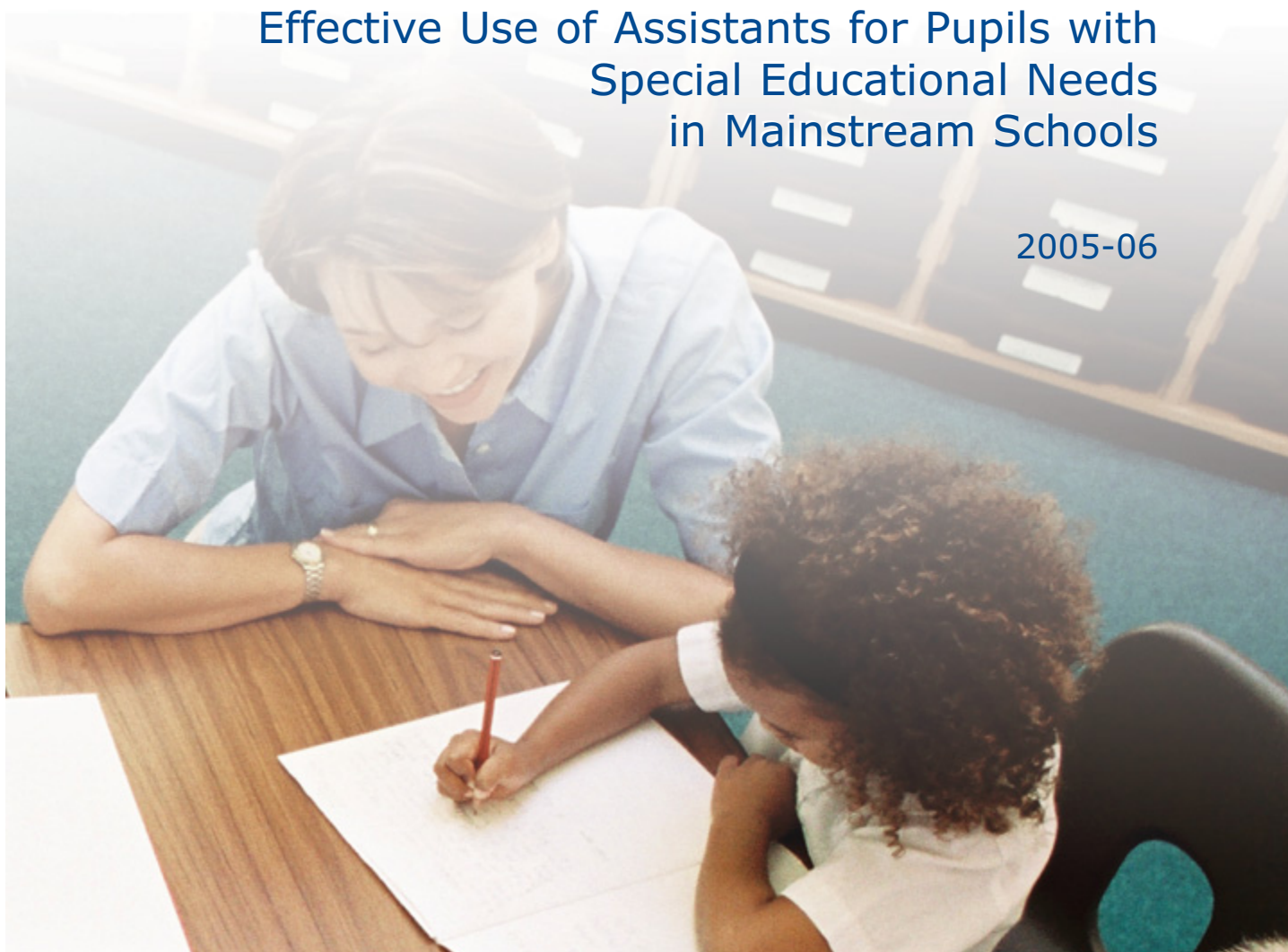


Report of an Inspection Survey

of the

Effective Use of Assistants for Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools

