Deployment of Specialists in Mainstream Settings

Angela Holdsworth
Louise Parrish
James Findlay-Pidcock

Sea View Trust

March 2021

Contents

Acknowledgements

List of Figures

List of Tables

Glossary and Abbreviations

ASC	Autistic Spectrum Conditions
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
FE	Further Education
GP	General Practitioner
HQT	High-Quality Teaching
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
KS	Key Stage
LA	Local Authority
MAT	Multi-Academy Trust
NHS	National Health Service
PPG	Pupil Premium Grant
RSC	Regional School Commissioner
SaLT	Speech and Language Therapist
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs (and Disabilities) Coordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and / or Disabilities
SEND CoP	Code of Practice - Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0-25 years 2015
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
TSC	Teaching School Council
WSS	Whole School SEND consortium

For the purpose of this report, **specialist** will refer to qualified professionals including Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

The Sea View Trust and East Lancashire Inclusion Partnership, supported by Blackpool Research School, undertook research to provide an in-depth understanding of the effective deployment of specialists in mainstream settings. The aim being to increase awareness amongst school leaders of the wider range of support available to schools to enrich their provision at the whole school (universal) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) support levels.

This project was intended to support wider Department for Education (DfE) aims to improve early intervention and to enable Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) to support school and Multi Academy Trust (MAT) leaders in making decisions about their investment in specialist provision.

This report identifies how schools commission and deploy specialists, such as Education Psychologists (EP) and Speech and Language Therapists (SaLT), to support early identification of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the development of inclusive, universal provision and strategic SEN support. A number of other specialists may work with pupils with SEND depending on their learning needs. The key findings of the research are presented along with corresponding recommendations made by the Expert Panel, a cross-professional group with knowledge and expertise in specialist deployment and SEND.

1.2 Approach

This project collected and analysed survey data from schools with recognised effective practice in the deployment of SEND specialists. A number of schools were targeted for follow-up structured interviews using a research methodology, supported by Blackpool Research School.

All school-based project submissions were moderated by an Expert Panel made up of representatives with SEND knowledge from mainstream, special schools and specialist professionals, including a senior EP and experienced SaLT. The Expert Panel considered the qualitative and quantitative evidence provided by participating schools to ensure that the examples of 'Good Practice' were robust. Collectively, the Expert Panel identified and endorsed a series of recommendations to support the future commissioning of specialists in mainstream schools.

Every effort was made to ensure that examples were drawn from each sector representative of the current diverse educational landscape, with examples of good practice from across the country.

1.3 Key Findings

This report includes many findings, however, the Expert Panel identifies the following as Key Findings to support future deployment of specialists in mainstream settings:

Key Finding 1: Inclusive Culture

Key to the success of specialist deployment appears to be a strong commitment to inclusive practice. Schools demonstrating Promising, Demonstrable and Spotlighted 'Good Practice' have all developed a positive SEN support culture, openly embracing new and flexible approaches to meeting pupils' needs. Their deployment of specialists has been central to this culture; ensuring that their universal and SEN support offer is built on evidence-led practice which is endorsed by specialists. The most effective practice was identified in schools where the SENCO was a significant voice on the school's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and all Senior Leaders regarded themselves as Leaders of SEND.

Key Finding 2: Positive Relationships

Effective practice was underpinned by strong, trusting relationships built between school staff and specialists; these, in turn, supported schools and specialists in developing positive relationships with parents and other external agencies. The interpersonal skills of the specialist were identified as crucial in forming these relationships and best practice existed where the specialist understood the context of the school and was able to engage in wider school improvement, rather than 1:1 pupil support. A strong sense of partnership working underpinned all Demonstrated and Good Practice.

Cluster arrangements can be positive, particularly for small schools where resources are more limited. Cluster arrangements can provide mutual support for school colleagues and access to high quality ongoing Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

Strong relationships and a 'can do' attitude from therapists has meant that many of the schools engaged in the project have developed solutions to the deployment challenges posed by the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Key Finding 3: School Ownership

The ownership of the specialist deployment appears to be significant. Whatever the deployment and commissioning arrangements, it appears that, where the school takes ownership of the intended impact of the deployment, there is evidence of a greater impact. Where both schools and therapists have a common vision and clarity about what is needed from the deployment, there is strong evidence that a user-friendly service, that meets the needs of children and families, can be developed.

It is recognised that centrally commissioned services can drive down costs, however, there is a real need for such services to understand the 'end-user' requirements so that best value can be achieved.

Key Finding 4: Sustainable Solutions

Specialist deployment was most impactful in schools where the deployment of specialists was embedded in the school's continuous improvement cycle. Most of the sampled schools identified that CPD for school staff was a positive outcome of specialist deployment; although some schools identified that centrally commissioned services did not always allow for flexibility in the area. The strongest practice was identified in schools where the leadership prioritised staff CPD delivered by specialists and where this was designed to meet the DfE's standard for teachers' professional development (DfE, 2016).

Senior Leaders identified that sustainability was achieved where middle leaders and teachers built the knowledge, gained from specialists, into their universal offer through their High-Quality Teaching (HQT) approaches. In these schools, the specialist sustainably grows the skills of the school-based workforce.

Specialist supply was identified as an issue by some participant schools; the greatest barrier to the engagement of specialists was funding.

This report establishes a clear role for specialists in the improvement of universal and SEN support in mainstream schools.

Key Finding 5: Robust Evidence Sources

Throughout this project, there was much evidence of Promising and Demonstrated Practice with a rich seam of qualitative data to support impact. However, there were missed opportunities in some schools in terms of the collection of outcome data to celebrate the

success of some exciting initiatives. Where schools had more robust tracking systems, developed in house or through bought-in packages, there was greater clarity of impact. Improving the evidence base for quantitative impact would help schools to create a stronger case for funding allocations.

1.4 Recommendations

This report includes many recommendations drawn from research findings and endorsed by the Expert Panel. However, the following are the Key Recommendations identified to assist mainstream schools in their future deployment of specialists:

Recommendation 1: Establish an Inclusive School Culture

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (SEND CoP) (DfE, 2015) states that the School SENCO should be a Senior Leader. This report has found that this is central to the most effective deployment of specialists and also appears to be key to developing an inclusive whole-school culture where best use can be made of the available support. We would therefore strongly recommend that in all schools (including those in MATs) the SENCO is a Senior Leader.

We recommend that priority is given to the universal offer for all pupils and that specialist advice is used to underpin the development of inclusive HQT. This will help schools to refine their inclusive culture.

Recommendation 2: Build Positive Relationships

As all successful deployments were based on strong, trusting relationships built between school staff and specialists, we recommend specialists understand the context of the school and the intended impact of the deployment from the school's perspective. We would recommend that, in commissioning specialists centrally, the Local Authorities (LAs), MAT leaders and other agencies are not overly restrictive as to how the specialist can work, so enabling strong partnerships to be formed that are more responsive to school need.

Commissioners of services, including LAs and MAT Leaders, might consider ways in which schools can cluster to share the expertise of specialists.

Recommendation 3: Establish a Vision

The Expert Panel recommends that schools have ownership of their specialist deployments and use this expertise flexibly and strategically to support their wider school improvement planning. It is advised that school leaders have a clear vision for SEND improvement, that annual, three and five-year strategy documents clearly reference SEND improvement and also identify the role that a specialist may play in bringing about sustainable change.

