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**Parents Choosing to Combine Special and Inclusive
Early Years Settings: The Best of Both Worlds?**

Final Report for Mencap City Foundation

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December 2005**

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations & terminology

EP	educational psychologist
GP	general practitioner
LEA	local education authority
n	number
PPP	parent partnership person
SENCO	special educational needs coordinator
SLT	speech and language therapist

Opportunity Group a mixed group in which children with and without learning difficulties and disabilities are integrated.

Early Learning Group the name of one of the specially resourced inclusive settings in the study (see below)

The terms special, inclusive, mainstream and mainstream/inclusive all are used in the report and it should be noted that interpretations and use of these terms vary from individual to individual and from local authority to local authority:

'Special' usually refers to provision set up for a particular group of children with special educational needs and offering particular resources or approaches; it is used as distinct from 'mainstream' or 'ordinary' education.

'Inclusive' usually refers to local community provision in which positive action is taken to address the organisation, curriculum and teaching in response to an increasing diversity of learners and where diversity is seen as both ordinary and welcome.

We use the term 'mainstream/inclusive' to refer to mainstream settings where there is diversity but where the positive action is not necessarily evident.

Additionally, the terms '*specially resourced inclusive*' or '*special inclusive*' were used by some respondents in this study to refer to provision that combined special resources and higher numbers of children with special educational needs within an otherwise mainstream/inclusive (though not necessarily local) setting.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This project developed in the context of New Labour government commitment to parental choice, to inclusive education and to maintaining a continuum of provision for pupils identified as having special educational needs. The first aim of the study was to gain a sense of how many children with learning difficulties attend a combination of special and mainstream early years settings, and to explore ways of identifying and accessing parents who had made this choice. The study also aimed to gain a better understanding of how parents conceptualised the choices available to them and the processes involved in their decision-making. Finally, the study explored the parents' expectations of combined special and mainstream/inclusive provision and their views about how their expectations were being met in practice.

Methods

The study was conducted in three education authorities in the South of England, one urban and two with both rural and urban populations. This was an exploratory, scoping study for a planned larger project that would focus on the experiences of children in combined placement early years education. The primary research methods were questionnaire and semi-structured telephone interviews, with thematic analysis of the data.

Findings

- The most successful route found for identifying parents of children with learning difficulties who combined special and mainstream early years services was by targeting settings known by the LEA to have children with split early years funding. Only one authority had administrative systems that permitted such access. Other less successful approaches included: sending questionnaires to all known early years settings in an LEA; contacting voluntary groups; asking parents to pass our details to other parents.
- Approximately 47 per cent of respondents from early years settings (providers) reported they had children with special educational needs in combined placements. Over time, many of these children increased their attendance in one kind of provision and decreased attendance in the other, reflecting parents' plans for their child's future primary education.
- Some parents and providers reported that there were no real choices or very limited choices available. Reasons for this related to geographical location, approach of the LEA towards the funding and allocation of places for children with SEN, and perceived limitations in either the special or mainstream setting.
- Parent responses indicated that visiting preschool providers and talking with family, friends and other parents were an influence on their decision-making, as was the support of education and health professionals, with Portage workers being seen by many as playing a key role.
- Some parents had received conflicting advice from professionals; for some parents professionals had been most supportive and for others, although professionals had been supportive, they had had to fight, sometimes in vain, for funding to fulfil professionals' recommendations.
- Twice as many provider respondents cited positive experiences of children combining special and mainstream/inclusive settings as cited negative or mixed experiences. Providers, parents and voluntary groups volunteered advantages and disadvantages of combining settings for children with special educational needs themselves, for providers and for parents. Advantages for children included: developing social skills with local

children combined with accessing special resources; academic/developmental gains; more comprehensive assessment; variety of experience, atmosphere and activities; belonging to different communities; and opportunity to participate in large/small groups, structured/less structured play. Perceived disadvantages included: coping with different structures/routines/expectations/relationships/curricula/pedagogies; confusion; difficulty settling in; the tiring nature of too much input; the time in transit; and children's preference for one of the settings.

- Various factors were cited as key to determining the success of combined placements. These included characteristics of the child (individual qualities, age, disability) and characteristics of the provision (liaison between settings; number of placements; quality of support; experience/ training of staff ethos/curriculum; relationships with staff; number, balance and timing of sessions; staffing ratio; proximity of settings; and how settings complement each other).
- Respondents also identified process issues as important including: funding of placements; lack of choice; shortage of places; changes in local arrangements; the statementing process; and conflicting advice.
- Thematic analysis of the parent interview data led to the identification of the following themes: seeking/getting the best of both worlds; having insurance (each setting making up for what the other lacked); trial and error (see how each type of placement works); belonging to diverse communities; doing the right thing; making hard choices and learning to live with disappointment; struggles and feeling safe.
- Parent respondents who had opted for combining mainstream/inclusive and special settings did not perceive inclusive education as offering the best of both worlds in itself. The social and 'normal' environment of the mainstream was wanted but there was a lack of faith that the 'special' input needed could be provided there.

FINAL REPORT

1. Background

Since 1997, the government in England and Wales has introduced many policy changes that have had both direct and indirect impacts on early years provision for children with special education needs. These changes include moves to increase the overall availability and quality of early years provision, to coordinate inter-professional provision, and to promote parental choice, early intervention and personalized education packages. Alongside this there has been an active, broad agenda to expand inclusive education. One outcome of this profusion of policies is that a number of young children deemed to have special educational needs now attend a combination of mainstream and special education early years settings.

These New Labour initiatives build on a long history of reports on the need to invest in young children and to intervene early in the lives of those experiencing difficulties in learning. Intervening early was highlighted in the Warnock Report (DES, 1978), *Excellence for All Children* (DfEE, 1997) and *Programme of Action* (DfEE, 1998). Many influential reports have argued the need for widely available, high quality provision and research evidence supports the benefits of more early childhood education particularly in settings of a certain quality (e.g. Sylva *et al*, 2004). These have culminated in an emphasis on parental choice (*Choice for Parents*, DfES, 2004b) and placing the child at the centre of personalized packages of education and care (*Code of Practice*, DfES, 2001; *Together from the Start*, DfES/DH, 2003) in tandem with the development of Early Excellence and Children's Centres, Childcare Information Service, Children's Trusts and Sure Start. A marked feature of the current era is the combination of all these strands, together with the intensity of interest and investment.

For parents of young children with special educational needs, the notion of choice is complicated by policies that endorse the option to combine placements as part of the 'comprehensive range of services for young children', intended to provide 'a sound basis for lifelong learning' (DfEE, 1999a: 4). The choices, however, are both difficult and circumscribed. Despite the government's significant achievements to date, and continuing plans to improve early years provision, the ambition for integrated, coherent services 'is a far cry from the current maze of different providers and services that parents must navigate' (Sylva and Pugh, 2005: 22). Research indicates that there is a lack of clear evidence regarding the quality of diverse special and inclusive settings (Law *et al.*, 2004), the relative effectiveness of special and inclusive education (Hegarty, 1993) or about how children experience different options (Donnegan, Ostrosky & Fowler, 1996). Furthermore, depending on local arrangements, the complex choice of special or mainstream/inclusive options encouraged by government may have to be battled for (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2004) and not all parents have the necessary resources for the struggle (Riddell, Brown, & Duffield, 1994). Previous research indicates that parents who place a higher priority on socialization tend to favour an inclusive educational setting (Duhaney & Salend, 2000), whereas parents who are more concerned with academic goals tend to favor the availability of a continuum of services (Palmer, Borthwick-Duffy & Widaman, 1998), but parents are increasingly consumers who are likely to want social and academic education.

2. Aims & Methods

The aims of the current study were to:

- explore ways of identifying parents of children with learning difficulties who have opted for a combination of special and mainstream services for their child in the early years
- gain a better understanding of how parents conceptualise the choices available to them and the processes involved in making decisions
- explore parents' expectations of combined provision and their feelings about how those expectations are being met in practice.

The study was conducted in three local education authorities in the South of England. Questionnaires were initially sent to providers (n=442) who were identified from local authority website lists/ Ofsted databases and via local education Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships. Questionnaires were also sent to local and national voluntary groups (n=42) to establish whether they had a position on advising parents about combining placements. Through these 'gatekeepers' and through a process of snowballing out from identified parents we sought to find parents who had young children in combined placements who wished to participate in the study. Parent questionnaires were sent directly to parents already known to us (n=1) or identified through the process (n=8), but most parent questionnaires were sent to providers, who were asked to forward them to the parents of children who they knew combined special and mainstream/inclusive settings (n=20). Follow-up in-depth, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with five parents; detailed notes of parent comments were made including verbatim quotes and these were validated in the one instance when both parents were involved and the dialogue was more complex.

