INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

WITH REGARD TO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS IN SINGAPORE

by

ELIZABETH MARY BARRATT

Student Registration Number: 422095

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Dr. Penny Lacey

School of Education

The University of Birmingham

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ABSTRACT

The theme for this dissertation was chosen due to recognizing a deficient area of knowledge in my field of occupation. I understood how the mainstream system within International schools in Singapore worked and how children with special educational needs (SEN) fit within this, however, I lacked awareness of the mainstream system within local schools. As a result, I decided to conduct a study to allow me to gain insight in how the local school system within Singapore works and how children with special educational needs fit within this. I aimed to gain information on whether children with SEN are freely included within mainstream schools and, if so, what support they are provided with, or whether they are excluded from local schools and instead have to attend local special schools.

In order to gather information on this topic I wanted to obtain details from a reliable source ideally involved within the local system. The best person for this, I believed, was an Educational Psychologist working for the Ministry of Education who would be knowledgeable not only in the area of the local mainstream system but also in the field of SEN. I aimed to acquire information through the use of an interview in order to gain face-to-face contact, have flexibility in the discussion and obtain in depth information rather than short prescribed answers. Additionally, as part of my research, I wanted to gather details from both parents of children with SEN and from the children themselves as this, I believed, would provide me with a range of personal views and experiences of the local school system. I decided to do this through the use of a questionnaire, which I

hoped to be the least time consuming method in order to reduce the additional pressures and commitments for both parties.

I had many preconceived ideas about the local system prior to beginning this research and the more I investigated the more I was able to realize how many of these were incorrect. My research enabled me to gain in depth details on how the local mainstream school system works as well as answers to what support is provided, how the parents and children feel about their child's / own school placements and in what areas they experience difficulties or lack of support. The research also enabled me to gain information on the local special needs school system and the views parents have towards special education. I gained information on the public's attitude towards people with SEN and how this affects parent's views on schooling choices as well as opportunities within society for people with SEN. Furthermore, I obtained details on the future aims and objectives the Government and the Ministry of Education have planned for the local school system.

CHAPTER 1

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

In working with expatriate children with special educational needs (SEN) in an International School in Singapore I have obtained knowledge in the field of inclusion and exclusion policies within the international sector. Additionally, through setting up a private service, I have had the opportunity to work and liase with Singaporean families and school authorities. In the relatively new experience of working with local children I quickly became aware, however, that the local school system and its special needs policies and practices were areas which greatly interested me, yet something I knew little about. I was aware that Singapore had a number of special needs schools, yet noticed how many local parents of children with special needs chose to enrol their children into mainstream schools. Also, I realized that there seemed to be a vast number of children accepted within mainstream local schools. Why this was and whether placement of each child was agreed to, with former knowledge of their special needs, was an area in which I was not sure and felt I wanted to investigate. Furthermore, I wanted to find out how these students coped, if any were excluded and what special needs policies were in place.

In planning for this dissertation, I realized that the main research questions I wanted to explore were:

1. What are the inclusion and exclusion policies / procedures for children with SEN within mainstream local schools?

2. What support is offered to the child?

3. What are the parent's views on alternative placements?

4. What benefits and / or difficulties can arise from inclusion?

5. What benefits and / or difficulties can arise with alternative placements?

I decided, due to the vast extent of special needs diagnosis, to narrow my dissertation research to those children on the high functioning range of the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as this is the field in which I work. I gathered information, through the design and distribution of two questionnaires. One was provided for twenty-five parents of children with ASD and focused on whether they felt their child's inclusion was successful and what support was provided for their child. An example of this questionnaire can be found in Appendix One. The other questionnaire was provided for five children[1] with ASD and focused on obtaining their personal views on their school and school experiences. An example of this questionnaire can be found in Appendix Two. Furthermore, I gathered additional information through an interview with an Educational Psychologist (EP) from the Ministry of Education (MOE).