All commissioners of specialist services, including school leaders, are advised to plan services with the end user need in mind. A checklist has been formulated by the Expert Panel with contributions from project participants to support future commissioning – see **Annex 1: What to look for when deploying specialists?**

Recommendation 4: Think Sustainability

The expert panel recommends that SEND workforce development is included in all school improvement action planning and that schools are able to adopt a CPD offer for all staff, informed by the DfE's standard for teachers' professional development (DfE, 2016). Staff development should be an intended outcome for all specialist deployments so that evidence-led, SEND specific, pedagogical practices can be embedded in both the teacher's repertoire and in the school's HQT offer.

The expert panel recommends that specialist-led CPD should be included in the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Core Content Framework, Early Career Framework and CPD delivery that will form the core offer of Teaching School Hubs.

Recommendation 5: Build an Impact Evidence Base

The Expert Panel recommends that schools develop tracking systems to monitor the effectiveness of specialist deployment. This information can be used as part of an evidence base of school effectiveness for any external scrutiny, as a justification for further investment from those with responsibility for school governance and to enable the school to celebrate their success with their key stakeholders, including children and families.

2. Introduction and Context

This project set out to investigate how mainstream settings have effectively deployed specialists in order to share good practice with the wider workforce. The research was undertaken by the Sea View Trust and East Lancashire Inclusion Partnership, supported by Blackpool Research School, and was designed to explore the deployment of SEND specialists in mainstream schools, although some transferable good practice examples have also been drawn from the specialist sector. This report outlines how Senior Leaders, and other school-based professionals, have successfully drawn on SEND specialists, particularly EPs and SaLTs, to enrich school SEND provision, with an emphasis on pupils who require SEN support.

Across all schools in England, as of January 2020, 3.3% of pupils have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and 12.1% receive SEN support, rising from 3.1% and 11.9% respectively since January 2019 (DfE, 2020a). With a proportion of pupils attending Special schools and alternative settings, the number of pupils in mainstream schools in receipt of SEN support is a significant minority.

The report details key findings made by the researchers and the Expert Panel and offers recommendations for the future commissioning of SEND specialists. This report seeks to increase the awareness of the wider range of support available to schools to enrich their provision at the universal and SEN support levels, securing accurate identification and good outcomes and experiences for pupils. It is anticipated that the Key Findings and Recommendations identified will support wider DfE aims to improve early intervention, while enabling SENCOs to make a case for investing in specialist support. The report will support commissioners, including LAs, Governing Bodies and MAT leaders, to make informed choices about the use of SEND budgets to achieve best value for children and young people with SEND.

3. Background

A key driver for the project was to better understand successful models of deployment of specialists in mainstream schools.

A second key driver for the project was to source evidence of how the impact of earlier and wider deployment of specialists may improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. A robust evidence base is required to support a cultural shift towards earlier deployment.

Anecdotal, informal feedback from various sources, including Whole School SEND (WSS) Regional SEND Leads and SENCOs, highlights that input from specialists, such as EPs and SaLTs, is frequently only secured by mainstream schools at the point of EHCP application. Therefore, earlier opportunities to engage specialists are potentially lost and many of the 12.1% of pupils nationally who have SEN support (DfE, 2020a) may not have any access to specialist input. There is further impact; by focusing only on individual children at the EHCP threshold, many whole school solutions which widen the impact of specialist engagement may also be missed.

Our informal findings indicate that the reluctance to engage with specialists earlier in the SEND identification and management process is both financially and culturally driven.

Culturally, many school SEND policies are driven by tight adherence to the 'should' and 'must' directives within the SEND CoP (DfE, 2015) which provides statutory guidance for organisations working with children in the age range 0-25. The SEND CoP states that the involvement of specialists is a consideration for the school where a child is not making expected progress, in spite of the use of individualised, evidence-led interventions. In chapter 6, paragraph 6.58, the SEND CoP acknowledges that specialists may be involved *'at any point'* to provide advice to schools on *'early identification, effective support and interventions'*. However, in paragraph 6.59, the SEND CoP states that when a pupil continues to make little or no progress, or is operating at a level *'substantially below'* their peers, that specialists *'should always'* be deployed.

A further consideration for this project was to support mainstream schools and academies in addressing budgetary challenges in the delivery of SEN support. Clear recommendations are required to establish how limited SEND resource budgets can best meet the needs of all children and young people with SEND.

Financially, there are costs associated with the deployment of specialists. Indeed, WSS Regional SEND Leads and SENCOs identify that there are inconsistencies between National Health Service (NHS) Trusts or LAs in the commissioning of these services on behalf of schools. Mainstream SENCOs, anecdotally, report that the identification of dedicated SEND funding can be an issue, particularly in schools where budgets are already in deficit.

The project considered differences in the commissioning arrangements of specialists across different local areas and the use of NHS and/or LA funded and school-funded, private specialists.

The research project posed the question 'Can the early engagement of specialists, working more widely across the school, build stronger whole school approaches and support the early identification of learners with SEND?'

4. Project Aims

This project's aims were twofold:

- Identify how schools commission and deploy specialists, such as EPs and SaLTs; and
- Identify how this deployment can support the early identification of children with SEND, the development of inclusive universal provision and strategic SEN support.

5. Overview of Research Methodology

The research project utilised a mixed method approach to collect information.

An accessible, digital survey with a response time of around 30 minutes, was developed to gather qualitative and quantitative data. The use of standardised questions allowed researchers to capture and aggregate data, with free text boxes enabling participants to provide context specific clarification.

A follow up telephone interview was conducted with respondents from twelve schools; these were schools with whom researchers had established consent to provide further detail about their arrangements for the deployment of specialists. Transcripts of these interviews were shared with the Expert Panel who completed a thorough peer review and analysis to identify a series of Key Themes and Recommendations.

5.1 Selection of Participants

The schools included in the project were self-selecting in response to a national advertising campaign effected through the Teaching School Council (TSC), sector body for Teaching Schools, and WSS's team of Regional SEND Leads. This approach ensured that all eight Regional Schools Commissioners' (RSC) areas were invited to participate. Project marketing was designed to attract schools who considered their use of specialists was effective and offered good value for money.

After the initial advertising link was sent out, researchers followed up with reminders to TSC and WSS representatives to encourage them to identify schools in their home regions based on knowledge of good practice. In total, 18 schools completed the survey, representing four RSC regions: Lancashire and West Yorkshire, North West London and South Central, South East England and South London, and West Midlands.

Indeed, the timing of this work, during the Covid-19 pandemic, may have reduced participation as school leaders were addressing other pressing priorities. However, the survey sample does cover schools operating in a wide range of contexts and is fully representative of the current educational landscape (as identified through the bullet points below). The level of detail collected and collated from participants through the structured interview methodology is rich, providing a wealth of useful information to inform good practice.

Data was collected from a representative sample of schools and academies, reflecting the diversity of the educational landscape, and included:

- National representation (half of the RSC regions were sampled)
- Primary and Secondary schools (including schools with Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Further Education (FE) provision);
- Small and large schools;
- Schools located in both urban and rural areas;
- Schools situated in areas with contrasting levels of deprivation;
- Schools which are under LA control and those which are part of a MAT;
- Schools operating independent and cluster approaches to specialist deployment;
- Schools working with LA commissioned, NHS provided and private, independent therapists.

5.2 Survey

A short online survey, taking around 30-45 minutes to complete, was created using Microsoft Forms. The survey addressed four key areas:

- Type of specialist deployed
- Information about the school's and respondent's context
- Commissioning and deployment arrangements
- Details of approach adopted and the perceived impact

Participants were asked to consider the following areas when identifying impact:

- Early intervention
- EHCP production
- Identification of need
- Attendance
- Behaviour, including frequency of incident and expulsion
- Academic outcomes

The Microsoft Form software filtered questions, through branching, so that participants were asked follow-up questions in response to initial replies.