2005-06



eti

*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:-

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75%-90%	-	most
50%-74%	-	a majority
30%-49%	-	a significant minority
10%-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small number.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This survey of the Effective Use of Assistants for Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools has particular relevance given the significant profile which the inclusion agenda has within government policy in Northern Ireland (NI).
- 1.2 The Education (NI) Order 1996 sets out the context for educating pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN), alongside their peers in a mainstream school. Firstly, the special educational provision should address their particular learning difficulties, as well as facilitating the provision of effective education for the other children with whom they will be educated, while ensuring the efficient use of resources. The Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDO) strengthens further the rights of children with SEN to be educated in mainstream schools where the parents have requested this and where the interests of other children can be protected.
- 1.3 Classroom assistants for pupils with SEN (SEN CA) are funded by the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), through their special education budgets. Pupils at stage three of Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs may, depending on the local ELB, have part-time access to a classroom assistant; pupils at stage five would normally have full-time access. The ELB informs the principal of the pupil's school, in writing, of the requirement for the school to recruit a classroom assistant at a particular level, stipulating an appropriate number of hours.
- 1.4 While recognising that it is the severity of the disability, rather than the number of the children at a particular school, which dictates whether or not a SEN CA is employed, and the number of hours allocated, there is a need to ensure that classroom assistants for SEN are employed and deployed in an effective and efficient manner.



2. THE MAIN PURPOSES OF THIS SURVEY

The main purposes of this survey were to:

- i. report on how schools use their SEN CAs;
- ii. identify exemplars of best practice; and
- iii. make recommendations to assist the Department of Education (DE), the ELBs, and schools to improve the effectiveness of the provision for pupils with SEN.

3. METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 This report draws on evidence from structured visits to 27 primary schools during the month of April 2006 which were carried out by members of the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate). The schools that were visited are listed in an appendix to this report. Additional evidence was drawn from proformas completed by members of the Inspectorate during other inspection activities and incidental visits which took place during 2005-6. Assistants or part-time assistants who are funded under the Making A Good Start (MAGS) initiative were excluded from this survey.
- 3.2 The schools involved were representative of small and large schools throughout NI. Each school was provided with a minimum of four weeks written notification of the proposed visit. In preparation for the structured visit, each primary school was asked to complete a questionnaire relating to its SEN CAs.
- 3.3 The visits to the schools involved almost 100 classroom observations and discussions with principals, the special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), class teachers and some of the SEN CAs. At the end of each visit, the Principal and Chair of the Board of Governors were provided with a spoken report-back. A letter detailing the main

points of the report-back was forwarded subsequently to the school; copies of these letters may be viewed on the DE website.

- 3.4 The Inspectorate also held discussions with the advisors within the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) who have responsibility for the allocation and work of SEN CAs.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

- 4.1 The proportion of pupils with statements in NI, as a percentage of the total school population, has shown a steady increase in recent years, from 1.6% in 1990/91 to 3.5% in 2005/06.

Table 1: Pupils in the United Kingdom (UK) with a Statement (as a % of the overall school population)

	03/04	04/05	05/06
England ¹	3.0	2.9	2.9
Wales ²	3.3	3.3	3.2
Scotland	1.2 ³	2.0 ⁴	1.9 ⁵
Northern Ireland ⁶	3.2	3.4	3.5

Note: For Scotland figures are for pupils with a Record of Need only and pupils with an Individualised Educational Programme.

1 *Special Educational Needs in England, January 2006 (SFR 23/2006 Office of National Statistics)*

2 *Pupils with Statements of SEN January 2006 (SDR 75/2006, Statistical Directorate, National Assembly for Wales)*

3 *Extracted from Statistical Bulletin: Education Series (Edn/B1/2004/1 Scottish Executive)*

4 *Extracted from Statistical Bulletin: Education Series (Edn/B1/2005/1 Scottish Executive)*

5 *Extracted from Statistical Bulletin: Education Series (Edn/B1/2006/1 Scottish Executive)*

6 *Department of Education - NI School Census*



- 4.2 Across the five ELBs, different titles are used for the adult assistants who are employed to support pupils with SEN, including: “qualified CA”, “recognised CA”, “unqualified CA”, “general assistant”, “domestic assistant” and “learning support assistant (LSA)”. This often results in SEN CAs having different pay scales although they often do very similar, if not identical jobs. A significant number of SEN CAs are also employed as lunchtime and playground supervisors. The use of different titles, pay scales and roles has resulted in difficulties in retrieving authenticated data relating to the numbers of SEN CAs currently employed across the five ELBs.
- 4.3 Many children with statements have been identified by the ELBs as requiring dedicated CAs. In the most recent figures available to the (DE), 2004-5, the 5 ELBs reported that the total cost of classroom assistance amounted to £44.71 million. The cross-board variation in the rationale for the allocation of SEN CAs, is reflected in a disparity in the cost of the provision, with figures ranging from £3m in one ELB to £18.8m in another.
- 4.4 At the time of the survey, the numbers of SEN CAs had risen to approximately 7,200 (full-time equivalent) working across all sectors and phases; just over 4,600 of these SEN CAs were working in mainstream primary schools. The increasing numbers of SEN CAs within mainstream primary schools is often a direct result of the view held by many parents, and some principals, that a SEN CA is a prerequisite to entry for a statemented pupil into a mainstream school.
- 4.5 Several principals reported difficulties caused by references in children’s statements to the need for one-to-one support; as a result of this recommendation, a small number of parents had claimed ‘ownership’ on behalf of their child of a specific SEN CA and this had caused problems when teachers wanted the SEN CA to support other children or when a principal wished to deploy SEN CAs with different classrooms and teachers. This emphasis on one-to-one support also increases the potential for ‘learned helplessness’ and thus could diminish the speed at which a child develops full independence.