The questionnaires to the three audiences were similar but were adjusted to suit the different roles of providers, voluntary groups and parents. Providers were asked about the nature of the provision in their setting, the numbers of children with special educational needs in combined placements, the nature of their involvement in arranging placements for these children, how they liaised with other settings the children attended and how often each child attended each setting. In addition to these largely factual questions, providers were asked more open questions inviting them, for example, to 'comment on your opinion of combined placements, the advantages and disadvantages, practical issues, how children cope with them and so on' (See Appendix 1). Some providers and voluntary groups completed the questionnaire by telephone interview, which also enabled discussion and the eliciting of richer information.

Voluntary groups were asked about their role in the early years, whether they gave advice or supported parents with decision-making, and their policy on special/inclusive pre-school provision (See Appendix 2).

Parents were asked to describe their children and the types of pre-school they attended, whether these settings were specified on a Statement of Special Educational Needs and the children's pattern of attendance. Questions then addressed the choices that were available to parents, who and what sources of information they consulted, the advantages and disadvantages they perceived in combining special and inclusive early years settings and what factors and people had the greatest influence on their final choice of settings (See Appendix 3).

3. Findings

3.1. Aim: Identify parents who had opted for a combination of special and mainstream/inclusive education in the early years

3.1.1 Response rates and gaining access to parents

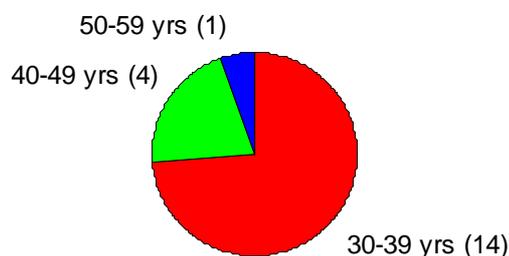
The first aim of this study was to explore successful methods of finding parents of young children with learning difficulties who had opted to combine special and mainstream/inclusive early education. This was important to establishing how common this practice was and also identifying parents willing to share their experiences and perspectives. Voluntary groups associated with parents of children with special needs were a potential rich source of contacts, but the nature of the groups meant that in practice it was often difficult to get to the person within the organisation who might have been able to help. The response rate to the questionnaire sent to voluntary groups was low - just 12% (n=5), but telephone and email contact led to some rich data related to how the groups perceived their roles in relation to parental decision-making and their views on special and inclusive early years provision.

The main route to parents transpired to be via providers, from whom there was a better response rate of almost a third (30%, n=134). Questionnaires sent directly to providers had a lower response rate than questionnaires forwarded in a targeted way by the local education authority (LEA). Only one LEA was able to assist in this way. The authorities' ability to target settings with children in combined placements appeared to depend on the administrative systems in operation within each authority, particularly the systems for tracking the allocation of split funding.

Once we had identified some parents with children who combined special and inclusive settings, we asked them to identify other parents who had made similar choices. However, this approach led to very few new contacts.

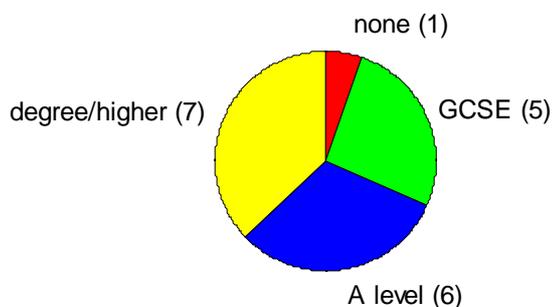
In total, 29 parent questionnaires were sent out and 19 (66%) were returned. The parent respondents (including one set of grandparent guardians) were not ethnically diverse, most identifying themselves as white UK/Irish (n=16, 71%) and the others white European or Turkish. They were mostly in the 30-39 year age bracket, see figure 1:

Fig. 1 Age group of parent respondents



Their highest educational attainment levels varied from one person with no qualifications to a fairly even spread of GCSE level, A level and degree or higher degree level (see figure 2).

Fig. 2 Parents' level of education



The majority of parent respondents were buying or owned their own home (n=16, 71%), with one on a rent/buy housing scheme and one in council accommodation¹. Most families had joint incomes in the £20-40,000 p.a. bracket (n= 11, 58%), with one earning £40-60,000 p.a. and some £60,000+ (n=3, 16%)². Their children were diverse in their special educational needs: seven had difficulties mainly in the area of speech and language and seven had global learning difficulties (linked with epilepsy/ Down syndrome/ Angelman's syndrome/ Cornelia de Lange syndrome), three had difficulties in mobility arising from cerebral palsy and two had autistic spectrum disorders.

3.1.2 How many children attend a combination of special and inclusive settings?

Just under half of the providers who responded to our questionnaire reported that they had children with special educational needs in combined placements (n=62, 47%). In addition, some providers reported this did not apply currently but had in the past (n=10, 8%), although it was unclear in some of these responses whether or not providers were reporting specifically on children with special educational needs. Of those that did have children in combined placements, having one child in this situation was most common (n=38, 28%), although several settings had two or three children (n=14, 11%) sharing special and mainstream/inclusive provision. Some settings (n=10, 8%) reported between six and twenty children combining special and mainstream/inclusive settings. These providers with high numbers tended to be special settings, where most of the children also attended a mainstream setting, often with encouragement from staff in the special setting.

3.1.3 What were the patterns of attendance?

Providers who responded to the questionnaire indicating experience of shared placements reported that it was more than twice as common for children to spend more time in one kind of placement (n=40, 30%) than have an equal number of sessions in each setting (n=18, 13%), though whether the special or

¹ 1 set of parents declined to give details

² 4 sets of parent respondents declined to give details of annual income

mainstream/inclusive setting was dominant varied. Similarly, 13 parent-respondents reported their child attended one setting more than the other, with only three children attending half and half, and some children attending three or more settings in various combinations. Sometimes the balance of placements was part of a changing pattern, in which case attendance at mainstream/inclusive settings was more likely to rise than special, and this increase reflected the parents' plans for their child's future primary education. Providers seemed clear in their responses that the patterns of attendance were highly dependent on the perceived needs of each child.

3.2: Aim: Understanding parents' choices and decision-making

3.2.1 What choices were available?

The second aim was to gain a better understanding of how parents conceptualise the choices available to them and the processes involved in making decisions. Some parents and providers reported that there were no real choices or very limited choices available for parents of children with special educational needs. The main reasons given for no or limited choices were: geographical location; the approach of the local education authority towards the funding and allocation of places for children with special educational needs; limited number of local special settings and limited suitability of mainstream/inclusive settings due to lack of facilities and/or staff training.

Variation due to geographical location

Both parents and providers mentioned a lack of real choice due to their geographical location. Some mainstream/inclusive providers in rural areas reported no local special education facilities, and others reported very restricted choices, with only one facility for special educational needs. In some rural areas, both parent and provider questionnaire responses indicated that the distances children would need to travel to access special schools were sometimes considered prohibitive. Some respondents also mentioned very limited choices of inclusive early years settings.

Variation due to Local Education Authority

Choices also varied considerably for parents depending on the special education needs policies and funding practices of the three local education authorities involved in the study. Most notable was that one of the LEAs apparently had providers who actively encouraged combined placements, while another actively discouraged them such that parents felt their children had to attend the specially resourced inclusive nurseries and not the ones they would prefer. Some parent, provider and voluntary agency questionnaire responses from all three areas studied cited the LEA's management of funding for placements as restrictive for choice. In some areas, some parents and preschool playgroups reported they had found it very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain funding for children with special educational needs. Several parents reported that they had had to pay for their child's place in a mainstream/inclusive setting, as the local authority payments were only made to the special setting. In one area, a parent had opted for a combination of mainstream/inclusive and special setting, because the latter offered conductive education for her son, but the parents had been unable to receive funding for his attendance, as the local authority did not support this particular special setting.

Provider and parent responses that indicated regional variation in the meeting of special needs for children were supported by information from the LEAs. It was clear that each authority had developed its own distinct approach to the funding and allocation of places to children deemed to have special educational needs.