5.3 Structured Interviews

Follow-up phone calls were undertaken by members of the teaching school team. All participants were asked standardised questions, agreed with Blackpool Research School. All interview researchers have a deep understanding of SEND specialist deployment and were able to use this knowledge to ask appropriate follow-up probing questions to ensure that there would be sufficient detail to inform the Expert Panel in deciding key themes. Interviews were typically 45 minutes to 1 hour in duration.

Standardised questions focussed on:

- School intake, including numbers of pupils with identified SEND and levels of Pupil Premium entitlement;
- Specific information about the school's choice of commissioning arrangements;
- Cost of the services provided to the school and an explanation of why the school considered these costs represented good value for money (where appropriate);
- Length of time the current arrangements have been in place;
- Typical time scale for specialist response;
- Details of any previous approaches to commissioning specialists;
- Quantitative and qualitative evidence of impact in relation to the following:
    - Accelerated attainment
    - Improved attendance
    - Behaviour data
    - Parental confidence
    - Increased engagement and participation including pupil confidence
    - Staff confidence
    - Inclusion
    - Strategic school improvement

- o Wider impact
- Negative consequences of engaging specialists, including barriers and challenges.

Transcripts of the full telephone interview were produced to ensure that the Expert Panel had a detailed understanding of participant perspectives, to avoid interviewer bias and to record accurate quotes from participants.

All participants were advised that they were able to withdraw from the project at any time and any attributable quotes would be confirmed with participants prior to their inclusion in the project deliverables.

5.4 Expert Panel

The Expert Panel is a cross-professional group with knowledge and expertise in specialist deployment and SEND. Expert Panel membership included: Mainstream SENCO; Mainstream and Special School Headteachers; an EP; a SaLT; a MAT Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and WSS Regional Lead. Their role was to act collectively, to test the credibility of the specialist deployment models presented by schools, ensuring only useful recommendations and high quality, promising case studies were included in the final report.

All members of the Expert Panel agreed to a Code of Conduct which covered the following three areas: Guidance on performance of the work; Impartiality; Confidentiality.

The Expert Panel members were required, individually, to score sections of project transcripts from 1-4 in terms of their exemplification of effective specialist deployment. The panel then worked collectively in groups of three to moderate judgements. Projects scoring below 1 are not included in the final report. All moderated scores were ratified by the full panel although, as part of the management of conflicts of interests, Expert Panel members were not consulted on case studies relating to their own organisation.

The Table 4i below indicates the scoring criteria that were applied:

Score	Grade	Comment
1	Poor example of specialist deployment	No impact on pupil outcomes, activity does not meet threshold for inclusion in the report.
2	Satisfactory example of specialist deployment	Practice shows promise but no clear impact is reported. Include in report alongside other similar examples of related practice as '**Promising Practice**'.
3	Good example of specialist deployment	Practice shows promise and some impact has been identified. Include in the report as **'Demonstrated Practice'.**
4	Excellent example of specialist deployment	Practice demonstrates clear evidence of positive impact on pupil outcomes which could be replicated, included in the report as '**Good Practice Spotlights**'.

Table 4i: Scoring Criteria Applied by the Expert Panel in Assessment of Specialist Deployment Practice Reported in Interview Transcripts

The Expert Panel made a detailed analysis of interviewee responses to the structured interview questions and compiled a grid to collate these responses. This enabled the panel and researchers to draw out key findings and put forward evidence-based recommendations.

6. Findings

Analytics were conducted to compare and contrast the school's responses in the following, previously identified areas:

6.1 Models of specialist deployment and commissioning arrangements
6.2 Cost of specialist services and value for money
6.3 Longevity of current arrangements
6.4 Specialist availability
6.5 Impact in relation to the following:
      6.5.1   Accelerated identification of need
      6.5.2   Accelerated attainment
      6.5.3   Improved attendance
      6.5.4   Behaviour data
      6.5.5   Improved parental confidence
      6.5.6   Pupils confidence, including engagement, participation and inclusion
      6.5.7   Staff confidence and CPD
      6.5.8   Strategic school improvement and wider impact
6.6 Challenges and barriers to the engagement of specialists

6.1 Models of Specialist Deployment and Commissioning Arrangements

Interviewees reported a range of approaches to securing specialist services. Our sample would indicate that there is a continuum of approach, from schools where all specialist support is exclusively sourced from LA commissioned and NHS provided services, through to augmented models where individual schools and MATs purchase additional services, either from the LA or private specialists. Availability was cited by several respondents as a reason for sourcing private specialists.

Dissatisfaction with previous approaches to specialist deployment was the main reason for schools adopting their current models. A quarter of respondent schools indicated that they considered previous arrangements were 'ad hoc' and the current system was more streamlined and strategic. One school identified that NHS therapy services discharged cases as a result of parents' non-attendance at appointments, which they identified as a concern because it contributes to needs not being met. Two schools identified that NHS therapists were only able to work with one child and could not provide CPD for groups of staff to increase breadth of impact. One school had previously had a support staff led model, with no oversight

from Senior Leaders. Another school reported that it had been unclear how allocations of specialist time were made.

One primary school Headteacher described their school's experience as part of an Inclusion Hub. Money allocated to the Hub is used to commission specialists to support a group of primary schools in the Preston area. This model enables the sharing of best practice between schools, supported by a specialist. Such a cluster model allows schools to highlight children's needs anonymously, involving parents at a school level if there is a need for a personalised and formal approach. Individual schools learn practical solutions to take back to their settings, which the Headteacher found very useful.

Findings: The model and commissioning arrangements did not appear to be significant in terms of the quality of the service and the grade the Expert Panel ascribed to elements of practice. However, more good practice examples were identified in schools where the LA and / or the NHS core offer was augmented by additional bought in services, either additional LA commissioned support or private provision. Restrictions on the way in which some therapists work appear to be imposed by commissioners and this can impact on the service that the specialist is able to offer to the school.

Recommendations: Schools should regularly review the sufficiency of their current deployment of specialists and consider '**Good Practice Spotlights**' in this report to augment their SEND offer. Commissioners could review their commissioning arrangements, enabling therapists to have the flexibility to exert maximum impact in schools.

6.2 Cost of Specialist Services and Value for Money

As anticipated, given the variety of models and commissioning arrangements, there are differences in the costs that schools attribute to their specialist provision. There was a perception from some interviewees that the NHS and '*core'* statutory EP services were 'free' and therefore accountability and expectation were low. A common theme of bought in services, either LA or privately provided, was that school leaders had higher service level expectations.

Typically, schools reported that EP services cost more than SaLT services and this is perhaps reflective of the doctoral qualifications held by EP professionals. However, this cost differential tended to influence the number of days purchased, rather than the overall annualised cost of commissioning i.e. less EP days were purchased when compared to SaLT.

