

# SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

A Guide for Inclusive Practice

2ND  
EDITION

Edited by

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# 1

## Introduction

*Gavin Reid and Lindsay Peer*

The field of Special Educational Needs (SEN) has undergone significant changes in the last quarter of a century and also since we wrote the Introduction for the first edition of this book in 2011. These changes in policy, perception and practice have interwoven with national and international movements in inclusion, equity issues and social equality. It has been a vigorous and dynamic area for research. There is no doubt that the Warnock Report of 1978 and the subsequent legislation that followed the report paved the way for the ensuing developments that have had a considerable impact on policy and practice. As Baroness Warnock indicated in her Foreword for this book, it is more than 30 years since the 1981 Education Act introduced the concept of special educational needs and much, of course, has changed since then. Much has been achieved in the public recognition of children's rights and those of families, with successive legislation – such as the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 Years* (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2014) in England. One of the key breakthroughs in developing student advocacy is integral in the *SEN Code of Practice*, which now covers students aged 0–25 and emphasises the responsibility of schools to assess and support all learners who are not making progress in line with national expectations. This means that schools, colleges, universities and other training providers now need to develop the skills of specialists within their teams. As Bell and McLean point out (Chapter 10), as part of this provision Education and Health and

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Care Plans will focus on those children or young people with SEN who need education provision – and that trained specialist teachers are likely to be key players in the process. This places responsibility on the shoulders of the providers and requires that all needs must be catered for by health and education providers.

These factors relating to recent legislation are a key feature in this new edition and it is also the intention of this edition to update the many different strands of SEN from different perspectives – research, policy, practice, parents and the students themselves. It might be argued that one of the features of this field has been the polarisation of perspectives: a continuum of views still exists on best practice for children with SEN. It is not the purpose of this book to become enmeshed in this debate but, rather, to highlight the range of perspectives through the individual chapters included in the book. Some of the chapters strongly promote an inclusive perspective, while others focus on the individual student and their individual needs. For example, there is a new chapter on the treatment of autism which involves a one-on-one specialist intervention (see Chapter 18).

We are also mindful of the needs of parents – parents have been and will continue to be a crucial element in the development of practice and have also influenced policy. Parents are considered throughout and, indeed, the concluding chapter of this book is written from parents' perspectives.

The thrust of this book has therefore been to promote both inclusive provision and to highlight individual needs. Additionally, we have attempted to be as comprehensive as possible and, although we have not been able to include individual chapters on all the existing syndromes, we hope that the general principles and strategies promoted throughout the book will in fact impact on serving the needs of all children, whatever their specific needs.

The scenario of SEN is established in Chapter 2 with Riddell, Harris and Weedon discussing recent changes in England and Scotland, and particularly the issues of categories and resources. The field of SEN has not been without tensions and these are also brought out in this chapter. The authors refer to the tensions as 'dilemmas of difference' – in particular, the tensions between parental expectations and education authority policy and practices. They pinpoint in particular the broader definition encapsulated in the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (the ASL Act) and the tensions that have arisen from this. As they indicate:

there continues to be a commitment to the over-arching categories of SEN and ASN [additional support needs], with their implicit emphasis on the commonality of all pupils with difficulties in learning, but at the same time there are moves towards the use of fine-grained categories, suggesting a focus on pupil differences.

In many ways, this encompasses the dilemmas that practitioners have to deal with and that parents try to work within. The authors of this chapter support their analyses with several excellent case studies. They also update the debate through reference to recent legislation, for example they note that under the post-September 2014 statutory framework for special educational needs

in England, Children and Families Act 2014, mediation has been given a significant push through a requirement that an appeal can only proceed if the parent or the young person him/herself if over compulsory school age, has been notified by the local authority of their right to mediation. They also note that the balance of power in the direction of parents is now more evident, making professionals far more accountable and opening up accessible appeal routes. They suggest that this process is arguably advanced further by the Children and Families Act 2014.