The urban authority, we were told, had adopted a strong policy of inclusion for children in the early years assessed as having 'special' and/or 'significant' needs, with an additional, limited number of nursery units in special schools resourced and staffed for children with more profound needs. All preschools in the area were required to have a SENCO, and were visited regularly by an LEA officer, with small grant funding for special needs available for all settings. In addition, this authority was proud to have developed provision in ten specially resourced inclusive centres. These were local preschools where the LEA had an agreed number of places for children with special educational needs. These inclusive centres were said to aim to provide the best available facilities and appropriately trained staff for a range of needs. Space permitting, a child would normally be allocated a place in the nearest of these inclusive centres, which may or may not be their local preschool. In the questionnaire responses, parents and providers frequently referred to these centres as 'special inclusive settings'.

Although the rationale behind the development of these specially resourced inclusive settings was clear to the LEA, in practice, parent responses implied that parents were using them differently. For example, one parent respondent reported that her child attended three sessions per week at a resourced inclusive preschool that specialised in speech delay but was some distance from home (an escort and transport was provided for the child), and two sessions per week at a local preschool playgroup, which was attached to the infant school her sister attended. Another parent in this authority reported that her child attended three early years settings: three sessions at an inclusive nursery, two sessions at an Early Learning Group and one session at an Opportunity Group. Furthermore, although this urban LEA was said by the Special Needs Officer to apply a fully inclusive policy, some mainstream/inclusive providers from this area made negative comments about children with special educational needs joining their setting, including the difficulties of accepting children with special needs who were not potty trained.

One of the mixed rural and urban LEAs stated that it promoted inclusive practice with a holistic approach towards young children's early years education. Young children assessed as having special educational needs were allocated specialist placements in early years settings, all of which were said to be inclusive with a high level of expertise in special educational needs. This authority also provided additional funding for children with special educational needs in mainstream settings and a range of free special needs training for early years practitioners. The LEA also mentioned the provision of the following services to support young children with special educational needs: Portage, outreach support to early years settings, area SENCOs, and specialist teacher advisors for children with hearing, visual and physical impairments. We were unable to get a perspective on provision from the third LEA.

Parent and provider perspectives on choice

Where local choices were available, some providers from each authority reported that parents had been advised to send their children to mainstream/inclusive settings, but that the parents had fought to combine this with a place in a special setting. Whilst some parents had eventually achieved some funding, there were also reports from other parents that the local authority had refused to fund a place in the special school that they had selected. Conversely, some parents reported that they had intended their child to attend the local inclusive preschool, but they had received advice from a professional to consider a special setting.

The parent interview data gave further insights into the degree of choice that some parents had experienced, and the conflicting advice they had received. One parent

had her child referred to a special school by health professionals, but had been declined by education staff indicating that his needs would be better met in an inclusive setting. Supported by the Portage worker, the mother had sought and, after seven months, eventually received funding for a place at a voluntary sector special school. More positive experiences of choice were also reported. One parent interviewee had been encouraged by professionals to consider combining the special school placement with an inclusive setting, and the combination had worked very well for her child.

3.2.2 What influences were there on parents' choice-making?

In the questionnaires, parents were asked with whom they had consulted when considering their child's early years education. While preschool providers were the biggest single category among the cluster of family, friends and providers, together family and friends outnumbered providers. Only four respondents indicated that they consulted their child but interview responses indicated that the children's response was crucial and thus, parents may have answered this differently if they were encouraged to view 'consultation' in the broadest sense. Among medical and LEA staff, specialist medics, speech and language therapists and educational psychologists were most likely to be consulted. The data on other sources indicate the other people these parents consulted were voluntary groups (n=3), social worker (n=1) or school staff (n=5). They were more likely to discuss options and visit settings than to consult websites, Ofsted reports and written information. The range of responses is shown in figure 3.

Consulting friends and family

These responses imply that as well as consulting preschool providers, many of the parent respondents considered talking with family, friends and other parents to be an influence on their decision-making. The interview data supported this, but the contacts with others' experiences were sometimes tenuous. For example, one mother reported that an important influence on her choice of special school had been through a friend:

I talked to my friend. I wasn't sure about the special one as it's a long way out. My friend's neighbour's grandson went there and made great progress – they were very impressed.

The interview data also revealed that although parents often consulted other parents when considering inclusive settings, they rarely had contact with parents in special settings prior to their child starting, and were therefore almost entirely dependent upon the views of professionals, and on their own feelings after visiting the settings.

Several parents reported in interview that when visiting both mainstream/inclusive and special settings, the attitude of the staff towards them and their child was highly influential, as they felt this reflected the setting's attitudes towards disability. For example, another mother reported:

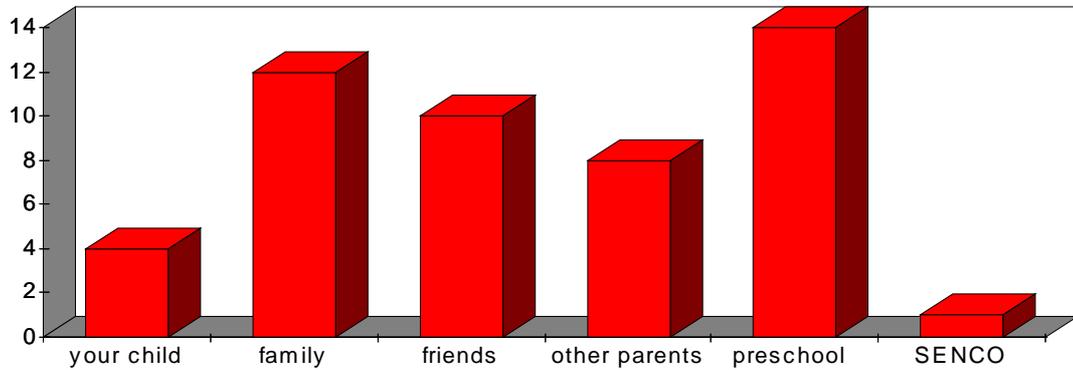
... the lady who runs (the inclusive preschool) was most welcoming. I had been very anxious at that time. [My son's] needs had only just been identified, and I was expecting a baby and [my son] wasn't sleeping well. I was interested mainly in social interaction, not what he learnt. [My son] was really welcomed there and the manager had time for me, she spent time talking with me and really listened, but the other settings I visited just gave me a form for [my son's] special needs and sent me packing.

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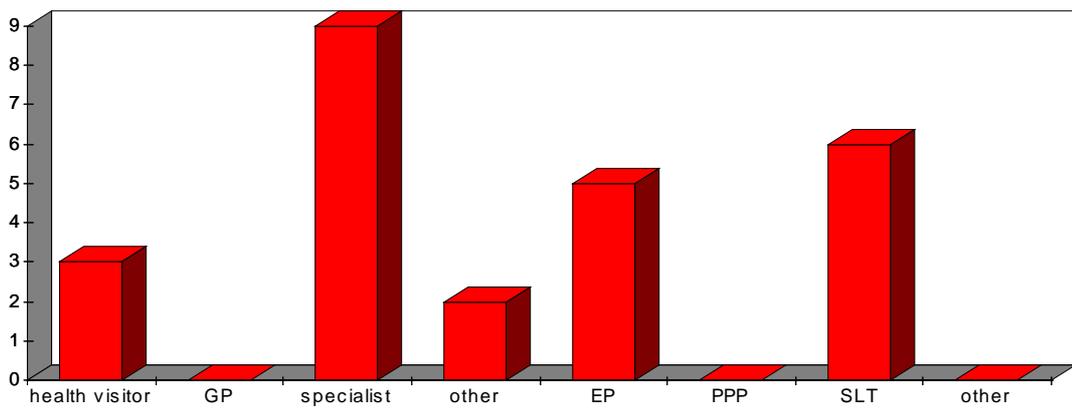
Figure 3 The people and sources of information that parents consulted

Response to questions 'Did you consult others in making the choice of your child's placement?' and 'What sources of information about local pre-school settings informed your choice of settings?' (See Questions 11 & 12, Appendix 3)