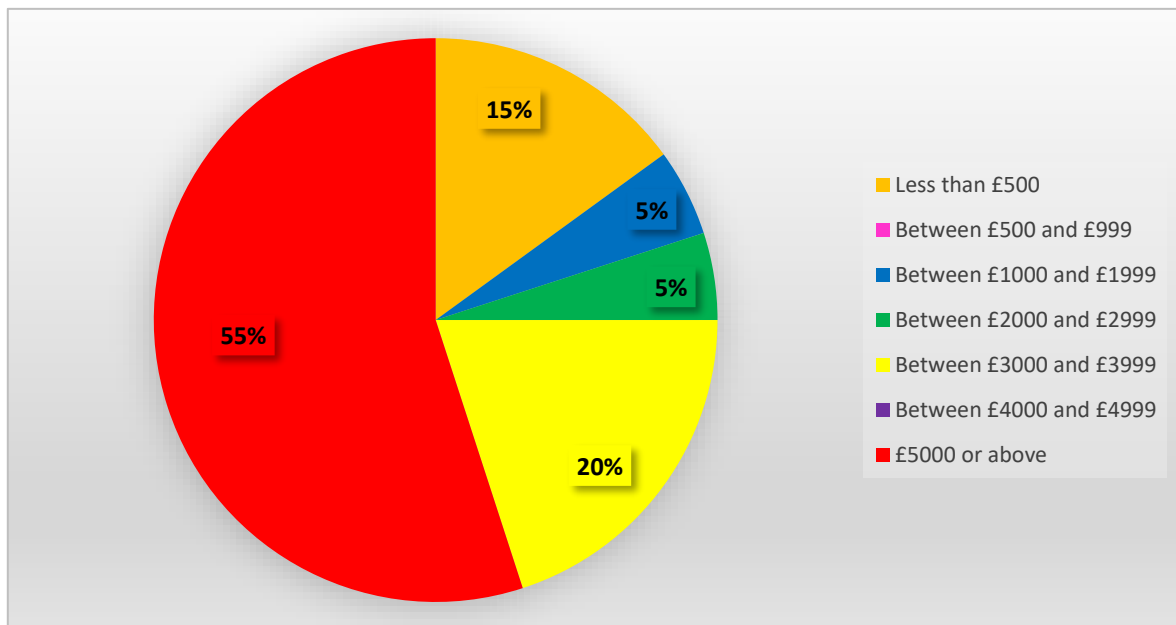The chart below shows school spend on specialist deployment.

Figure 6.2i: Proportion of schools by annual spending band: from initial questionnaire response

In the structured interviews, schools reported that costs ranged from £425 - £600 per day for EP support and £350 to £562 for SaLT. Where private providers have an hourly rate, this would appear to be higher than the equivalent day rate. One school reported paying £92 per hour for a Teacher of the Deaf, equating to £1800 per year. Annualised costs of services were reported to be between £4,800 and £20,000 for EP, and £6,000 to £12,000 for SaLT. One school reported spending £6,500 on Music Therapy. One Trust employs a dedicated SaLT and Trust schools buy in days at a reduced rate. A number of schools reported that they use part of their Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) to fund specialist services. One school reported a credits system purchased from the LA where 20 units of EP time cost £1,000 and a single observation could require up to 12 credits. Cluster models were identified as a cost-efficient solution for small schools.

The following chart identifies the cost of school spend on specialist deployment, expressed as a cost per pupil on roll. Cost per pupil enables a clearer comparison between small and large schools.
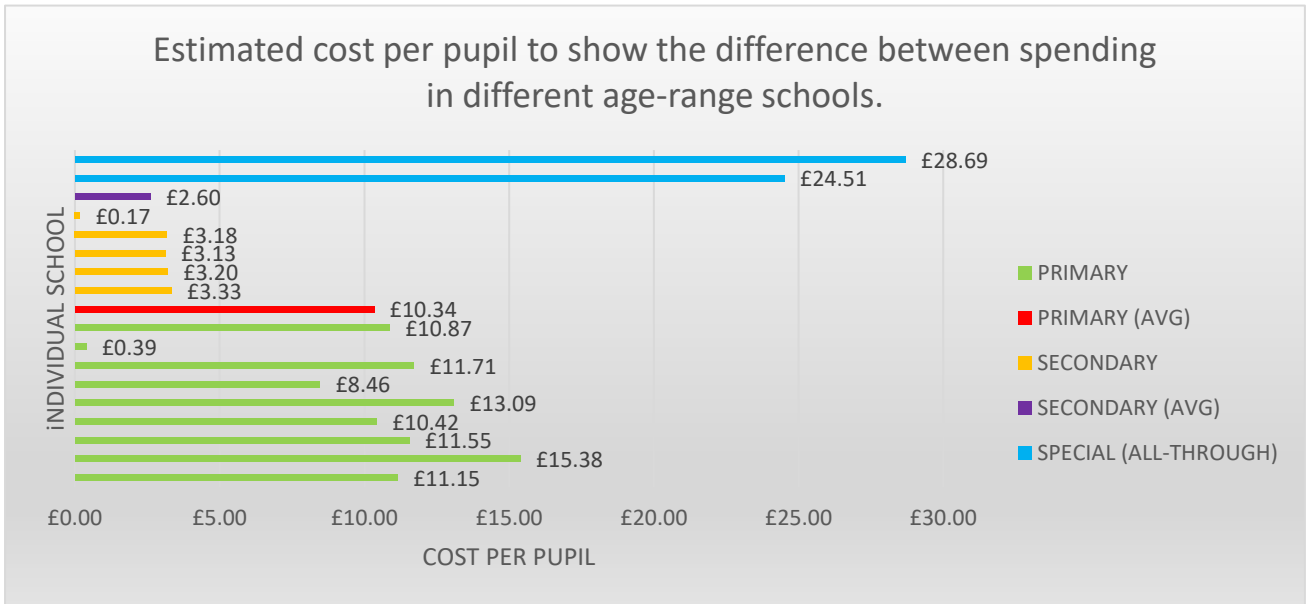
Figure 6.2ii: Estimated cost per pupil to show the difference between spending across different sectors and age ranges.

As might be anticipated, spend per pupil is higher in special schools. Sampled secondary schools spent on average £2.60 per head and primaries spent on average £10.34 per head from their school budget share. This differential may reflect the finding that sampled primary schools frequently use specialists to support early identification of need. These costs do not include any statutory specialist services or services that are commissioned through, and funded by, the LA or NHS.

A number of schools reported that as some pupils were not in school during the Covid-19 pandemic, they had made savings in the area of specialist deployment. However, some specialists have been deployed as part of the remote learning offer.

Interviewees typically valued specialist input. Schools reported getting quotes for private services to ensure best value was achieved. One school described in detail a cluster model with schools pooling their resources and developing a collective SEND *'tool kit'* enriched by recommendations following each subsequent specialist deployment.

LA and NHS models were seen as offering good value for money as the schools did not directly fund these specialists. One SENCO identified that she planned her conversations with the EP in advance to access as much 'free' information and expertise as possible to support children with SEND.

In responding to the finance question, respondents indicated that school-led commissioned services had the following valued features: knowledge of the school context, straightforward reports written in a 'parent-friendly' style; good relationships; provision of appropriate resources; accommodating timescales and speed of response; impactful – on academic performance and behaviour; meaningful staff CPD which impacted positively on staff confidence; diversity of offer - working with a wider range of types of need, for example SaLT working with pupils with dyslexia and supporting across the whole class; support to access required resources from other partner agencies.

Findings: The cost of specialist deployments is significant. Individual LAs have developed different allocation systems and schools are not always fully aware of the service that can be expected from this provision. Costs for private specialists vary significantly. Schools augmenting LA and NHS provision all reported that the purchased services offered good value for money. School leaders were able to pinpoint the aspects of the deployment of specialists which they found valuable.

Recommendations: A more transparent pricing structure to support schools in evaluating the quality of service could be provided by commissioning bodies. Schools should adopt best value principles when sourcing specialists to ensure that value for money is achieved. In developing a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with an external specialist, schools should have clarity around their organisational needs. School Leaders could refer to the following features (valued by interviewees) as a checklist:

- Experience
- Flexible reporting style
- Capacity to build positive relationships
- Resourcing
- Response times
- Intended impact
- Sustainability
- Engagement
- Value for money

A more comprehensive and expanded version of this list '**What to look for when deploying SEND specialists**' is included in Annex 1, this is a **Key Recommendation** of this report. Regular review of services and a Quality Assurance process will provide reassurance to all parties that best value is being achieved.