Their chapter is followed by that of Avramidis and Norwich, who discuss the research implications of recent philosophical trends and developments in special education and who present the main research paradigms operating in the field, along with their methodological implications. They also discuss the current trend towards evidence-based practice and the implications of this for policy and the perception of disability in society. They consider the distinction between the medical and social models of disability and the implications of this for research methodology. They also review the trends towards inclusive education and the controversial view that inclusion is a product of social-political arguments, rather than a product of empirical evidence. The agendas that drive research methodology have to be considered. They maintain that:

more often than not, researchers in the field are firmly attached to particular paradigms or knowledge culture stances, thus reproducing sterile debates about the supremacy of particular methodologies (e.g. the scientific/quantitative vs interpretive/qualitative divide).

They argue that, for research progress to take place, a convergence and consensus about research methodologies and philosophical positioning is necessary.

The theme of inclusion is developed in Chapter 4 by Sakellariadis, who discusses the issues and dilemmas that an individual with SEN experiences. She provides a rationale for inclusion and how it may benefit all people. The chapter questions many of the situations that many take for granted and raises the need to focus more on the support needs of people with SEN. She suggests that inclusion needs to be sufficiently resourced and effectively managed.

The potential impact of the social model of disability is also developed by Weedon in Chapter 5. Weedon, utilising his practical experience, argues that:

in the early years [of education] there is an almost instinctive inclusivity, and acceptance of a social model of disability. Each child is seen as a unique individual, and it is part of the teacher's craft to find ways for all the individuals in the class to share the learning. In the later years, where subject specialization and formal assessment gain increasing influence, there is an increasing dynamic towards a bio-medical categorization, an allocation of learners to categories in order that they might better fit the demands of the examination system.

This statement questions current thinking in areas of differentiation and in particular the examination system. Weedon argues that:

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it can only be helpful to generate a dynamic that seeks continuously and imperceptibly, to shift our perceptions a little further away from a bio-medical model whenever it is possible to do so, towards a socially constructed model; and continuously and imperceptibly away from a view that attributes a deficit to an individual, and to look instead at the barriers we construct within the environment.

This statement has considerable current relevance to the direction of SEN and has implications for all syndromes and support services.

This theme is followed in Part II of the book, which focuses on perspectives from practice. In Chapter 6, O'Keefe and Farrugia highlight the importance of language for all areas of development – educational, social and emotional. They discuss the 'at risk' factors that predispose children to speech and language difficulties and highlight the path for assessment and access to professional services. They also provide pointers for teachers on what signs can reveal the possibility of speech and language difficulties, but they also present detailed analyses of diagnostic criteria and the range and different types of speech and language difficulties, including stammering and stuttering, voice disorders, attention, listening skills, receptive and expressive language and the cognitive factors associated with language learning. This is a practical chapter, well-grounded in current theory, and has a host of useful ideas for teachers and other professionals.

Sirimanna in the following chapter looks at auditory processing difficulties, providing a detailed and comprehensive overview of this area, which is gaining increasing attention from parents and professionals. It is likely this attention will be heightened with the publication of DSM-5 in 2013, which appears to be promoting a co-morbid approach to the field of learning disabilities, with some categories being subsumed under a more general label ([www.dsm5.org/ProposedRevisions](http://www.dsm5.org/ProposedRevisions)).

Sirimanna's chapter is followed by a discussion on the role of occupational therapists by Abdullah. In this chapter, Abdullah describes the role of the occupational therapist and focuses in some detail on developmental coordination disorders and dyspraxia. She provides some excellent practical examples and a range of theoretical explanations. She also discusses the very real issues that can be associated with developmental coordination disorder, such as attention difficulties, social difficulties and the challenges in behaviour and in acquiring academic skills.