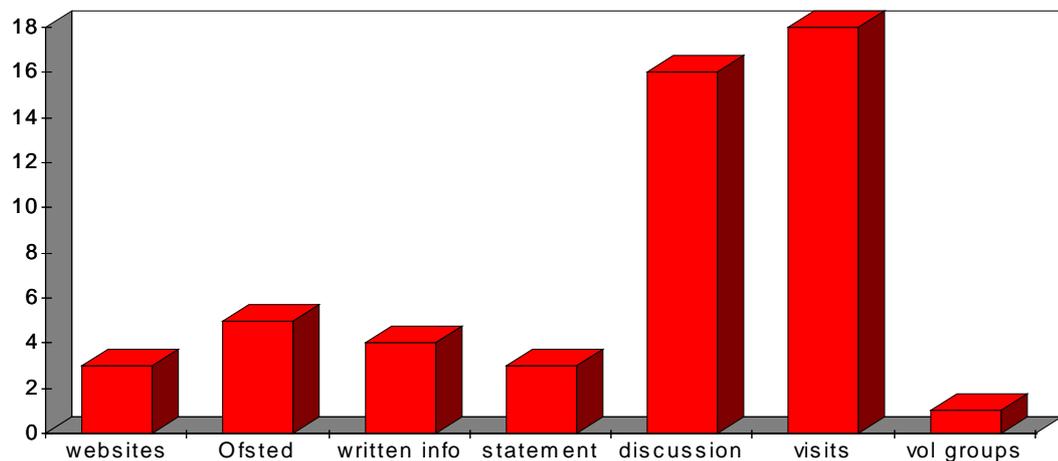
Family, friends and providers



Medical and LEA staff



Other sources



The mother of one boy visited several local mainstream/inclusive settings until she found a setting she liked and where she felt her son would 'be happy', and then discussed her choice with the Portage worker and other parents. In addition to the welcoming approach of the staff in the setting and the recommendations of others, the resources in the setting had also influenced her final choice, as it had a 'lovely outdoor fenced off play area, which I knew [my son] would enjoy as he doesn't like being inside all the time'. For parents of children with particular physical needs, the extra resources available in some special settings were a particular attraction:

[The setting] was a slight factor as the special school had a swimming pool and [our son] loved swimming.

She does Makaton and PECS and she would lose out in mainstream. She has physical needs too. And the special school has various things that would benefit her – swimming and horse riding. So it's a balance really.

Many parent questionnaire and interview responses cited the favourable staff to child ratio and the ability of a special setting to focus on their child's specific needs as reasons for selecting a special school. For example, the mother of a girl with speech delay had selected a particular special setting as it had two speech therapists on site, and each child had a specific program for their development. However, parents' initial impressions of a setting's strengths had not always proven to be reliable indicators of a setting's practices. The parents of one boy had thought long and hard about whether to combine special and inclusive settings, or whether to opt for inclusive only. Following the recommendations of other parents they visited a special setting, where they formed a very positive impression, particularly of the headteacher, who 'talked herself up and impressed us'. Although the parents felt that in retrospect their son had enjoyed attending this setting, particularly the friendships he had made with other children with Down syndrome, they had been shocked to discover that the setting had not been doing the speech and language exercises set by the therapist:

... they said it didn't fit in with the way they planned their day and they didn't really believe in them ... it was mortifying to discover that it didn't happen ... it was very shocking for me and shocking for the speech and language therapist, who couldn't believe it.

Consulting a range of professionals

For some parents, the views of professionals from a range of health, care and education backgrounds had been central to their decision-making. For example, one mother had been encouraged by professionals to consider both inclusive and special settings for her child:

[The consultant], the physiotherapist and occupational therapist [were most influential] ... and my Portage worker has been fantastic ... very helpful, very good. I did talk to other parents – with older children – people at the Opportunity Group about what nurseries they use. You can talk to other people but it comes down to your own individual child. [The consultant] said it would benefit her development – she would copy other children – that being with other children would make her more confident. The outside activities not the alphabet and that. She really influenced me. We're trying to do the best we can – and when someone has a lot of experience – that's a big influence. Seeing the nursery too – hearing what they could do – that was a big thing for me.

Several parents reported that with regard to opting for a special setting, the recommendations and reassurances of the Portage worker had been a crucial early

influence, both because of the Portage worker's experience and knowledge of their child and for their contacts:

We found out about [the special setting] through a Portage worker – after he was turned down there. We applied to Portage next because I wanted more support but he was turned down because he wasn't bad enough. But the Portage woman was good – she kept him on the waiting list until he got a place somewhere else. She said about [voluntary sector provider] and I contacted [provider] and a field worker came out to my home and he recommended [the same special setting]. They have a list of schools they endorse and a Schools for Parents Network.

I went and talked to people. The Portage lady gave me some contacts of parents of other children with Down syndrome who she thought I would get on with, and other people, their experiences and then I found out what was available in the local area.

Overall, I've felt quite well informed and supported throughout ... not a lonely process ... loads of support from Portage, speech therapist and from the inclusive preschool.

The role of the Portage worker continued to be key for some parents, for example, to act as a point of liaison between special and inclusive settings:

The Opportunity Group and nursery don't talk to each other directly but the Portage worker links with both and I do.

In interview, parents of children with speech delay found the advice of their speech therapists, sometimes along with other health professionals, particularly useful:

The speech therapist made us aware of [special setting for Speech and Language] last year. She said [your daughter] is due to start preschool in September, would you like me to refer her to a special one? So we found out about it and we found she could go to both. We looked around [the special setting]. It was small and friendly, about six or seven children in a session.

... [our son] attends the only local facility, recommended by the paediatrician and speech therapist. I also discussed this with his inclusive setting, who knew the special school and felt it would be good for his speech.

The interview data confirmed that for many parents, the interest and advice of a range of professionals had helped them to feel supported and less lonely in the process of their choice-making. Where professionals had given conflicting advice, the parents had found decision-making particularly difficult (see 3.2.3 below).

Other influences

For all the parents interviewed, the final decision for their child to attend particular settings was based on a balance of many different factors. When choosing an inclusive setting, most respondents considered its location in the local community important, so their children could make local friends with whom they might generally develop their social skills and continue on to primary school. Parents who also had older children who had attended a local mainstream/inclusive setting, and/or now attended a nearby mainstream primary school, also felt that this had influenced their choice of local inclusive setting for their child with special needs. The sense of belonging to a community appeared to be particularly important and for some parents this was linked to the rural nature of where they lived:

We felt a strong commitment to the community, this is a rural setting so there aren't many options – you're either in the community or you're not and we felt we had to give to the community or the community wouldn't give to us

For many parents, there was no real choice of special school. Most reported only one suitable setting and this was often situated at a considerable distance from home. Many parents had received a strong steer from health and education professionals to consider the benefits of a special setting for their child's early years education, but professionals had also often been supportive of parents' desire to combine special with inclusive. However, funding for combined placements had remained problematic for many parents.

3.2.3 How did parents make their choices?

Many parents reported that making choices was difficult, partly because there was no ideal path to follow. In both the parent questionnaire and interview data, it was clear that the choices parents made for early years education tended to reflect their aspirations for their child's primary education, and how best to achieve that outcome. Rarely did one setting seem to offer everything parents felt their child needed, and in these cases, combining mainstream/inclusive and special settings offered a solution:

We wanted part and part. The idea originally was go to mainstream school. He was already at [an inclusive nursery] and he was fully integrated there, the children knew him, so it made sense to stay in mainstream. If he could have had the special care there that would have been ideal. We do hope to continue [the special setting] for one day week once school starts – because he won't get enough at school, even with twenty hours Learning Support Assistance because they're not a trained physio. If they really learn about the physio side then that's fine but...

We had no hesitation about combined placement – it just evolved. The ultimate goal was to go into mainstream [primary] and how to get him in the best position to cope in order for him to have the best life for him to reach his own potential and the best chance to grow and be acceptable and not suffer loneliness and it's all about equipping him for life.

Parents sometimes received conflicting advice from health professionals and they were left having to insist on the path they weighed up to be best. Other parents reported that they had felt well supported by professionals when considering the options for their child's education. However, the pressures of choice making and choice avoiding was reported to be a potential source of disagreement between partners:

The thing is I'm only one parent and [mother] is the other. I have to respect her views and not impose mine. [Mother] had strong ideas when we started thinking of preschools and [mother] saw advantages to special and her reasons were sound so I went along with it. Equally, I wanted it to be a route to playgroup when he was three rather than special school.

This couple had shared the decision making, but for others, the process of choice making was reported to be a lonely journey:

... many women I know ... mothers of [children with Down syndrome] don't have such support from their husbands, they don't want to know and leave the decisions to the mother ... it's very lonely

3.3 Aim: Parents' expectations and experiences of combined provision

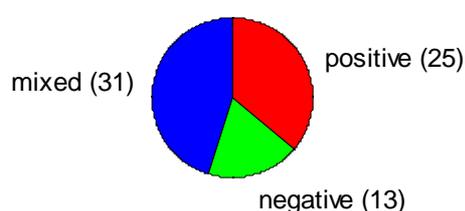
The final aim was to explore parents' expectations of combined special and mainstream/inclusive early years education and their feelings about how those

expectations were being met in practice. In this section, the general experiences of parents are summarised alongside the experiences of providers and the factors and process issues that appeared to have impacted on the successful establishment and maintenance of combined placements. Expectations are addressed through the respondents' comments about the perceived advantages and disadvantages of combined placements and through a thematic analysis of the whole dataset.