My data and conclusions are based on the information gathered from the above sources as well as from literature research.

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[1] These five children were unconnected with the parents that completed the other questionnaires.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF BACKGROUND LITERATURE

In researching the topic of inclusion of children with special educational needs within the Singapore school system, little could be found. Much of the literature gathered was from the Ministry of Education (MOE) website (2004) which, in addition to detailing information on school structuring, provided records of the minutes taken at every Government speech given on education and proved invaluable. Further information was obtained through a book written by the 'Movement for the Intellectually Disabled' (MINDS) entitled 'Many Dawns – A brief History of Services for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities in Singapore', published in 2002. Success also prevailed on discovering an article on Special Education in Singapore, by Levan Lim from the University of Queensland, Brisbane, written in 2000. Lim confirmed, in her study, the limited literature available on this subject other than a few papers written in the nineties. She did, however, acknowledge Quah, a writer who had also published articles on SEN and schooling in 1990. Despite Lim's paper being very informative and enlightening the reader on the available provision in 2000, much has changed since then and naturally even more drastically since Quah's article in 1990. Singapore has experienced a change in Minister of Education as well as a recent change in Prime Minister and provision for children with SEN appears to be an increasing priority for the MOE. For example, Lim (2000) describes sixteen special schools and centers in action when writing her paper. Now, there are twenty. Quah [(1990) cited in Lim (2000)] on the other hand, refers to only eleven schools. Additionally, Lim states twenty primary and secondary schools had

recently been equipped with facilities for students with disabilities. According to the MOE speech in 2003, however, this number has now increased to fifty-one. Consequently, this dissertation will bridge the gap between Lim's paper and the current situation. It will identify the additional advancements that Singapore has made in meeting the needs of children with SEN, the new services and support systems now in action and others in the process of being implemented.

Researching literature on the more general topic of 'inclusion', however, was plentiful. According to Booth (1999),

> "Inclusion in education is about increasing access to, participation within and reducing exclusion from, local centers of learning. It is about creating inclusive cultures, policies, curricula and approaches to teaching and learning."

Within schools, inclusion often takes a variety of forms including:

- Integration: children from special schools or units integrate into mainstream schools for certain lessons.

- Supported Inclusion: as above, however, a support teacher is supplied for the child while in the mainstream school.

- Full Inclusion: a full time mainstream placement without a support teacher.

Research suggests that integration of children with special needs can benefit all involved, including the child itself, its peers, teachers and parents. (Stainback, S., Stainback, W. & Jackson, 1992) Furthermore, it can cause benefits to children in all areas of learning including cognitive, academic, social and emotional development. (Barnard, Prior & Potter, 2000)