In Chapter 9, Keith and Clare Holland discuss vision and learning, explain the importance of visual aspects of learning and describe the nature of the visual difficulties that can prevent learning. There is a solid theoretical underpinning to this discussion and they discuss the research from a balanced and insightful perspective. The authors provide in this chapter some excellent suggestions for teachers. They also provide some words of caution when they say that: 'these issues [visual difficulties] may well be misdiagnosed as being part of a specific learning difficulty, and thus treated through additional tuition, when what is really required is an appropriate visual assessment and treatment'.

The theme of dyslexia is tackled by Bell and McLean in Chapter 10, who focus primarily on good practice in training specialist teachers and assessors of people with dyslexia. This chapter is set against the backdrop of increased commitment for the training of dyslexia specialists (e.g. the Rose Report of 2009) and concern about the effectiveness of training in the field of SEN. They quote the comment from the national Lamb Inquiry in England (2009) that:

we cannot currently be confident that those who are charged with making a judgement about the quality of the education provided for pupils with SEN can do so on the basis of a good understanding of what good progress is or how best to secure it.

Bell and McLean provide an indication of the types of skills needed by specialist teachers in dyslexia, including training in assistive software. They indicate that: ‘crucial to any teaching programme for learners with dyslexia is that it should be individualised. Trainees learn how to direct learning programmes towards students’ particular strengths and weaknesses [to develop individualised programmes].’ In this chapter, the authors remind us of the importance of obtaining first-hand evidence from course participants themselves on their needs and how far the courses meet these needs. On a positive note, the authors conclude by saying that ‘this is an optimistic period for training dyslexia specialists’, but they also state a concern, indicating that ‘as we move into the future it is vital that economic constraints do not prevent us from training the teachers and assessors who can make such a difference to the lives of people with dyslexia at all levels’.

The theme of dyslexia is followed up by Crombie in Chapter 11 on literacy. In this chapter, Crombie looks at the current and future contexts for literacy and literacy difficulties. She highlights the comments from a state-of-the-nation document (Jama and Dugdale for the National Literacy Trust, 2012), which indicates that one in six people in the UK are struggling with ‘literacy’ and have ‘literacy levels below what would be expected of an eleven-year-old’. Crombie discusses different types of literacy and the nature of literacy difficulties and also highlights considerations for identifying literacy difficulties. She refers to both theory and practice and also highlights the importance of school/parent partnerships and the increasingly important role of technology in the digital age and its implications for the future of literacy.

In the following chapter, Chinn focuses on mathematics difficulties and, in particular, dyscalculia. He utilises research in effective learning to highlight the implications of this for students with mathematical difficulties. He explains the key factors that contribute to dyscalculia, the prevalence of dyscalculia, diagnostic criteria and strategies for intervention.

This is followed – in Part III on syndromes and barriers – by a new chapter on Down syndrome by Iva Strnadová and David Evans, both based in Australia and who have an excellent grip on the international field of special educational needs; and then by an updated chapter on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) by Soppitt. There is a

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great deal of information available on ADHD and much of this can present a confusing picture for professionals and parents. There are a number of entrenched theoretical positions and divergent views on intervention approaches. In this chapter, Soppitt indicates that aetiology is usually multi-factorial, involving interaction between bio-psychosocial factors. He also outlines interventions, including educational, parenting, cognitive behavioural therapy and pharmacological. He suggests that, although multi-agency working in relation to ADHD raises challenges, it must be fully considered as the way forward in order to prevent young people with ADHD from becoming socially excluded.

The theme of visual impairment is addressed in Chapter 15 by Ravenscroft. In this chapter, Ravenscroft presents an insightful overview of the field of visual impairment and discusses current research on the profile and prevalence of children with visual impairment living in the UK. He also discusses strategies to empower the mainstream teacher in relation to addressing the needs of children with visual impairments, and explores the balance between academic attainment and independent daily living skills. As he indicates, it is important for children with visual impairment to fulfil their academic potential but, equally, it is crucial that they can engage with the world around them!