3.3.1 What were the general experiences and opinions of providers?

Among providers there was twice as much reporting of positive experience of children combining special and inclusive settings as negative. This is perhaps unsurprising given that this was not a representative or systematic sample and more positive practitioners may have been more inclined to return the questionnaire. The most common coding category, though, was mixed experiences (see figure 4).

Fig. 4 Experiences of combining



Providers most frequently cited the advantage of combining the opportunity to develop social skills offered by the inclusive environment with the special resources of the special setting (n=19). The next most frequently cited advantage was the benefit of mixing with local children combined with getting specialist input (n=12). Other advantages cited for the children were academic/developmental gains (n=7) and a more comprehensive assessment (n=4); the benefits of a variety of experience (n=6); different atmospheres (n=1); a greater range of equipment and activities (n=3) and the opportunity to participate in both large and small groups (n=3), structured and less structured play (n=2).

The main disadvantage for children with special educational needs who combine special and inclusive settings was seen by providers to be having to cope with two different structures or routines (n=34), with the next biggest category being a slightly less specific concern that combining placements could be generally confusing for the children (n=22). Providers also suggested the disadvantages for children of having to deal with different (behaviour) expectations (n=17) and different staff and relationships (n=12). Some (n=12) commented that it took longer or was more difficult for children to settle in if they attended two or more settings, and that it was harder for them to make friends (n=11). Other disadvantages were seen to be in terms of different curricula (n=4), different pedagogies (n=2), the tiring nature of too much input (n=4), time in transit (n=1) and developing a problematic preference for one of the settings (n=1).

A few providers also cited disadvantages for staff of having children with special educational needs in combined placements. These included the problem of staff having to liaise across settings (n=8), extra work (n=2) and practical difficulties regarding equipment (n=2) and staffing levels. Occasionally, providers noted advantages for staff, for example learning about caring for diverse children to help with current and future children's needs (n=3).

Providers also occasionally volunteered disadvantages for parents, which were seen as financial (n=2), the time involved (n=2) and the mixed messages they might

receive from different settings (n=1). Advantages for parents were perceived to be that combining settings gave parents the option of more sessions, therefore permitting the parents more time to work (n=6), and the possibility of more support for parents (n=3).

Three providers also volunteered advantages for other children in inclusive settings of having children with special needs, such as learning about diversity and caring for the needs of others.

3.3.2 What were the general experiences and opinions of parents?

In the questionnaire responses, more of the parents made statements about positive experiences for their children (n=13) than negative (n=2) or mixed (n=4). There was, however, one report of the combination of settings being discontinued, made by a mother of a child with autistic spectrum disorder who felt the inclusive setting had been unable to cope with her child's needs.

The most frequently noted advantage for children given by parents, as for providers, was the opportunity to develop social skills offered by the inclusive environment combined with the special resources of the special setting (n=11): 'getting the special help and still mixing with normal children her age' (mother of child with autism). Parents also felt that by combining inclusive and special settings, they would be more able to gauge which environment suited their child, which would then make them better informed when making their choice of primary school (n=2). Also mentioned as advantages for children were: variety (n=1); more comprehensive assessment offered by two centres (n=1); the combination of a good general education in an inclusive setting plus specialist physical help and training in a special setting (n=1) and belonging to different communities (n=1).

With regard to benefits for parents, parents also mentioned the opportunity to develop diverse parent support networks in the local community via the inclusive setting and with parents of other children with special needs via the special setting. (On this topic, one parent-focussed voluntary group commented that they felt special schools could be a 'special place' for parents, where parents feel their child's needs are understood and where they can talk openly about their concerns.) Parents also reported the advantages for themselves of their children being able to attend more sessions by combining settings (n=6) and the parents receiving more support (n=3).

Partly because of the way the parent questionnaire was structured, parents were more explicit about what the individual components of the combined package had to offer. Most important for the inclusive settings was the opportunity they offered for mixing with local children, mentioned by over half the respondents (n=11), both because they were positive role models and because they were local peers. A focus on their child's special needs was perceived as a major advantage of the special settings (n=11) with mention of highly trained staff (n=6), specialist equipment and resources and favourable staffing ratio in small classes (n=5). Parents were concerned though, that by attending a special setting their children were not getting used to a 'normal' environment (n=4) and were not getting access to 'the best peer group' (n=3).

The disadvantage for children of combining settings cited most frequently by parents was the children becoming confused by attending different settings. The parents of one child had reduced her time in the inclusive setting as she appeared to be more settled in the special setting, but for most parents, their initial fears about this had been allayed:

Being autistic [child] needs routines - dislikes change, was warned he'd become distressed with two different places. (He was fine though.)

Parents also mentioned staff in inclusive settings being unable to support or understand their child's special needs (n=6), the large class sizes (n=5) and the comparatively poor ratio of staff to children (n=3).

3.3.3 What factors and process issues affected the success of combined placements?

Providers were keen to volunteer opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of combining placements for young children, but it was difficult to decipher from the questionnaire data the extent to which these opinions were informed by experience. On the whole, providers who did not have children in combined placements often had very firm, and often negative, views on whether this was good for children, whereas providers who did have children in combined special and inclusive placements mostly reported positive experiences. Providers with some experience noted a range of factors that affected the success of combined placements and these were related to either the setting or the child. The biggest category overall was the individual child (n=17): respondents regularly volunteered the key message that individual children vary. This seemed more important than either the age of the child (mentioned 6 times) or the nature of the child's disability (also 6 mentions). Parental data supported this in that clearly parents were making complex decisions based on their understanding of the qualities and needs of their individual child.

In terms of the settings, liaison between settings was most frequently cited as pertinent to success (n=12), with other factors including the number of placements (n=5), support by various agencies during induction (n=5), the experience or training of staff in the inclusive setting (n=4) and the nature of the setting itself - its ethos or curriculum (n=3). Relationships with staff, the number, balance or timing of sessions, staffing ratio, support for parents, physical proximity of settings, and the way they complement each other were all also mentioned by parent and provider respondents.

The thematic analysis revealed a cluster of process issues identified by the respondents. For providers, the issue of liaison between settings was important not just to the success of the combined placement but to the process of setting up the arrangement initially, with one of the settings sometimes being instrumental in this (n=8). Some parent and provider respondents (n=24) reported some communication between settings in the form of written communication, telephone calls, sharing of individual education plans and mutual visits. Far fewer respondents (n=3) mentioned no liaison between inclusive and special settings.

Parents and providers also indicated that some process issues complicated the arrangements for combined placements. For example, funding related issues (n=7), shortage of places (n=4), changes in local arrangements (n=2) or lack of transport. Parents were more likely to mention process issues in relation to problems - with one parent commenting on the lack of places and five mentioning that their children were in combined placements because of a lack of choice of what they really wanted. In response to a question about whether they had spoken to other parents in similar circumstances, one mother responded:

yes, some positive, some negative. General theme is that you have to fight for everything. The louder you shout the more likely you are to get what you want. Much confusion.

The process of getting a statement of educational needs for children was reported by several parents to have helped or hindered their child's progress. Some children had been refused a statement, and in these cases, the parents felt excluded from the process:

We applied [for a statement] but she was refused. We're appealing. We were disappointed about that. We got a clear-cut letter. Refused. That's the end of it. It wasn't very helpful or sympathetic. We've got leaflets about mediation and SPPS – a free parent support service.

Other parents reported more positive experiences of the statementing process:

The statement was easy really – to get - and to get the number of support hours – we've got twenty, which is more than I expected – we're pleased with that.

3.3.4 Themes

Qualitative analysis of the complete dataset led to the emergence of a set of common, inter-related themes.

The best of both worlds

The findings from all three LEAs studied indicate that combining special and inclusive early years placements is happening and for a variety of reasons. Most apparent perhaps is the perception amongst both parents and providers that it can be difficult for one setting to provide everything a child needs and therefore that by combining placements parents might be able to get the 'best of both worlds' for their child. This is a phrase that was used frequently by both providers and parents and suggests a pervasive discourse that the combination can offer more than any one placement on its own:

[child] would get the best of both worlds, get the advantages of both settings'

'... she would get the best of both worlds. Copying healthy children and mixing with them socially, but also getting the physio, and physical support and exercise she needed to improve her mobility

The best of both worlds. Help with his speech but getting the special aspect of mixing with other children.