- 4.6 A majority of the SEN CAs' contracts are temporary and are often linked to an individual pupil with a statement. A small number of principals reported that, due to the part-time nature of much of the work, they were finding it increasingly difficult to recruit SEN CAs of a sufficient calibre. Although some of the principals interviewed reported that they still appoint SEN CAs informally from among parent helpers or existing lunch-time supervisors, most schools are now moving towards the use of formal selection procedures, with criteria which reflect the growing professionalism of the SEN CAs. Newly appointed SEN CAs are generally given an appropriate job description; the job descriptions of existing SEN CAs are being updated. However, while most CAs have job descriptions, a small number of teachers and principals expressed uncertainty regarding the boundary between a SEN CA providing effective support and actually becoming engaged in teaching.
- 4.7 Increasingly, newly appointed SEN CAs are required by schools to have appropriate qualifications. The majority of SEN CAs participating in this survey had attained national vocational qualification (NVQ) awards at levels 2 and 3; very few, however, had received training in the area of SEN. A minority of the SEN CAs had no formal qualifications but have become 'experienced' by virtue of long service working alongside informed teachers. Indeed, some principals reported the value they place, not just on training and qualifications, but also on essential personal qualities such as, a caring nature and a desire to do the best for the children in their care, that many SEN CAs bring to their work.
- 4.8 Almost all of the teachers interviewed spoke appreciatively of the support their SEN CAs provide them. They report benefits such as, help in managing behaviour and minimising distractions where a pupil or pupils' conduct is disproportionately demanding of the teacher's time, distributing resources, providing individual explanations of tasks and ensuring that children are helped to complete tasks which otherwise might be too difficult for them.



- 4.9 A small number of teachers who had a SEN CA in their classroom for a few hours each day, commented that they would like this support extended across the whole day, as they sometimes experienced difficulties coping with a child or group of children when the SEN CA was not present. This was further compounded when the school management of the SEN CAs' 'hours' allocated resulted in more than one SEN CA being present in a classroom at one time while, during subsequent parts of day, there was no additional adult present to support the teacher. Echoing the teachers, a majority of principals indicated that they would wish to have increased both the number of hours and the number of SEN CAs allocated to their schools.
- 4.10 During a majority of sessions observed, almost all the SEN CAs were given responsibility for a individual pupil or a group of pupils sitting in close proximity to the stated pupil (often those with SEN or lower attainment). During whole class activities/discussions, the SEN CAs often sat alongside designated pupils to manage behaviour and to encourage their participation in learning. In the best practice observed, the SEN CAs were well-informed and encouraged by the class teacher to show initiative; they were sensitive to the needs of the child, involved in fostering social participation with peers, encouraged the pupil to learn independently as part of the class without obtrusive support and helped to achieve targets and raise standards.
- 4.11 Several teachers reported that by delegating the support of their SEN pupils to the SEN CA, they (the teachers) were able to concentrate on the remainder of the class without any interruptions. Normally, the close proximity of the SEN CA resulted in a pupil with SEN receiving more adult attention than would otherwise be possible. In a minority of sessions observed, however, the class teacher had little or no contact with the stated pupil or pupils. In these classes, the inclusion of the pupils with SEN was often simply locational, with the pupils sitting apart from the rest of their peers and being shadowed by the SEN CA. In a few classes, where the boundary between the teacher's role and the SEN CA's role was unclear, the latter spent a considerable amount of time 'teaching' individual children either in the classroom or through

withdrawal sessions. This paradoxically resulted in the least qualified staff in the school supporting those most in need of help and support with their education. In a small number of classrooms, the SEN CA was not always confined to the SEN group but, instead, circulated around and supported the other ability groups; this alternative approach allowed the most professionally trained educator, the class teacher, to concentrate on supporting all of the pupils, including those with SEN.