6.3 Longevity of Current Deployment Arrangements

Interviewees typically reported that their current approach had been in place for an extended period of time: 100% of interview participants had had practice in place for at least 2 academic years and 83% had operated in this way for over 5 years. This is perhaps reflective of their confidence in their decision to share their specialist deployment practice.

Findings: Schools responding to the call for best practice in the deployment of specialists had confidence in their practice and had operated in this way for a significant time-period.

Recommendations: Researchers and readers of the report can have confidence that '**Key Findings'**, '**Recommendations**' and '**Good Practice Spotlights**' identified are based on well-established practice.

6.4 Specialist Availability

Respondents reported that referrals to school-led, commissioned SaLT and EP services achieved a rapid response. This was typically compared to less favourable response times from LA and NHS therapists, where a 'demand and supply' issue was reported. Availability concerns were identified in three quarters of the interviews and, in some cases, waiting times of several months were quoted. In-year admissions were also identified as a challenge by a number of schools when deploying specialist support. However, where there was an allocation of days from these services, and schools were able to 'triage' their own cases, schools reported better satisfaction with response times. One school reported that parents purchased private SaLT to speed up referrals.

Findings: Interviews with respondent schools highlighted a demand and supply issue with insufficient commissioned service from LAs and the NHS to meet schools' specialist needs. Lengthy waiting times were reported. Availability of timely specialist support was cited as the main reason for purchasing school-led, commissioned specialist services.

Recommendations: Commissioners of services could audit schools to better understand levels of specialist need and then work with schools to procure value for money solutions. Schools having flexibility around the use of their individual allocation of specialist support time can allow them to achieve more targeted impact.

6.5 Impact

Respondents reported varying levels of impact. A challenge for schools was identifying if the specialist deployment had been causal in the outcomes noted. The schools engaged in this research project had not set up their practices as action research and, therefore, the Expert Panel was vital in assessing credibility of findings and recommendations made to ensure they can be usefully shared. The research methodology and the process of defining Promising, Demonstrated and **Good Practice Spotlights** is designed to assist readers and establish a level of confidence in the project outputs.

6.5.1 Accelerated Identification of Need

91% of interviewees identified that their specialist deployment model had had a positive impact on accelerated identification of need. A number of schools reported that their privately commissioned specialists worked across the school, supporting staff CPD. Several schools reported that their specialist support was embedded in their graduated response. One school identified that specialists were used alongside school-based diagnostics to strengthen identification of SEND. One primary school focussed specialist support in the Early Years, supporting screening on entry, to respond to needs immediately.

The flexibility of the specialist to make general observations, as well as child-specific recommendations, was described as a *'positive'* by one primary school Headteacher.

There appears to be a consensus across participant schools that the engagement of specialists through a trusting, and often long-term, relationship has improved the individual school's identification processes, together with staff confidence in identifying need.

Findings: The schools interviewed reported using specialists at a whole class and whole staff level to support accelerated identification of need. Schools successfully integrated specialists with diagnostic packages, feeder school information and baseline assessment regimes to develop effective school-specific SEND identification systems.

Recommendation: Schools could consider early and flexible specialist deployment, working across whole classes, and with staff teams, to develop accelerated SEND identification models. Identification processes should be tailored to individual circumstances and can involve a range of integrated assessment approaches, including the use of specialists.

Good Practice Spotlight

Minsthorpe Community College, a secondary mainstream school with 1540 pupils on roll located in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, deploys speech and language therapy specialists to support curriculum delivery at a whole school, targeted and individual level.

Senior Leaders recognise that there is a need for both individual therapeutic intervention and an understanding of whole school levels of speech and language need for effective universal curriculum delivery. The SaLT therefore works alongside Senior Leaders, and other key colleagues, to feed into staff CPD and in this way teachers are supported to deliver on the Leadership Team's expectations that teachers are responsible for identifying and meeting the SEN support needs of all their pupils.

The school has a comprehensive package for in-school identification for all students in Year 7 informed by the evidence base from feeder primary schools. All in-year admissions have an assessment so their needs are understood 'before they walk through the door'.

School leaders suggest the SENCO's understanding and knowledge of the child are key to parental confidence, and this, supported by an understanding of the child's learning journey, established through analysis of primary school data, enables the school to be very clear on required outcomes when engaging SEND specialists.

Accelerated SEND identification is successful as SEN support numbers are higher than national whist EHCP numbers are in line with national percentages.

6.5.2 Accelerated Attainment

Over 50% of schools surveyed identified that specialist deployment had a positive impact on accelerated attainment. Most schools had seen improvements with in-year attainment, and over a key stage, through their own internal tracking system. However, a causal link was not always clear as most schools had a number of evidence-informed interventions in place.

Four mainstream primary schools confirmed that SaLT input had improved academic outcomes. Indeed, two of these schools identified improved outcomes at Key Stage (KS) 1, including in the Phonics screening check. One primary school identified that the specialist EP supports accelerated attainment by writing plans with trackable outcomes. All the mainstream secondary schools interviewed identified improved academic outcomes which they attributed to specialist EP deployment. One secondary school identified that progress for children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC) and dyslexia were accelerated by engagement with the

SaLT. One secondary school reported that the specialist directly fed back to the Head of Literacy, ensuring departmental improvements could be made.

Many of the interviewed schools had robust graduated responses in place and specialist CPD supported the *'High-Quality Teaching'* approaches. One school identified that a collaborative approach between specialists, school parents and the child were key drivers for accelerated attainment.

Findings: Interviewed schools reported a positive impact on accelerated attainment, driven by the use of specialists. Both SaLT and EP professionals supported improved outcomes. SaLT was demonstrated to have particular impact in the Early Years and at KS1, but also across the mainstream age range. EP deployments were also identified to have a positive impact on accelerated attainment throughout mainstream provision. Specialist CPD supported HQT and better personalisation.

Recommendation: Schools could consider early, flexible specialist deployments, working across whole classes and with staff teams to develop accelerated attainment for learners with SEND. Primary schools may choose to focus some specialist resource in the Early Years to enhance performance in the Phonics screening check. All schools could consider how the use of specialists can support HQT.

Good Practice Spotlight
Revoe Learning Academy (RLA), a Blackpool primary mainstream academy, with 488 pupils on roll, serves an area of high deprivation and significant family mobility. Rapid language acquisition, to counter speech and vocabulary 'poverty', is a priority for rapid improvement. A fundamental element of their strategy is the deployment of speech and language therapy specialists to support individual pupils; and curriculum delivery in the Early Years and across KS1.   Employing their own specialists has enabled RLA to be very flexible and fluid in their approach. They have used their specialist SaLT to upskill staff in a range of specialist speech and language interventions. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the SaLT has worked very flexibly with staff and families, using Google Meet to conduct and complete additional and developmental specialist teaching and progressive cycles of assess, plan, do and review. This offer has been maintained as part of the Academy's blended offer, meeting the needs of children who are learning on site and remotely.

Senior Leaders identify that the deployment of specialists from the early years enables the school to successfully close the disadvantage gap, meaning that by KS2 SaLT support is no longer required other than for a minority of pupils who have ongoing speech and language needs (and require statutory assessment to access additional specialist support); or for mobile children who have low or no English on entry, or who are identified as having additional speech and language needs. Whilst not solely attributable, significantly improved outcomes, identified in the Year 1 Phonics screening check, are as a result of the Academy's determination to address speech and language needs at the earliest point and their work with parents and carers to ensure sustainable improvements. (2015, 10% pass; 2019, 84% pass).