The passing of laws appears to impact the development of acceptance and inclusion of people with special educational needs within society. Certain Countries have already targeted this situation. In the United Kingdom the Green Paper, presented to Parliament in October 1997, stated the Country's aim to increase the level and quality of inclusion within mainstream schools and provide more specialised provision for children with special educational needs. (Department for Education and Skills, 1995 – 2002) Similarly, in the UK, the 'Disability Discrimination Act' (1995) declares the country will "improve the standard of education for children with SEN and make it unlawful for education providers to discriminate against disabled pupils, students and adult learners." (Department for work and pensions, 2002) In 1990, the United States passed two laws, the 'Individuals with Disabilities Act' stating the right for "all children with disabilities to be given a free and appropriate public education" and the 'Americans with Disabilities Act' stating "all individuals with disabilities to nondiscriminatory treatment within the community." (U.S. Department of Justice, 2002) Furthermore, in Australia, the passing of the Federal 'Disability Discrimination Act' 1992 (D.D.A.) aims to "provide[s] protection for everyone in Australia against discrimination based on disability." (Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Disability Rights, 2002) Implementing inclusion p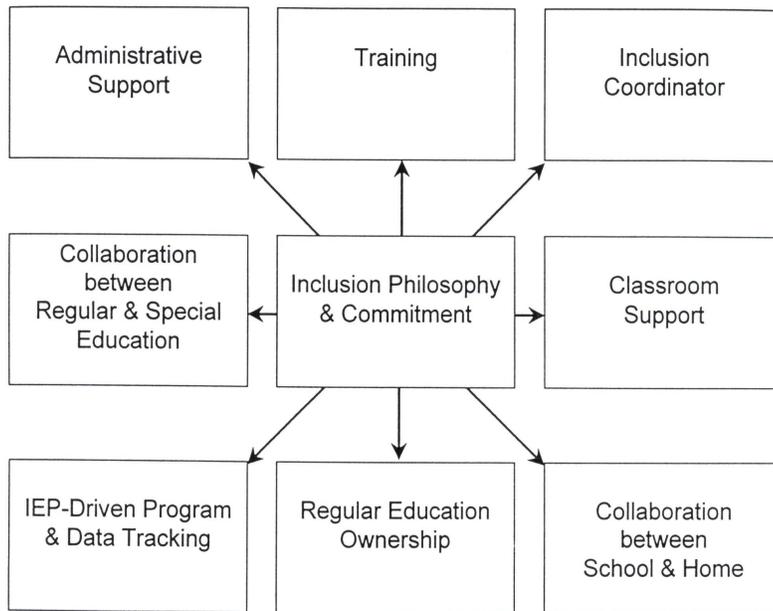olicies within schools worldwide could perhaps help mould future generations into more understanding, accepting and collaborative societies.

Wagner supports inclusive education, yet warns, "Placement in regular education alone does not ensure success." (1999, p.6) She explains how thorough planning is essential for inclusion to work. The 'Programme of Action' for 'Meeting Special Educational

Needs' within the United Kingdom highlights the government's promotion of regular

staff training in understanding inclusion and how it can work most effectively. (Booth,

1999) Wedell believes that meeting a child's needs can only occur if teaching staff: "saw

it as their obligation to increase their teaching repertoire accordingly." (2000, p.100)

Similarly, Harrison (1998) highlights the importance in understanding the needs,

strengths and weaknesses of each child included in mainstream education. Yet, it appears

that these views can only be made possible if staff have the knowledge and training.

Further suggestions on the success of inclusion involve the implementation of an 'inter-

professional collaboration' within schools. Graham & Wright state, "Collaboration, to

provide an environment in which inclusive education can occur, is dependent on factors

including therapy service, delivery models and school ethos, organization and

flexibility." (1999, p.40) Wagner (1999) similarly agrees that collaboration between

professionals is imperative and encourages regular meetings between staff to discuss the

included child and to support one another as well as meetings between staff and parents.

She also advises schools to use 'teacher aides', stating, "At least partial support of an aide

or teacher is usually necessary for optimal academic and social progress." (Wagner,

1999, p.10) Wagner has devised an 'Inclusion Model' which highlights these and

additional components necessary for successful inclusion, as can be seen in the following

diagram:

Inclusion Model

Administrative Support	Training	Inclusion Coordinator
Collaboration between Regular & Special Education	Inclusion Philosophy & Commitment	Classroom Support
IEP-Driven Program & Data Tracking	Regular Education Ownership	Collaboration between School & Home

(Wagner, 1999, p.13)

Cohen (2001) agrees with many of Wagner's suggestions and additionally suggests the

use of effective classroom organization, directed 'buddy' systems, social skill classes and

1-to-1 teaching sessions.   Both Cohen and Wagner have identified many idealistic goals,

yet how feasible these components are within mainstream schooling is a concern. The

issue of resources, manpower, finances and priorities need to be targeted first in order for

such inclusion models to be implemented. An important and feasible issue which both

Cohen and Wagner have highlighted, however, is the importance of having an

"administration that supports effective inclusion." (Cohen, 2001, p.13) This certainly

seems crucial as it reveals whether a school is committed to making the inclusion

successful or whether it is simply allowing inclusion to occur because it has to.