It is a good mix in the early years between education and physical help/physio that [child] needs to enable him to manage his disability. He is making great progress.

Although many parent respondents were very happy with the combination of special and inclusive education, their initial aspirations for what each setting would offer their child had not always been met.

Seeking an ideal

Several parents mentioned that they had opted for a combination of settings as there had been no 'ideal solution' for their child's education. Some felt that the combination of settings had offered the best available support, whereas others felt strongly that an ideal solution would be for one setting to offer everything their child needed. For two sets of interviewed parents who planned for their child to attend mainstream primary school, an ideal solution would be an appropriately staffed and resourced inclusive setting. One mother of a child with cerebral palsy explained she had opted for a combination because their child was already settled in an inclusive setting, but this setting could not receive the special care they felt he needed. For another couple, the 'ideal-ness' of a setting depended most on the positive attitude of the staff towards the abilities of children with special needs, which they had ultimately found in an inclusive setting but not in a special setting:

Mother: The most important is to have staff that feel enthused enough to stretch themselves and him.

Father: The perfect setting is where there is a desire to learn and stretch the lad so he can develop. He had that at mainstream preschool and never at [the special school].

Insurance

For our respondents a recurring theme was that the special or the inclusive placement was in some way making up for the inadequacies in the other:

... he would have the advantages of specialist help and mainstream social interaction

... we were advised by the special preschool that it is best for the child to do both settings so he would have the model of mainstream children

... [we] would not have chosen the special playgroup if it was not for the speech therapy provision.

There was even sometimes a more explicit element of the combination offering a kind of insurance policy: '... didn't have much choice but felt if one didn't work out at least we still had the other to fall back on'.

Trial and error

Another emergent theme was a desire to try both kinds of placement just to see how they worked out. One parent told of testing out the inclusive preschool 'to see how he would cope' and to 'help decide which types of school he would benefit from most'. This view was expressed many times by parents:

... combining settings is about giving opportunities to be with both groups and to see how he manages and then making your decision from that and rethink it when you think he can't manage. Now we feel mainstream is right for him and I would fight body and soul for [our son] to be in mainstream primary, but things change.

With mainstream and special settings offering differing advantages and disadvantages, many parents struggled to choose between them. Combining placements in the early years in some ways delays the ultimate special or mainstream dilemma. The parents of one boy with cerebral palsy had initially been reluctant to combine early years settings, but had chosen this option because 'he had to go to both to get all the help he needed. We had to combine the places'. Having tried combining, they found the experiment worked well for their child, and then found choosing between special and mainstream primary unfair:

We are very pleased with this mixture since it gives the advantages of each setting and indeed are rather upset that we must in effect choose one or other type of setting for his primary education.

Belonging

There were hints across the dataset of an awareness of individual children having multiple identities and therefore needing to belong in multiple communities. One set of parents recognised the importance of their son 'mixing with peers, building relationships' in an inclusive setting, but also acknowledged that he had loved being in a special setting with 'peers with Downs with similar characteristics to him that he could form friendships with'. Another mother spoke of a particular friend who her son

sat next to on the bus to special school, and equally of her pleasure that 'a girl from the inclusive preschool has just started to come round to play'.

For children with older siblings, being near their siblings and following them into inclusive primary and then on to secondary education was also considered very important. One parent summed up how she perceived the benefits of a combined placement: 'being a member of the various communities he is growing into - the big wide world, our village, those with special needs.'

A sense of belonging and involvement in their child's education was also important for parents. Several parents mentioned how they valued feeling included in their child's care and education, particularly by the inclusive settings:

... the inclusive setting tends to share things ... whereas the special school just gets on with it ... the staff are more (pause) professional ... they've been brilliant, but they're (pause) more strict, a bit more bossy with me, but we have an excellent relationship, they're just more busy. They involve parents less, but I think I only notice this because at the inclusive setting, [my son] is the only child with special needs, and they get funding for a special needs helper, so they keep asking me things and involving me, to make sure we all liaise.

'Doing the right thing'

All the parents seemed to be guided by a desire to 'do the right thing' for their child, yet many had been anxious about their ability to know what 'the right thing' was. When asked about the greatest influence on their ultimate choice there were numerous mentions of the child's needs:

[child's] difficulties and her happiness

wanted what was best for [child]

[child] and just watching to see how she settled in

[child's] needs being met

For some parent respondents, being told that their child had special needs had been a shock, something they were still coming to terms with while they had to start making the 'right' choices. One parent emphasised the need for parents to have time to make decisions, as 'when you first get a diagnosis you have lots to think about'. Another parent echoed this:

For the first five months I was coming to terms with [my daughter's] diagnosis – I was going through a kind of bereavement. But by preschool I'd come to terms with it. I spent five months [at the opportunity group] with her, coming to terms with it.

Parents also reported they had felt unsure of what their options were, and therefore had doubted their own ability to make the right choices. For example, one parent had not been aware that statements of educational need could be made for children in the early years. For many parents, the process of choice-making had been riddled with doubt:

It's very confusing for parents – where to send their children – you get advice but there are so many options – it's so confusing – you so much want to do what's best. She could have started school – should she start early? Should I keep her back? And you don't really know how your child will develop – so you can't plan ahead – how will she be in 12 months time?

In the face of this uncertainty, several parents emphasised how they had had to make difficult choices, some of which had felt 'wrong' for parents at the time, but which had in retrospect turned out to be 'right': 'At the end of the process, [my wife] and I are not feeling guilty.'

Hard choices

Several parents referred to the process of choice-making as 'hard', saying they had had to learn to accept the inevitability of difficult decisions:

... I feel for [my daughter], with the level of her needs, ordinary school wouldn't be targeted at her. It's a hard one – it would be good for her to be part of the local community, but a lot would just go over her head.

Parents also reported having to learn to live with disappointment, particularly linked to their expectations of what special schools would be able to do for their child. For example, the mother of a child with speech delay reported:

I expected a lot from [the special school] ...that her speech and problems would improve. She has blossomed really. She's talking a lot more. They send us notes on what to work on. We're very pleased. We were hoping she would totally overcome her difficulties. When we made the initial visit, in July, we saw children chatting away and they said they were like [our daughter] a year ago. It was very encouraging but it's not happened for [our daughter].

Another parent summarised what many others had suggested:

So much depends on individual teachers and who's around. They are hard choices, but one thing that hasn't changed is the fact that hard choices are a constant. Things might change in the future, but there will still be hard choices.

Struggle

Many parents spoke of how they had 'struggled' at various stages of their young children's educational pathways, including battles to:

- get a full picture of the educational options for their children;
- obtain a statement for their child;
- get two settings for combined placement mentioned on the statement;
- be included in the decision-making for their child's statement and/or IEP;
- find a suitable early years setting for their child;
- feel involved with their child's education in some settings.

In these struggles, parents had sometimes felt powerless, particularly when confronted by bureaucratic processes. The mother of a child with cerebral palsy explained:

The preschool was complicated. He was referred to the special something or other forum and they referred him to ... a special needs nursery. We were concerned about him getting enough physio – he was only seeing a physio once a fortnight and [the special nursery] offered special motor development classes for physio so it looked ideal. But we were turned down. The board decide – it was strange – we had no direct communication from them. We heard via ... I don't remember now who told us, but we had no input. Maybe if I'd been more direct with them.

Feeling safe

In the face of so much uncertainty, self-doubt and hard choices, it is hardly surprising that many parents spoke of the need for reassurance, and the need to trust in the staff in early years settings. Feeling safe was a recurring theme and several parents spoke of how a special school had initially made them feel secure:

You see, special schools are nice for parents, you feel safe. Everyone understands you and are very sympathetic and they want your child, but in an ordinary setting everything is a fight and a battle and you have to persuade them they want your child.

However, with time these same parents began to question whether the 'safe' environment was offering their child appropriate challenges, so feeling safe sometimes has to be balanced out with other needs.

Others had different experiences. For one mother, the inclusive setting had seemed welcoming and warm, but staff in the special setting had been distant. This mother spoke of how she had been 'shocked and distressed' by her son's initial separation distress, and how she had needed more reassurance from staff. It was only with time, and with her child's noticeable progress, that she had begun to place her trust in this setting.

Some parents had felt reassured by both special and inclusive settings, but for different reasons. For example, one mother spoke of how the experience and reputation of the special setting gave her confidence and made her feel 'safe', but the relaxed, quiet and calm atmosphere of the inclusive setting had also made her feel her daughter was in safe hands.

4. Implications for policy and practice and for parents

This study of the phenomenon of parents combining special and mainstream/inclusive early years settings for children with special educational needs has generated evidence of interest to policy-makers, practitioners and parents themselves.