6.5.3 Improved Attendance

Nationally, pupils with SEND have lower attendance rates than their peers who do not have identified SEND. The average absence rate across all schools in England for pupils with an EHCP is 9.2% and pupils with SEN support is 6.8%. This compares to a rate of 4.5% for pupils with no identified SEND (DfE, 2020b).

Although the majority of schools taking part in the structured interviews did not have quantifiable data indicating improved attendance as a result of the deployment of specialists, they all identified that their attendance patterns for learners with SEND were well within national expectations. One school identified that, because EP engagement started in the Early Years, appropriate support was always in place and this sustained the attendance for learners with SEND through school. Another school identified that, through the programme of support developed with specialist input, a parent who had been reluctant to bring her child to school had developed her confidence and his attendance increased from around 40% to 100%. Not all SENCOs interviewed had analysed their attendance patterns and linked these to interventions and specialist input. However, some were engaging in more systematic evaluations of impact.

Findings: All of the interviewed schools reported positive patterns of attendance for learners with SEND, although they were unable to identify a causal link between attendance and their engagement with specialists. However, it is not perhaps unexpected that an embedded culture of effective SEND practice is linked to high attendance for Learners with SEND. When considering the impact of specialist deployments, SENCOs did not universally analyse attendance.

Recommendation: Schools establish a positive culture of SEN support which promotes both parental and pupil confidence; this may, or may not, be supported by the deployment of specialists. School monitoring and tracking procedures could be enhanced to identify causal links between SEND intervention and specialist deployment because this could support a business case for increased service provision.

6.5.4 Behaviour Data

A key behaviour data measure is exclusion data; both permanent (expulsion) and fixed-period exclusions (suspensions) are recorded through national census. The national rate of permanent exclusions is 0.10 (a formula is published to support schools in calculating this figure). The rate of fixed period exclusions is 5.36 (DfE, 2021). Schools also have their own internal measures for tracking and recording behaviour data.

Most of the schools interviewed were unable to identify quantitative behavioural change. Although, following specialist input, one school had implemented half-termly tracking of 'Conduct Management'. Their processes identify underlying sensory needs and the pupils' ability to communicate their need for self-regulation time. However, they did generally report qualitative impact on behaviour. One school described the EP's input as *'quite miraculous'* in terms of supporting the whole school with complex behaviour management. The specialist recommended a team approach with the EP, school and SaLT working collaboratively to offer a more nurturing environment. The impact with one child has resulted in a significant reduction in absconding from class and the child is now both present in lessons and available for learning. Seven schools, indicated that, as inclusive schools, they considered they had a culture of robust and effective behaviour management which was responsive to pupil need. A number of schools took the viewpoint that behaviour is a form of communication and therefore improved access to suitable communication strategies impact on behaviour, often by reducing frustration levels. One primary school described the positive behavioural impact of EP deployment in supporting children with ASC, and also those with attachment issues.

Findings: Interviewed schools reported positive, qualitative behavioural change as a result of specialist deployment. Schools taking the view point that behaviour is a form of communication were also able to identify how improved communication strategies had impacted positively on behaviour. Nurture and team work were also recognised as having positive behaviour outcomes. However, not all interviewees were able to demonstrate that their engagement with specialists had an impact on quantitative behaviour measures.

Recommendation: Schools establish a positive behaviour management culture which may, or may not, be supported by the deployment of specialists. School monitoring and tracking

procedures should be enhanced to better record quantitative behaviour data, to identify causal links between SEND intervention and specialist deployment. This could support a business case for increased service provision. As not all interviewed schools could demonstrate quantifiable evidence of impact, the Expert Panel recommend further research into the use of quantitative data to monitor the quality and impact of specialists to improve behaviour. However, the interviewed schools were confident in the robustness of their qualitative evidence.

6.5.5 Improved Parental Confidence

Parental confidence is a very subjective qualitative measure and interviewed schools did not typically have stakeholder survey results which could evidence impact in this area. However, there was significant anecdotal evidence of impact.

One primary school has established a *'Coffee Morning'* approach to meeting the specialists; helping to create positive, *'non-judgemental'* relationships with families. Some schools make specialists available at Parental Consultation events. One school identified that one of the greatest benefits of employing their own specialist is that the school can identify the report style that best suits the family. Another identified that their specialist adds a line at the end of all their reports *'if you'd like to speak to me…'* and provides contact details. The school explained that a number of parents follow up on this offer.

One secondary school reported that the involvement of specialists with parents provides an endorsement, *'a rubber stamp',* that the school is making the right *'general provision'* for learners with SEND. One Headteacher made the point that EP input is generally well respected and valued over that of school staff, however experienced they might be. One school felt that accessible specialist reports could be empowering for parents, enabling them to hold the school to account. This was seen by some schools as a potential challenge, particularly where therapists had no relationship with the school, i.e. private therapists employed by the family. However, where the therapist and the school has a good relationship this was regarded as a strength. Two schools noted that their approach to deploying specialists was considered positive in marketing the school to new families.

Some schools shared their positive experiences of using specialists during the Covid-19 pandemic to work with families on their home learning offer.

Findings: Interviewed schools reported positively on how the engagement of specialists could support the development of better relationships with families. Informal approaches, e.g. drop-ins and coffee mornings hosted by the school, were identified as particularly successful.

Access to specialists was widely seen as empowering for parents and maintaining a three-way approach, between parent, specialist and school, was identified as essential.

Recommendation: Schools establish setting-specific parental engagement strategies and introduce specialists as part of their universal offer.

6.5.6 Improved Pupil Confidence, Engagement, Participation and Inclusion

Pupil engagement in this context refers to their readiness to learn, their participation and inclusion, in both the curriculum and with wider opportunities. A deep commitment to inclusion was a common thread in the schools interviewed. Many schools referred to the impact of HQT in their responses.

Two schools volunteered that, through specialist deployments, pupils with SEND were included in more extra-curricular activities and wider school life. One secondary school identified that specialists supported the school in making the changes required to include pupils, or they supported the school and the child in identifying alternative provision that could better meet need. One primary school and one secondary school volunteered that the specialist support enabled their schools to keep children in class with their peers as much as possible. Three schools reported that subject leaders worked closely with SEND specialists to ensure curriculum coverage was appropriate.

One school reported the importance of hearing the child's voice and this was reported as an area that has been championed by the school. Another reported (as a result of SaLT support and pre-teaching recommended by the EP) a direct impact in terms of pupil contributions to class discussions. Some schools identified that they did not have a system in place to capture pupil voice specifically around SEND or SEND specialists. One secondary school reported that the specialist developed very positive relationships with pupils who enjoyed having an external person taking a real interest in them and their learning. Two schools reported improved levels of self-esteem. One school reported positive re-engagement of disengaged learners.

Findings: Interviewed schools reported positively on how the engagement of specialists could support pupil confidence, engagement, participation and inclusion, both in lessons and in the wider life of the school. However, capturing impact in this area was a weakness in a number of schools.

Recommendation: Schools establish context specific solutions to capture pupil voice around the impact of the school's SEND offer in general and more specifically around the deployment of specialists to celebrate their positive impact.

Good Practice Spotlight

Cheney School, a mainstream secondary school with 1576 pupils on roll, located in Oxfordshire, has 312 children with identified SEN. The school has developed an internal Inclusion Unit for a maximum of 16 students who have additional ASC or Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Needs, Cheney Plus. Pupils accessing this provision have high levels of personalised support and access to mainstream lessons.