On the topic of inclusion of children with ASD into mainstream, Powell expresses the importance of firstly understanding how children with ASD learn. Powell states,

> "Autistic learning is of a disconnected kind and therefore pupils with autism need to be shown what connections are as well as what the specific connections are within the particular learning experience with which they are engaged."
> (2000, p.9)

Powell explains that the use of visual cues, such as pictures, photos, symbols and video footage can help the child with autism make these connections. Again, it appears that the provision of resources and appropriate training to obtain knowledge and therefore understanding would, however, be necessary in order to implement Powell's suggestions into the mainstream setting. Powell continues by describing,

> "There is a need to address the fundamental issue of how the thinking of these children can be made more effective, always accepting that teachers need to address this issue at the level at which children are able to operate."
> (2000, p.11)

Powell's beliefs therefore support the use of differentiation within schools and in using a variety of teaching strategies based on the individual needs of each child to ensure they are receiving the most effective means of learning. Jordan (2001) reinforces Powell's views and additionally suggests ways in which to adapt the learning environment through "flexible use of space; flexible timetables;… monitoring and 'trouble-shooting' of problems and accessible communication systems." (p.30)

Harrison (1998) discusses Haring & Breen's (1992) implementation of peer support networks at school to assist children with autism in mainstream classes. Harrison herself encourages teachers to educate the mainstream peers in ways of communicating, understanding and supporting those with autism and by setting up shared activities to

promote successful integration. Wagner (1999) suggests activities whereby 'teachers actively prompt and then reinforce the interactions between the student with autism and the peers'. (p.5) Mesibov [(1984) cited in Harrison (1998)] recommends using the 'idiosyncratic interests' of those children with autism to initiate conversations and interactions between students. These suggestions are again problematic, however, if teachers are not trained in appropriate skills. In a recent Special Needs Forum in the United Kingdom an issue was raised on the negative repercussions that can occur when a child with special needs is not given adequate support. Reports were given on students in this situation being ostracized and sometimes bullied and that in such cases a student could "be made to feel 'more disabled'." (Wedell, 2000, p.100)

Wagner (2002) highlights two common situations children with ASD often experience when in inclusive education, stating, they either "slip through the cracks socially, remaining isolated" or are returned to special school due to not meeting the academic or behavioural expectations of mainstream. (p.27) Wagner also believes that children with ASD placed in middle school experience greater demands with less support and are therefore more likely to struggle.

On the topic of social integration, Jordan describes how difficulties experienced by people with Autism are often caused by society rather than the Autism itself. She expresses, "the social situation and attitudes of others may be creating the difficulties we observe." (2001, p.29) Jordan encourages a change in outlook towards how people with disabilities are generally perceived and treated.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Researchers appear unanimous on which main issues should be addressed when beginning a research project. For example, Lewis & Munn (1997) state you must firstly consider what you are going to investigate, followed by why and lastly, how. Hite (2001) shares views akin to Lewis & Munn, believing "the first element of the research review process is identifying the purpose and problem(s) stated for the research… The purpose is the reason for conducting the research." (p.55) My objectives, for this research, were to gather detailed information on the current local education system in Singapore and to identify quantitative and qualitative views on inclusion within mainstream schools. My research was directed, firstly, at an Educational Psychologist from the Ministry of Education, secondly at the parents of children with ASD who attend mainstream schools and thirdly, the students themselves. Answers were obtained through the use of an interview for the former and questionnaires for the latter two respondents. The interview explored topics such as: 1) the structure of the local education system, 2) the policies, procedures and support for children with SEN, 3) the support and training provided for teachers, 4) future plans for the education system. Each questionnaire focused on the parents and childrens views on: 1) the success and appropriateness of the inclusion, 2) the predominant difficulties the children encountered, 3) the support provided, 4) the changes / additional areas of support each would like implemented within school.