Of significance for policy-makers and practitioners is that choosing to combine is something that does go on, both with and without the encouragement of professionals. This is not just the practice of families with educational and social capital, though the data here are not sufficient to allow stronger claims about who do and do not make this choice. Choosing to combine is likely to be the culmination of a lot of data gathering and soul searching. It is likely to reflect an individual response to an individual set of circumstances though wider policies and personal and wider resources do have an influence. The combination of settings may not be the ideal for the child but instead what parents see as the best option in a constrained set of circumstances. Parents use information from a range of sources, but any decision is ultimately informed by what they see as best for the child. Restricting the option to combine may add to what is already a difficult process.

Crucial for the development of inclusive education is that parents who opt for a mixture of special and inclusive education see this as the 'best of both worlds' - the 'specialist' input and the 'inclusive' social interaction and community belonging. Inclusive education is, in itself, intended to offer these dual benefits but the data indicate that many parents may be unconvinced that one setting can meet all needs. Inclusive education providers need to build trust in their capacity to meet children's specialist as well as general learning needs and be alert to both the reality and perception regarding this capacity.

There is a wide recognition amongst professionals and parents that all children, including those with special educational needs, vary in their ability to cope with the different environments of different preschool settings. Settings also vary in their willingness to get involved in a complex package of early education, and their willingness and/or ability to work proactively to make it succeed. Professionals without experience of children combining special and mainstream may be more likely to express negative attitudes towards this. In the main, children in this study exceeded the expectation of adults with respect to their ability to cope with the different routines, expectations, relationships and so on that combining settings entailed. The data suggest that the outcomes for children of any combination depend on achieving a triadic balance between the strengths and skills that parents have, and the strength and skills that each of the special and inclusive settings can offer.

Parents should know that combining special and inclusive education for their young children is an option endorsed by central government, but that whether or not this is suggested or supported by professionals will vary enormously from setting to setting and LEA to LEA. The option may have to be struggled for. Talking with other parents may help parents to know what is available or possible and may help them in evaluating options. However, as early years centres become more multi-professional, child-centred and inclusive the felt need to go to different settings to get the best of both worlds should reduce.

5. Conclusion

The findings from this study show a complex range of practices even within a small sample of parents and across just three LEAs. Themes emerged from the data that future studies could explore more fully:

- parents seeking the best of both worlds, an ideal or some kind of insurance,
- wanting a sense of belonging and to feel safe,
- using trial and error and struggling with hard choices to do the right thing for their child.

Evidence emerged of considerable concern amongst parents and professionals about the potential of combined placements to confuse and/or tire children. However, the substantial reporting of positive experiences may indicate that the fear tends to be greater than the reality. There was also evidence of considerable optimism among parents and some professionals that combining placements may offer the best solution for children's varied needs in the early years.

The study had shortfalls in its scope and depth. Notably, evidence of the perspectives and experiences of parents who may have considered and rejected combining settings was not sought and this may have added to our understandings. More significantly though, the data only give a partial picture of children's responses as they negotiate the different settings in which they ultimately find themselves. The next step is to gather rich, observational data on how children make meaning and sense of their home, special and inclusive settings. It is this data that potentially has most to offer policy-makers and parents who have to make difficult decisions about what kind of early years education is best for children with varied needs.

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Appendices

1 Questionnaire to providers

We would like to ask a number of questions about your pre-school setting and the children who attend the setting. *Please circle the answers that apply or write in answers as appropriate.*

1	Please indicate the nature of your provision.	1 Child-minder 2 Crèche 3 Inclusive preschool playgroup 4 Inclusive nursery school 5 Inclusive nursery class 6 Inclusive reception in primary school 7 Special nursery 8 Class in special school 9 Portage service 10 Sure Start Programme 11 Opportunity group 12 Other <i>Please specify</i>
2	Approximately how many places are there in your pre-school setting?	Number of children registered to attend __ _ – Maximum number of children per session __ – Average number of children per session __ – Don't Know
3	Approximately how many children who attend your pre-school setting also attend another pre-school setting?	Number of children __ _ _ Don't Know
4a	Approximately how many children in your pre-school setting have a Statement of special educational needs or are in the process of being formally assessed?	Number of children with a Statement of special educational needs or in the process of assessment __ _ _ Don't Know

4b	Approximately how many of these children have learning difficulties (this may be in combination with other disabilities)?	Number of children _ _ _ Don't Know
5	Approximately how many children with special educational needs who attend your pre-school setting also attend another pre-school setting?	Number of children _ _ _ Don't Know

If there are children with special educational needs in your pre-school setting and who attend another setting as well, please answer questions 6-10. Otherwise please go directly to Question 11.

6	What other pre-school settings do these children with special educational needs attend? <i>Please describe</i>	Setting 1 Setting 2 Setting 3 Setting 4
7	Were you involved in arranging for the children with special educational needs to attend other settings?	1 Yes 2 No
	If yes, what was the nature of your involvement?	
8	Do you have any liaison with the staff of the other settings that the children with special educational needs attend?	1 Yes 2 No
	If yes, what is the nature of this liaison?	
9	What is the most common pattern of attendance? e.g. do children typically spend half the time in one setting and half the time in another? Or do they spend more time in one placement?	

10	Is this pattern likely to change over time?	<p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p> <p>3 Don't know</p>
	If yes, how is it likely to change?	
11	Please comment on your opinion of combined placements, the advantages and disadvantages, practical issues, how children cope with them and so on.	
12	Do you know parents who have spoken to you within the last year about combined placements? How did they get on? What kind of thing happened to them?	
	<p>Do you think they would be willing to speak about their experience to us? We would like to find parents who have chosen a combined placement to speak to them about their reasons for choosing such provision. This is an important part of the research. It would be very helpful to us to speak to parents so that we can find out about a range of experiences. We understand that you may not wish to involve parents in our research for various reasons, so please do not feel under pressure to provide names, but if you think you know parents who might be willing to speak to us, this would be very helpful.</p>	<p>1 Yes</p> <p>2 No</p>

2 Questionnaire to voluntary groups

We would like to ask a number of questions about your voluntary group. *Please circle answers that apply.*

1	What kind of voluntary group is yours? <i>Please circle all answers that apply.</i>	1 Disability focused 2 Parent focused 3 Inclusion focused 4 Education focused 5 National 6 Local 7 Other <i>Please specify</i>
2a	(Optional question) What is the name of your voluntary group?	Name:
2b	<i>If you have given the name of voluntary group above, please circle which option applies:</i>	1 I have given the name of my voluntary group, but wish the group to remain anonymous in the report 2 I have given the name of my voluntary group and am happy for it to be mentioned by name in the report in order to publicise the group
3	What is the nature of your voluntary group's involvement with early years provision? e.g. Does the group provide early years education and care? Does it give advice about early years education and care? Does it lobby on behalf of a specific group of people? <i>Please comment</i>	
4	What is your voluntary group's policy on supporting parents with decision-making? Does it provide information? Advice? A listening ear? Practical support? <i>Please comment</i>	

5	What is the voluntary group's policy on inclusive/special pre-school provision? e.g. Is the group pro-inclusion? In favour of the government policy to retain a continuum of provision? Pro-parental choice? <i>Please comment</i>
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We would now like to ask you some questions about combined placements.

6	Are you aware of parents choosing to combine inclusive and special preschool provision for their child?	Yes No
	If yes, please comment further e.g. on whether this occurs regularly, occasionally, rarely, when this is more likely to be opted for etc	
7	Do parents discuss the option of combined placements with you?	Yes No
	Please comment. For example, do parents seek advice or information? Are parents anxious about choosing this option or steered towards it by their LEA?	
8	What information do you give parents?	
9	What do you think about combined placements? Please say whether you are speaking as an individual or as a group representative, if this is relevant.	

10	Do you know parents who have spoken to you within the last year about combined placements? How did they get on? What kind of thing happened to them?	
	Do you think they would be willing to speak about their experience to us? We would like to find parents who have chosen a combined placement to speak to them about their reasons for choosing such provision. This is an important part of the research. It would be very helpful to us to speak to parents so that we can find out about a range of experiences. We understand that you may not wish to involve parents in our research for various reasons, so please do not feel under pressure to provide names, but if you think you know parents who might be willing to speak to us, this would be very helpful.	1 Yes 2 No

If you know parents who might be willing to complete a questionnaire or to be interviewed, please pass our contact details on to them and ask them to contact us. Our contact details are listed below. Alternatively, **with the parents' permission** let us know their details.