Senior Leaders have also adopted *'a school within a school'* approach following specialist EP advice. The EP identified that some pupils appeared to be struggling to regulate in large, noisy groups and required targeted therapeutic support. The *'school within a school'* offers a six-week intensive course to develop self-management skills, including *'self-calming behaviours'*, after which, young people return to their mainstream classes.

87% (13) of students who started in the *'school within a school'* were able to successfully return to their mainstream classes and their engagement has been maintained.

6.5.7 Staff Confidence

Interviewed schools frequently referred to the positive impact of CPD provided for school staff by specialists. Specialist CPD was described as *'empowerment'* for staff and one primary Headteacher commented *'we have to upskill our staff to make sure they can meet the needs of all the children.'* In several schools, specialist observations were not targeted to a specific child, which enabled the specialist to feedback around a wider range of improvements that could be made. For example, in one school, the SaLT had completed an environmental audit to improve communication access across the provision. A number of schools ensured that the specialist supported both teacher and support staff CPD. In one secondary school, all the teachers and support staff working with a specific group of pupils, with multiple needs, had training which was led by the specialist.

Interviewees reported that their staff particularly benefitted from coaching and modelling approaches where the specialist would demonstrate the required practice. Targeted, needs-led CPD was also identified as more effective than generic approaches, enabling a little and

often approach to learning new skills and techniques. Schools reported that, through effective CPD, they were able to embed specialist strategies into their HQT.

Findings: Interviewed schools reported positively on how the engagement of specialists widened staff knowledge and confidence in both the identification of, and the meeting of, need. There was strong evidence that a coaching and modelling approach was particularly beneficial.

Recommendation: Schools work in partnership with specialists to plan a comprehensive CPD offer, tailored to the range of needs typically met by the school. Scheduled CPD should be planned sequentially so that staff can build their skills. The DfE have identified the following CPD standards:

> *'1. Professional development should have a focus on improving and evaluating pupil outcomes.*
> *2. Professional development should be underpinned by robust evidence and expertise.*
> *3. Professional development should include collaboration and expert challenge.*
> *4. Professional development programmes should be sustained over time.*
> *And all this is underpinned by, and requires that:*
> *5. Professional development must be prioritised by school leadership'.*
>
> *(DfE, 2016)*

Schools should work in partnership with their specialists to ensure that CPD meets these professional standards.

6.5.8 Strategic School Improvement and Wider Impact

All schools sampled through structured interview expressed a commitment to SEND school improvement.

One school reported that the SENCO completes an audit and provides a costed action plan. Time is spent to plan the intake and ensure there are sufficient funds available to meet pupil needs at all stages of SEN support. Another interview said that SEND in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) tended to relate to improved systems. One school reported that SEND was included in the SIP; it was a standing agenda item at SLT meetings and the weekly newsletter contains specific SEND information. One secondary school has established a 3-year vision for SEND.

One school identified that it was essential that the specialist understands the ethos of the school. Relationships between staff, SLT and therapists are described as key, with the specialist informing the development of the SIP.

One school shared that the cluster model supported school improvement because of the opportunity to share best practice.

Findings: Interviewed schools were committed to continuous improvement in their delivery of SEND. The majority of schools include an emphasis on SEND in their SIP and practice was most effective in schools where the SENCO is a member of SLT. There was a commitment to the concept that all leaders should have an awareness of SEND and schools prioritised SEND in Leadership Team meetings.

Recommendation: The SEND CoP states that *'teachers are responsible and accountable for the progress and development for the pupils in their class,'* (paragraph 6.36), and that *'school leaders should regularly review how expertise and resources used to address SEN can be used to build the quality of whole-school provision as part of their approach to school improvement,'* (paragraph 6.3). Schools should therefore embrace the concepts 'every teacher, a teacher of SEND' and 'every leader, a leader of SEND' and seek to prioritise SEND in their improvement planning; engaging with specialists can support this work.

6.5.9 Challenges and Barriers to the Engagement of Specialists

A key concern expressed by most interviewees was the cost of the deployment of specialists, with one school commenting *'I could spend twice what I do spend'*. One school commented that the cost of EP SLAs with their LA was increasing annually. Two schools identified that they were concerned that centrally commissioned NHS SaLT services had reduced since they started to buy in their own additional support. One school disclosed that they had a £500,000 deficit and this made it difficult to defend the need to spend on specialist deployments. However, in spite of this challenge, schools continued to be inclusive and commission the support that they considered the children needed.

One school identified that links with the health sector could be a challenge, but the engagement of specialists could support General Practitioner (GP) referrals.

User friendliness of reports, and reporting style, was raised as an issue following some specialist deployments. Schools who had more control of the process and outcome of the deployment tended to report better satisfaction levels with these outputs. Where schools had sourced their provision from their own budget share, they were active in ensuring the output

suited the needs of their children and families. Knowledge of the school was identified as an essential ingredient and a couple of schools identified that specialists could make too many recommendations, or not fully understand current practice. However, where relationships had developed, there was confidence to address these issues. Honesty and clear, shared expectations were also identified as central to building successful school and specialist partnerships.

Schools and specialists have been inventive during the Covid-19 pandemic and many of those interviewed were making use of remote platforms to continue with individual and group input with children and the delivery of staff CPD.

Findings: Interviewed schools raised concerns in the following areas: funding; wider engagement with professionals; quality and appropriateness of outputs; the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, schools reported that all of these challenges could be successfully mitigated by developing trusting relationships with specialists based on mutual respect and an understanding of the schools context.

Recommendation: Schools should seek to recruit specialists who understand their context and are open to the development of positive school-specific relationships; a flexible approach to working together is vital.

7 Key Findings and Recommendations

7.1 Key Findings

This report includes many findings, however, the Expert Panel identifies the following as Key Findings to support future deployment of specialists in mainstream settings:

Key Finding 1: Inclusive Culture

Key to the success of specialist deployment appears to be a strong commitment to inclusive practice. Schools demonstrating Promising, Demonstrable and Spotlighted 'Good Practice' have all developed a positive SEN support culture, openly embracing new and flexible approaches to meeting pupils' needs. Their deployment of specialists has been central to this culture; ensuring that their universal and SEN support offer is built on evidence-led practice which is endorsed by specialists. The most effective practice was identified in schools where the SENCO was a significant voice on the school's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and all Senior Leaders regarded themselves as Leaders of SEND.

Key Finding 2: Positive Relationships

Effective practice was underpinned by strong, trusting relationships built between school staff and specialists; these, in turn, supported schools and specialists in developing positive relationships with parents and other external agencies. The interpersonal skills of the specialist were identified as crucial in forming these relationships and best practice existed where the specialist understood the context of the school and was able to engage in wider school improvement, rather than 1:1 pupil support. A strong sense of partnership working underpinned all Demonstrated and Good Practice.

Cluster arrangements can be positive, particularly for small schools where resources are more limited. Cluster arrangements can provide mutual support for school colleagues and access to high quality ongoing Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

Strong relationships and a 'can do' attitude from therapists has meant that many of the schools engaged in the project have developed solutions to the deployment challenges posed by the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Key Finding 3: School Ownership

The ownership of the specialist deployment appears to be significant. Whatever the deployment and commissioning arrangements, it appears that, where the school takes ownership of the intended impact of the deployment, there is evidence of a greater impact. Where both schools and therapists have a common vision and clarity about what is needed from the deployment, there is strong evidence that a user-friendly service, that meets the needs of children and families, can be developed.