Similar views to Lewis & Munn (1997) and Hite (2001) are also applicable when choosing a methodology. Knight (2002) suggests one should, firstly, decide why the methodology is the best way to gather appropriate information, secondly, choose what you aim to explore and why, and thirdly, outline how you will word and design the questions. In choosing which research methodology to use for my investigation I felt that a survey would be most suitable. As Hite (2001) affirms, other methodologies can produce similar results, yet I felt that neither the observational nor archival methods would be time efficient in obtaining the information I required.

When discussing questionnaires I refer to a paper-based set of questions to be self-administered by specified respondents rather than face-to-face encounters. According to Robinson & Reed questionnaires are "typically used to gather large amounts of data in extensive samples whose members are relatively inaccessible or expensive to reach for purposes of interview." (1998, p.86) Lee (2000) advises the incorporation of face-to-face inquiries with distance research methods and unobtrusive measures. The latter refers to methods such as non-participant observations, exploration of physical evidence and investigation of documented sources. Naturally, however, Lee's suggestion is not always viable unless one is working on a large research investigation with less time constraints. Questionnaires enable the researcher to survey and generalize and thus allowed me to gather quantitative information on whether student's needs are being met and qualitative information on the main difficulties experienced. Yet questionnaires can also be limiting compared to other methods. For example, interviews can often generate more in depth answers and can allow for greater personal opinions to be explored. The interview I held

enabled me to gain detailed information as well as feelings based on frustration,

contentment and hope. The answers I received were a mixture of confirmed suspicions

and surprises. According to Patton,

> "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly
> observe. The issue is not whether observational data are more desirable, valid or
> meaningful than self-report data. The fact is that we cannot observe everything."
> (2002, p.320)

Questionnaires, however, tend to encourage more highly structured answers through the

use of lists, rankings, quantities, categories and so forth. Elliott & Elliot (1998)

encourage the use of questions which involve yes / no choices or short answers. This

enables questionnaires to be user friendly and less time consuming. Both my

questionnaires and interview incorporated a mixture of 'open-ended' and 'closed-ended'

questions. The former refers to questions which allow the interviewee to answer without

any restriction of choice (i.e. yes / no options) and without any prejudice being inferred.

The difficulty with answers to open-ended questions, however, is that they are harder to

analyse by comparison or categorization. Closed-ended questions, however, refers to

answers based on a given choice(s) and directs the respondent to an answer they may

have not given without such fixed options. Knight supports this view stating, "Replies to

open-ended questions inform the researcher, but replies to closed or fixed-response

questions are just responses." (2002, p.511) Knight also expresses that open-ended

questions cause 'incomplete' answers.

Fink states, "All surveys, regardless of format, should only contain questions or items

that are pertinent to the survey's objectives." (1995, p.5) This advice is reinforced by

Bell (1999), Hite (2001) & Lee (2000). Additionally, Gorard (2001), Knight (2002) and

Coghlan & Brannick (2001) warn us that the use of 'fuzzy' or ambiguous words and sentences must be avoided and instead questions must be kept clear, precise and relevant. Similarly, as reported by Gorard (2001), Lee (2000) and Knight (2002), in order to prevent the respondents to be guided into giving a particular answer, the use of leading, presuming and hypothetical questions should not be used. I suspected that many of the parents, who the questionnaire was designed for, would hold full time jobs as well as having to deal with the strains of bringing up a child with ASD. In consequence, the least time consuming method was most applicable. Additionally, the parents would perhaps come from a range of backgrounds, some speaking little English and many having little previous knowledge of ASD. It was therefore important that I devised a well-structured questionnaire incorporating the above suggestions. This was also applicable for the student questionnaire.