3. Questionnaire to parents

Please circle the answers that apply or write in answers as appropriate

1	First name of child in combined placement?	Date of birth: <i>Month</i> <i>Year</i> _____																								
	Gender of child in combined placement?	1 Male 2 Female																								
2	Summary portrait of child (qualities, strengths, special educational needs)																									
3	Please tell us about your child's brothers and sisters, their ages and type of school attended (e.g. primary, secondary, special, private)																									
		<table border="0"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th style="text-align: center;"><u>Level</u></th> <th style="text-align: center;"><u>Special or not</u></th> <th style="text-align: center;"><u>Private or not</u></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1 ____ Age ____ School Type _____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2 ____ Age ____ School Type _____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3 ____ Age ____ School Type _____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4 ____ Age ____ School Type _____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5 ____ Age ____ School Type _____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		<u>Level</u>	<u>Special or not</u>	<u>Private or not</u>	1 ____ Age ____ School Type _____	_____	_____	_____	2 ____ Age ____ School Type _____	_____	_____	_____	3 ____ Age ____ School Type _____	_____	_____	_____	4 ____ Age ____ School Type _____	_____	_____	_____	5 ____ Age ____ School Type _____	_____	_____	_____
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4 ____ Age ____ School Type _____	_____	_____	_____																							
5 ____ Age ____ School Type _____	_____	_____	_____																							
4	Are you currently involved with any voluntary groups connected with your child's special educational needs?	1 Yes 2 No																								
	If yes, which voluntary groups? <i>Please specify</i>																									
	If yes, in which capacity are you involved? (e.g. founder, member, volunteer)																									

We would now like to ask you a number of questions about the preschool placement of your child who is in the combined placement.

5	Which types of pre-school does your child currently attend? <i>Please circle all that apply.</i>	1 Child-minder 2 Crèche 3 Inclusive preschool playgroup 4 Inclusive nursery school 5 Inclusive nursery class 6 Inclusive reception in primary school 7 Special nursery 8 Class in special school 9 Portage service 10 Sure Start Programme 11 Opportunity group 12 Other <i>Please specify</i>	
6	Were these preschools specified on your child's statement?	1 Yes 2 No Please comment	
7	What is the pattern of her/his current attendance? How many days does s/he go to pre-school in the morning? How many hours does s/he attend each morning when s/he goes? If s/he goes to school in the afternoon, what is the pattern of afternoon attendance?	Morning (1st placement if relevant) Type _____ Days per week _____ Hours per day ____ Afternoon (1st placement if relevant) Type _____ Days per week ____ Hours per day ____ Other	Morning (2nd placement if relevant) Type _____ Days per week _____ Hours per day ____ Afternoon (2nd placement if relevant) Type _____ Days per week ____ Hours per day ____ Other

8	How long has your child been attending each of the pre-school placements s/he currently attends?	Morning (1st) Months.. __ __ Afternoon (1st) Months.. __ __	Morning (2nd) Months.. __ __ Afternoon (2nd) Months.. __ __
9	Your child is experiencing a “combined” or “split” placement. When you were considering where your child would attend pre-school, what were the choices available to you? <i>Please circle all that apply.</i>	1 Child-minder 2 Crèche 3 Inclusive preschool playgroup 4 Inclusive nursery school 5 Inclusive nursery class 6 Inclusive reception in primary school 7 Special nursery 8 Class in special school 9 Portage service 10 Sure Start Programme 11 Opportunity group 12 No real choice – placement specified by Local Education Authority 13 Other <i>Please specify</i>	
10a	Has your child attended other types of placements in the past?	1 Yes 2 No	
10b	If yes to 10a, which ones? <i>Please circle all that apply.</i>	1 Child-minder 2 Crèche 3 Inclusive preschool playgroup 4 Inclusive nursery school 5 Inclusive nursery class 6 Inclusive reception in primary school 7 Special nursery 8 Class in special school 9 Portage service 10 Sure Start Programme 11 Opportunity group 12 Other <i>Please specify</i>	

10c	If yes to 10a, please specify how long the placements lasted	
10d	If yes to 10a, please specify why you changed placements.	
11	<p>Did you consult others in making the choice of your child's current placement? <i>Please circle all the people that you consulted</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Your child 2 Family 3 Friends 4 Other parents 5 Pre-school provider <p>Medical staff:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6 Health visitor 7 GP 8 Specialist/Consultant 9 Other <i>Please specify</i> <p>Local education authority staff:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10 Educational psychologist 11 Parent partnership person 12 Other <i>Please specify</i> <p>Other:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13 Voluntary group 14 Other professionals (e.g. social worker) 15 School staff 16 Other <i>Please specify</i>
12	<p>What sources of information about local pre-school settings informed your choice of settings? <i>Please circle all that apply</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Websites 2 Ofsted reports 3 Written information 4 Statement of special educational needs/Individual Education Plan

		<p>5 Discussion with others</p> <p>6 Visits to settings</p> <p>7 Voluntary groups</p> <p>8 Other <i>Please specify</i></p>
13	What advantages, if any, did you consider for your child in attending an inclusive preschool setting?	
14	What disadvantages, if any, did you consider for your child in attending an inclusive preschool setting?	
15	What advantages, if any, did you consider for your child in attending a special preschool setting?	
16	What disadvantages, if any, did you consider for your child in attending a special preschool setting?	
17	What advantages, if any, did you consider for your child in attending a combination of special and inclusive preschool settings?	

18	What disadvantages, if any, did you consider for your child in attending a combination of special and inclusive preschool settings?
19	Of these advantages/disadvantages mentioned above which had the greatest influence on your final choice of setting?

Finally, we would like to ask you some information about yourself

20	Please could you tell us your highest educational qualification?	1 Higher degree 2 Degree 3 A levels or equivalent 4 GCSE or equivalent 5 Other <i>Please specify</i>
21	Could give us an indication of your age group?	1 Under 30 2 30-39 3 40- 49 4 Over 50
22	Which group best describes your ethnic origin. Please circle only one response.	1 Indian 2 Pakistani 3 Bangladeshi 4 Chinese 5 Asian - other Please specify 6 Black-Caribbean 7 Black-African 8 Black - other Please specify

		9 Mixed Race
		10 White-UK/Irish
		11 White European
		12 White - other Please specify
		13 Another group. Please describe
23	Are you?	1 Male 2 Female
24	Please circle each of the following that apply:	1 We own/are buying our own home 2 We are private tenants in rented accommodation 3 We are council tenants in rented accommodation 4 I am unemployed 5 I am self-employed 6 I am a homemaker 7 I am employed 8 I am in a professional occupation 9 My partner is a professional 10 My partner is self-employed 11 My partner is a homemaker 12 My partner is employed 13 My partner is in a professional occupation 14 Our gross annual income is below £20,000 15 Our gross annual income is between £20,000 and £40,000 16 Our gross annual income is between £40,000 and £60,000 17 Our gross annual income is above £60,000

4. Parent interview questions

1. Before NAME'S special educational needs were assessed where did you imagine s/he would go to school and preschool? (*prompt* – where did her/his siblings go?)
2. Can you describe the process in which your expectations about preschool were confirmed or changed? (*prompt* – can you say more about that)
3. Over what time scale did the decision to go for a combined/split placement emerge? (*prompt* – how did that feel?)
4. Who or what was most influential on your thinking about preschool for NAME?
5. We have a list of possible influences on choosing preschools – are there any among these that played a part that you haven't yet mentioned?
 - the reputation of the particular setting
 - recommendation from other parents
 - the experience of the staff there
 - the size of the classes
 - the suitability of the building
 - the general atmosphere and ethos
 - the behaviour of the other children
 - other things about the peer group such as role models
 - the child/adult ratio
 - the resources
 - the locality
 - cost of setting
 - availability of transport
 - cost of transport
 - encouragement from professionals(*prompt* – can you say more about that)
6. Has NAME got a statement of special educational needs?
7. YES > Does that statement specify the combined placement?
NO > Is the process happening or going to happen?
8. Has NAME got an individual education plan? What was your involvement with this?
9. What line have professionals taken in talking to you about where NAME would go to school and preschool? (*prompt* – were they open or did you feel they had an agenda?)
10. What did you expect of the combined placement?
11. And what has your experience of it been so far? (*prompt* - Are your expectations being met? How happy are you with the placement? What new issues have arisen?)
12. On balance how do you think NAME is managing the different environments?
(*prompt* – does s/he have friendships in either of the settings?-
how happy is s/he in each setting?
why do you think that is?
how happy is s/he to go between the 2 settings?)