It is recognised that centrally commissioned services can drive down costs, however, there is a real need for such services to understand the 'end-user' requirements so that best value can be achieved.

Key Finding 4: Sustainable Solutions

Specialist deployment was most impactful in schools where the deployment of specialists was embedded in the school's continuous improvement cycle. Most of the sampled schools identified that CPD for school staff was a positive outcome of specialist deployment; although some schools identified that centrally commissioned services did not always allow for flexibility in the area. The strongest practice was identified in schools where the leadership prioritised staff CPD delivered by specialists and where this was designed to meet the DfE's standard for teachers' professional development (DfE, 2016).

Senior Leaders identified that sustainability was achieved where middle leaders and teachers built the knowledge, gained from specialists, into their universal offer through their High-Quality Teaching (HQT) approaches. In these schools, the specialist sustainably grows the skills of the school-based workforce.

Specialist supply was identified as an issue by some participant schools; the greatest barrier to the engagement of specialists was funding.

This report establishes a clear role for specialists in the improvement of universal and SEN support in mainstream schools.

Key Finding 5: Robust Evidence Sources

Throughout this project, there was much evidence of Promising and Demonstrated Practice with a rich seam of qualitative data to support impact. However, there were missed opportunities in some schools in terms of the collection of outcome data to celebrate the

success of some exciting initiatives. Where schools had more robust tracking systems, developed in house or through bought-in packages, there was greater clarity of impact. Improving the evidence base for quantitative impact would help schools to create a stronger case for funding allocations.

7.2 Recommendations

This report includes many recommendations drawn from research findings and endorsed by the Expert Panel. However, the following are the Key Recommendations identified to assist mainstream schools in their future deployment of specialists:

Recommendation 1: Establish an Inclusive School Culture

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (SEND CoP) (DfE, 2015) states that the school SENCO should be a Senior Leader. This report has found that this is central to the most effective deployment of specialists and also appears to be key to developing an inclusive whole-school culture where best use can be made of the available support. We would therefore strongly recommend that in all schools (including those in MATs) the SENCO is a Senior Leader.

We recommend that priority is given to the universal offer for all pupils and that specialist advice is used to underpin the development of inclusive HQT. This will help schools to refine their inclusive culture.

Recommendation 2: Build Positive Relationships

As all successful deployments were based on strong, trusting relationships built between school staff and specialists, we recommend specialists understand the context of the school and the intended impact of the deployment from the school's perspective. We would recommend that, in commissioning specialists centrally, the Local Authorities (LAs), MAT leaders and other agencies are not overly restrictive as to how the specialist can work, so enabling strong partnerships to be formed that are more responsive to school need.

Commissioners of services, including LAs and MAT Leaders, might consider ways in which schools can cluster to share the expertise of specialists.

Recommendation 3: Establish a Vision

The Expert Panel recommends that schools have ownership of their specialist deployments and use this expertise flexibly and strategically to support their wider school improvement planning. It is advised that school leaders have a clear vision for SEND improvement, that annual, three and five-year strategy documents clearly reference SEND improvement and also identify the role that a specialist may play in bringing about sustainable change.

All commissioners of specialist services, including school leaders, are advised to plan services with the end user need in mind. A checklist has been formulated by the Expert Panel with contributions from project participants to support future commissioning – see **Annex 1: What to look for when deploying specialists?**

Recommendation 4: Think Sustainability

The expert panel recommends that SEND workforce development is included in all school improvement action planning and that schools are able to adopt a CPD offer for all staff, informed by the DfE's standard for teachers' professional development (DfE, 2016). Staff development should be an intended outcome for all specialist deployments so that evidence-led, SEND specific, pedagogical practices can be embedded in both the teacher's repertoire and in the school's HQT offer.

The expert panel recommends that specialist-led CPD should be included in the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Core Content Framework, Early Career Framework and CPD delivery that will form the core offer of Teaching School Hubs.

Recommendation 5: Build an Impact Evidence Base

The Expert Panel recommends that schools develop tracking systems to monitor the effectiveness of specialist deployment. This information can be used as part of an evidence base of school effectiveness for any external scrutiny, as a justification for further investment from those with responsibility for school governance and to enable the school to celebrate their success with their key stakeholders, including children and families.

8. Future Foci

The survey respondents and interviewees who engaged in the structured interviews typically reported on their experience in the deployment of SaLT and EP specialists. There are a wide range of additional specialist colleagues who could support mainstream schools' universal and SEN support offers; specialist teachers and other therapists including Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Music Therapists and Play Therapists. Further research could be undertaken to consider best practice around the commissioning of these services.

Project participants identified that there are some availability issues around specialist deployment. Understanding supply and demand for services nationally could be helpful in supporting the future deployment of specialists.

References

Department for Education. (2016). *Standard for teachers' professional development.* London: DfE. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/537030/160712_-_PD_standard.pdf

Department for Education. (2020a, July 2). *Explore education statistics.* Retrieved from Special educational needs in England: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england#releaseHeadlines-summar

Department for Education. (2020b, December 8). *Explore education statistics.* Retrieved from Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term 2019/20: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term

Department for Education. (2021, February 2). *Explore education statistics.* Retrieved from Permanent and fixed-period exclusions in England: Academic Year 2018/19: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england

Department for Education and Department of Health. (2015). *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years.* London: DfE. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf

Annex 1: What to look for when deploying specialists?

This list of possible questions is not exhaustive and has been collated from the responses made by schools participating in the research project to help schools to understand their own service needs and support the commissioning of specialists.

- **Experience/ understanding:** Does the specialist understand the school context?
- **Reporting style:** Can the school select the reporting style (e.g. straightforward reports written to be 'parent-friendly')? Is a formal report always required or can schools opt for a written record of visit instead? Is there an ability to negotiate the number of and prioritise recommendations made?
- **Capacity to build relationships**: Will there be consistency in the specialist attending the setting? Is the specialist approachable? Will the specialist support the school in working with other external partners and parents?
- **Resources**: Will the specialist provide or signpost schools towards resources? Are the suggested resources and approaches evidence-led?
- **Response times**: How quickly can the specialist address new referrals? Can the school triage its own caseload? What are the minimum and maximum report completion timescales?
- **Impact**: What will change? What are the intended areas of impact? How will we measure the impact?
- **Sustainability**: Is staff CPD included in the offer? Will the CPD be in line with the Standard for teachers' professional development (DfE, 2016)?
- **Engagement**: Will the specialist work with a wide range of diverse needs? Will the specialist support the school's universal and SEN support offers?
- **Value for money:** How much is the service? How much would additional time cost? How long is a 'session'? How much time will be contact and how much will be for report writing – can this be flexed?
- **Deployment model:** Can the school cluster with other schools? Is pooling funds an option? Can experiences be shared?

Annex 2: List of Project Contributors

Acorns Psychology

Anchorsholme Academy (Primary)

Blackpool Research School

Castle Hill Specialist School

Cheney School (Secondary & sixth form)

Devonshire Primary Academy

East Lancashire Inclusion Partnership

Fir Bank Primary School

Haslingden High School

Highfurlong Special School

Hillside Nursery

Inkberrow Primary School

Lostock Hall Community Primary School

Minsthorpe Community College (Secondary)

Moorlands Primary School

Newbridge Multi Academy Trust

Padiham St Leonard's CE VA Primary School

Revoe Learning Academy (Nursery/Primary School)

Sacred Hearts High School

St Mary's RC Primary School, Haslingden

Teaching School Council

The Sea View Trust (MAT)

Tor View School (Special)

Whole School SEND