- 4.12 Although SEN CAs are often required to contribute to the review process for pupils with a statement of SEN, very few of the SEN CAs interviewed reported being involved in evaluating their own work in relation to the actual progress the child is making, or whether any targets or goals set by the teacher had been achieved. A small number maintain a basic record sheets of tasks completed, which are returned to either the class teacher or the SENCO.
- 4.13 Observations of the work of the SEN CAs indicated that their support was most effective when they worked in close partnership with a teacher who understood and had planned well for the SEN CA's role in the lesson and had good arrangements for obtaining appropriate feedback on the pupil's learning and behaviour. Where the SEN CAs were insufficiently or superficially briefed, or had inadequate knowledge, they sometimes became more concerned with the completion of the set task rather than with supporting the pupil to improve his/her skills, understanding or ability to work independently.
- 4.14 Teachers are responsible for managing and organising the day-to-day work of the SEN CAs in their classrooms. Few of the schools visited had policies which outlined the roles and responsibilities of SEN CAs and which provided clear guidance to the teachers as to how SEN CAs could be used most effectively in the classrooms. Only a small number of teachers reported that they had received school-based training or advice on how to manage the work of SEN CAs, or other adults, in their classrooms.



- 4.15 In a significant minority of the schools visited, there was evidence of inconsistency across classes in the manner in which SEN CAs were employed, and in the detail of daily or weekly briefings provided by individual teachers regarding allocated tasks and targets for individual pupils. Most teachers reported that they discussed with their SEN CAs what they required them to do each day before class commenced; a few teachers include notes to this effect in their planning. However, few SEN CAs have opportunities to engage in regular meetings with the class teacher, without children being present.
- 4.16 In many cases, the SEN CAs' contractual hours do not allow for discussion before or after school. This, together with the fact that a significant minority of the SEN CAs work part-time, means that schools report difficulty in arranging meetings for teachers and SEN CAs to meet to discuss progress and plan together. Much depends on the goodwill of teachers and SEN CAs in meeting informally during the day, for example, during break and lunch times, although other duties such as playground supervision or staggered break-times, may mean that even this possibility is not feasible. A few principals have used the SEN CAs' allocated hours flexibly and imaginatively to allow the SEN CAs to take part in whole-school development activities or to meet with other members of the teaching and non-teaching staff.
- 4.17 A majority of the SEN CAs reported that they valued the opportunity to receive training, both accredited and non-accredited, particularly if it was related to their daily work and if it had direct practical application. A small number reported that they had attended, at their own cost, weekend conferences and evening workshops, organised by different SEN interest groups, in order to further their own knowledge of particular syndromes or difficulties, particular to pupils they were supporting. Several of the SEN CAs interviewed also spoke positively of the information and individual advice they had received from professionals offering support for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, sensory impairment, speech and language problems or behavioural issues.

- 4.18 In recent years, officers from the ELBs have been involved in the development and delivery of training programmes for classroom assistants. The SEN CAs who have availed of the various ELB training programmes, reported that they found their attendance at the course beneficial, in that their confidence and competence had increased. In those schools where the SEN CAs have been encouraged to avail of the training and advice available, there is evidence of improved management and increased understanding of the SEN CAs, both within the school and by teachers in the classroom. The participation of Principals, SENCOs, class teachers and SEN CAs in training courses provided by the five ELBs, however, still remains irregular.
- 4.19 In two of the schools visited, the SEN CAs had not been provided with any school-based training in relation to child protection matters.
- 4.20 Each school principal has overall responsibility for the deployment and management of teaching assistants. Very few of the schools visited had clear procedures established for evaluating the quality of support the CAs provide or their impact on pupils' learning and development. A majority of the principals reported that they often only had the opportunity to observe the SEN CA involved with pupils when carrying out an appraisal of the class teacher's work. Several principals indicated that they relied on oral feedback from teachers regarding the work of SEN CAs and that, when no comments were forthcoming, this was viewed as a positive indicator regarding the effectiveness of the work of the SEN CAs. One principal reported that he had problems with a SEN CA breaching frequently the school's confidentiality code.
- 4.21 In many of the schools visited, the responsibility for managing the work of the SEN CAs had been delegated unofficially to the SENCO; in a few school, the SENCOs appeared not to be aware that this was now part of their duties. Several SENCOs, who also had teaching duties, raised the issue of lack of time to complete all their allocated duties effectively.



