A really pleasing development of the service is that schools within the network that Wilson Stuart has been supporting are now working to support other schools. In some of these cases the schools that have received help from Wilson Stuart are now acting as supporters for other networks of schools, sharing their knowledge of how ICT helps inclusive practice.

Ongoing support

A need was recognised to offer ongoing advice to mainstream schools when the support staff from Wilson Stuart could not visit or be available by phone or email. Wilson Stuart has therefore developed information and support materials which can be accessed via its website (see below), and aim to cover the most frequently

asked questions and relevant topics.



Wilson Stuart's website – 'Supporting you' section

New Oscott Infant and Nursery School

New Oscott is one of Wilson Stuart's network of mainstream schools to which it offers support. New Oscott is an infant and nursery school, and is bigger than many other primary schools. The pupils who attend the school come from a wide range of social backgrounds.

A distinctive feature of New Oscott is its specialism – inclusion – about which it shares information with other schools in the area. The school has a member of staff who has responsibility for inclusion, as well as a special needs co-ordinator.

There is very good preparation prior to a pupil with a special educational need or disability being admitted to the school, during which the pupil's needs are identified and discussed. New Oscott and Wilson Stuart are currently working closely together to support pupils who have physical needs in a mainstream setting. The outreach team from Wilson Stuart visits New Oscott regularly to discuss pupils and offer advice and support about individual children and the development of inclusive teaching approaches.

There is training for all staff in using ICT to make their practice fully inclusive for pupils with SEN, and they have high expectations of what all pupils, whatever their capability or background, can achieve.



New Oscott and Wilson Stuart are currently working closely together to support pupils who have physical needs in a mainstream setting.

Key issues

If you are reading this booklet in conjunction with viewing the video clips on the CD, you may wish to watch the videos now, to see how they illustrate the points below.

○ Partnerships are important

Wilson Stuart carefully builds up partnerships with schools in its network. Specialist staff ensure that the needs of pupils with SEN placed in mainstream schools are fully supported with ICT. This has clear benefits for pupils but also increases the confidence of mainstream staff in developing more inclusive practices generally.

ICT can help to initiate, develop and maintain partnerships between schools. Wilson Stuart's staff maintain regular contact with partner schools through email and the web as well as through direct contact.

Information and ideas also flow from mainstream schools to Wilson Stuart. In this way examples of good practice spread between all the schools in the network.

○ Share expertise

An expertise in using assistive technology is an area that many special schools can share with teachers in mainstream schools. If special schools are to fulfil this role they need to be consistent in the approaches they use and have well developed skills to offer.

Network schools are aware of Wilson Stuart's reputation in the field of assistive technology and often approach the school for help and advice. The advice and resources on the school website are essential in promoting the outreach service.

○ Technology supports broader inclusion

Often technology that has been developed specifically for learners with SEN will have wider applications in promoting inclusive practice, and this should be capitalised on.

In Wilson Stuart's experience, when teachers see technology that supports a particular child, they quickly identify other pupils who would benefit from using that technology. When this happens, the teaching becomes more inclusive and the curriculum more accessible.

○ Low-tech works too

It is not always leading edge and sophisticated technologies that offer solutions to specific needs. Wilson Stuart works with mainstream schools to raise their awareness of lower-tech solutions. These can offer low-cost ways of making classrooms more inclusive.

○ Effective communication

All the schools in the Wilson Stuart network share information. Often the support given to one school is passed between other schools in their network. This increases the effectiveness of Wilson Stuart's outreach service and extends expertise in using ICT to more schools.

In Birmingham, an intranet linking all schools has increased the opportunity to share information.

**To start this
CD-ROM:**

Place in CD-ROM drive. The CD should start automatically. If it does not: PC users should double-click the 'My computer' icon and then double-click on the CD-ROM drive icon; Mac users should double-click the CD-ROM icon, then double-click on the icon marked 'Include ICT Communities of schools'.



Further help

Abbott, C. & Galloway, J. (2003). ICT: An aid to inclusion? Reflections on the potential of ICT for the changing role of the special school. In: *Informatics and the digital society: Social, ethical and cognitive issues* (Eds, van Weert, T. J. & Munro, R.K.). Kluwer Academic Publishers. pp.186–196.

Becta – educational research on how ICT supports inclusion and special educational needs (SEN); a selection of abstracts and further sources
http://www.becta.org.uk/page_documents/research/SEN_bibliography.pdf

Becta – resources on inclusion and special educational needs
<http://www.becta.org.uk/teachers/display.cfm?section=1>

Becta – software to help manage special educational needs
http://www.becta.org.uk/leaders/msn_list.cfm

Every Child Matters website
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/everychildmatters>

Inclusion website
<http://inclusion.ngfl.gov.uk>

Removing barriers to achievement
<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/senstrategy>

The report of the Special Schools Working Group
http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/4620/working%20group.pdf

Wilson Stuart School
<http://www.wilsonst.bham.sch.uk>

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