The issue of sensory impairment is continued by Duncan, who summarises the central issues related to students with hearing loss, which include hearing technology, communication modality, literacy and cognition. She also provides practical strategies for supporting classroom teachers with students with a hearing loss. Using a range of case studies, she highlights how important transitional periods can be effectively handled and the struggles and challenges that parents, children and professionals face. As she indicates, students with hearing loss 'have diverse learning needs. They, along with their families and classroom teachers, require specialist practitioner support in order to maximise learning potential.' This is in line with the other areas previously highlighted, such as visual impairment, attention difficulties, dyslexia and dyscalculia, which are, in many ways, priority areas for training agendas.

The current interest in autism and autistic spectrum is vast and diverse. It is challenging to incorporate the range of research and perspectives in this fast-changing and developing field into one succinct chapter. In Chapter 17, Reid, Lannen and Lannen deal with this by focusing on the challenges and the issues. They provide a background to understanding autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as an overview of the criteria for identification and assessment. They also note the main areas of research and provide a range of strategies for intervention. Moreover, they look at the characteristics and identification procedures of ASD, as well as the impact of ASD on classroom learning. They comment on the range of programmes available for young people with ASD and provide pointers for consideration in relation to these programmes, as well as reviewing the issue of co-existence and overlap. In addition, we include a new chapter by Page on applied behavioural analysis (ABA) and how it can be successfully implemented. This is a valuable addition to this book.

This chapter is followed by a chapter on Tourette syndrome by Barrow, who provides a clear explanation of the nature and the impact of Tourette syndrome. Arguably, this is one

of the most misunderstood syndromes and there are educational as well as social implications to this. As Barrow points out, in some cases the behaviours of the child with Tourette syndrome can be misunderstood as disruptive, attention seeking and mischievous. They provide a clear explanation of Tourette syndrome and also indicate the range of overlapping disorders. They quote Davidson, who once said that:

growing up with Tourette syndrome was very difficult. I believed I was different from everyone else due to the involuntary symptoms. I often felt unloved and unwanted by family and friends and felt that I was being a hindrance to the rest of my family.

Reading statements like this can be heart-wrenching and it is this which should persuade educators to pursue educational and training programmes for all those who may have to deal with children and adults with Tourette syndrome. Barrow indicates the range of current issues in relation to supporting people with Tourette syndrome. She writes that:

the ability to explain and allow for the condition varies from school to school, and particularly at primary school level, where disruptive behaviour has more of an impact. Some schools prefer to leave it to the parents to resolve what they see as 'problems' with Tourette syndrome. Yet, practice shows that the school is the best place to explain the condition for teachers and pupils to resolve a way forward.

This is an important message for educators.

In the final part of the book, the theme is 'working together', which follows on from many of the messages contained in the previous sections. In Chapter 20, Woods focuses on the role of educational psychologists and particularly the wide-ranging and dynamic roles that now need to be adopted by educational psychologists. This is followed by a chapter by Friel on the legal issues which often gain prominence when working together is not possible, positive or effective. It is important to be aware of the legal implications.

The final chapter of the book is on parental perspectives, which have also been considered in many of the individual chapters. In this chapter, Reid, Peer, Strachan and Page indicate that the field of special educational needs can be a confusing one for professionals but can be fraught for parents. All the contributors of this chapter are parents and have experienced the frustration and the anxieties of supporting their child through the educational journey, and have had to deal with a range of circumstances and experiences in education and in society.

As Baroness Warnock indicated in the Foreword, it is fitting to end this book on SEN with parental perspectives. Parents have contributed a great deal to this book and, in fact, have contributed to the direction and impact of provision for SEN in almost every country. They have a key role to play and, together with informed and trained educators, may bring further positive changes in perceptions and working practices in dealing with the range of challenges associated with SEN. This may lead to an enhanced understanding of the needs of children and their families which ultimately will benefit schools, society, families and individuals.

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