4.22 Few schools monitor the time that individual pupils spend in the direct company of SEN CAs without direct input from their class teacher. A small number of the principals interviewed admitted that they were unaware that some pupils with SEN were spending considerable amounts of time with the SEN CA, often outside the confines of their own classroom.

5. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT: SCHOOLS

5.1 The need:

- ❑ for the further enhancement of the contribution of the SEN CAs by involving them more systematically in the planning, reporting and review arrangements undertaken in respect of the children for whom they are providing support;
- ❑ to provide access to additional relevant in-service training to enhance further the SEN CAs' knowledge and understanding of SEN provision, and issues arising;
- ❑ through the provision of school-based in-service training and timetabled opportunities for regular meetings, to promote a share understanding among staff of the role of the SEN CA in supporting both children and the teachers and to ensure consistency in their deployment across the school;
- ❑ to produce guidance to inform all involved of the role of the SEN CAs;
- ❑ to develop strategies for managing effectively the increasing numbers of teaching assistants, especially those providing SEN support, in individual classrooms;

- ❑ to address the constraints affecting liaison arising from the limitations related to the contractual hours of the SEN CAs;
- ❑ to manage competing priorities carefully to ensure that the teachers' workloads do not increase substantially;
- ❑ to develop monitoring strategies to ensure that the SEN CA provision is being used effectively and appropriately;
- ❑ to clarify the line of management for SEN CAs and to establish regular meetings between CAs, teachers and the person with overall responsibility for CAs, to deal with deployment and management issues;
- ❑ to revisit the SEN CA job description as the role of the CA develops professionally and as the needs of pupils change; and
- ❑ to communicate clearly the role of the SEN CA to parents, governors and others who need to know.

6. KEY PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT: DE AND ELBs

6.1 The need:

- ❑ to challenge the perceptions of parents, principals and teachers in order to change the traditional view of the role of SEN CA and the perception that the allocation of a SEN CA is a prerequisite to entry for a statemented pupil into a mainstream school;
- ❑ to review the means by which SEN CAs are allocated and funded to enable principals to plan ahead more effectively and to make the employment and retention of qualified SEN CAs much easier;



- ❑ to give greater consideration to the current complement of, and effective use of, SEN CAs in a given classroom/school before agreeing to additional provision;
- ❑ for ELBs to develop a more robust management system which would provide a detailed over-view of the provision and allocation of SEN CAs and provide a means of quality assuring their use by individual schools;
- ❑ to develop a more co-ordinated training programme across NI to make it easier for schools and SEN CAs to access relevant training;
- ❑ to continue to develop a structure of training and qualifications which focuses on the roles and responsibilities of SEN CAs;
- ❑ to develop an accredited training framework for SEN CAs linked to salary and career progression;
- ❑ to ensure that newly qualified teachers are trained to organise and work effectively alongside SEN CAs; and
- ❑ through the services of the Inspectorate, to continue to monitor systematically the impact of CA support on the quality of teaching and learning.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The effective practice observed during this survey is often underpinned by a positive school ethos for inclusion, where teachers, and all within the school, have a shared understanding of the role of the SEN CA and value their work. It is also important that the SEN CAs are involved, as much as possible, in planning and review and in providing regular opportunities for professional development.

- 7.2 It will be important that all those involved with the work of SEN CAs, but most particularly, school principals and the ELBs, become more accountable for the allocation and effective use of this valuable resource.



Appendix

LIST OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING IN THE SURVEY

Ballykeel Primary School, Ballymena
Carnalridge Primary School, Portrush
Christ the King Primary School, Drumaness
Cornagague Primary School, Enniskillen
Cranmore Integrated Primary School, Belfast
Culnady Primary School, Maghera
Dromara Primary School, Dromore
Drumachose Primary School, Limavady
Faughanvale Primary School, Greysteele
Glenwood Primary School, Belfast
Holy Child Primary School, Belfast
Holy Cross Boys' Primary School, Ardoyne
Kesh Primary School, Enniskillen
Lisnasharragh Primary School, Belfast
Lynn Primary School, Larne
Markethill Primary School, Armagh
Primate Dixon Primary School, Coalisland
Spa Primary School, Ballynahinch
St McCartan's Primary School, Clogher
St Malachy's Primary School, Camlough
St Malachy's Primary School, Carnagat
St MacNissi's Primary School, Newtownabbey
St Patrick's Primary School, Holywood
St Patrick's Primary School, Hilltown
St Mary's Primary School, Killyclogher
St Mary's Girls' Primary School, Strabane
Westwinds, Newtownards

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