Marshall similarly advises us to "probe gently for more information when necessary." (1997, p.41) Marshall's thoughts are very applicable to the interview I held, as much of the information I was investigating was of a sensitive nature, especially when it acknowledged the negative aspects of the local education system, which I was aware the MOE would be reluctant to discuss. Marshall also encourages the interviewer to be attentive and show interest without rushing the interviewee or finishing their questions for them. Knight (2002) similarly supports Marshall's views on listening attentively. He also suggests one should show empathy and, if applicable, sympathy to the interviewee. This I was able to implement on hearing the enormous pressures Educational

Psychologists (EP's) have when working for the MOE, as will be described in my findings.

According to Knight (2002), the order of questions is also an issue to consider, reporting that the placing of some questions in certain orders can have an effect on the answers by guiding the respondent in a particular way. Bell (1999), however, contradicts Knight by suggesting that questions should be ordered from easy to complex. Piloting the questionnaire is one suggested way of identifying any poorly ordered, unclear or ambiguous questions, again supported by Bell (1999), Gorard (2001), Knight (2002) and Glesne (1999). Knight and Glesne suggest that this will give opportunity for feed back on issues such as how user friendly the questionnaire was, how long it took each person to complete, whether they felt any important issues were missing that should be included and how you might begin to analyse the data. Bearing this in mind, I piloted my questionnaire by initially sending it to five parents of the students I currently teach, encouraging them to provide me with feedback based on Knight and Glesne's suggestions. The feedback received, however, was positive and this encouraged me to continue by distributing the remaining questionnaires.

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) express the importance of maintaining ethical behaviour when carrying out any action research. Official channels must be carried out, approvals must be sort and confidentiality, if promised, must be preserved at the expense, if necessary, of the gathered data. For part of my investigation I initially sort and obtained approval from the director of the 'Autism Resource Centre' (ARC) to hold discussions with the staff and to distribute the questionnaires through the center. This

was to enable me to have contact with the respondents I required. However, when the time arose it coincided with the ARC moving to new premises and setting up a new special needs school and therefore proved unsuitable timing. As a result I contacted a Speech Therapy Center, which kindly distributed the remaining questionnaires to the parents of students who attended mainstream school. To arrange an interview with an Educational Psychologist I contacted the MOE but was initially refused permission. After much persuasion, however, I was granted authorisation based on the understanding that the interview could not be recorded. The interviewee was restrained with her answers and at times requested that I did not quote her on certain answers given which, as Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) advise, I honoured.

Likewise, in the questionnaire, I reassured the parents and students that their answers would be anonymous, meaning that no names or referrals to the child's school would be made and that the answers would only be used for the purpose of my dissertation. I hoped this would encourage them to be honest with their answers without feeling deceitful to the school if reporting any negativity. Lee verifies the importance of anonymity in a report stating: "the more anonymous the method, that is, the less it involved face to face contact, the more likely respondents were to admit to socially undesirable behaviours." (2000, p.3) A concern with questionnaires, however, as warned by Hite (2001), is the reliability and accuracy of the answers. Hite's concern is relevant to the aforementioned issue where some respondents feel uneasy in acknowledging flaws in the local education system. Reliability is, therefore, a concern in Singapore when a high number of parents of children with SEN want their child placed in

mainstream settings rather than special schools. This issue will be discussed in greater

detail later in the dissertation, however, it does acknowledge the possibility that some

parents may provide inaccurate information due to being happy that their child is in

mainstream and wanting to believe that they are coping well. Additionally, children's

views cannot always be fully relied upon. I therefore had to bare both of these issues in

mind when analyzing the returned data.

Bell (1999) suggests that one advantage in distributing questionnaires is when the

researcher is able to gain personal contact with the respondents and physically hand them

out. Bell's suggestion seems likely, yet I predict is rarely viable. Lee warns, however,

that "characteristics of interviewers can under some circumstances affect the answers

respondents give to particular kinds of questions," which he believes is applicable with

all methodologies involving any form of contact with the clientele. (2000, p.3) In

following Lee's advice for the questionnaires, I decided that if contact were to happen,

discussion on the topic should be kept minimal to avoid any influential opinions.

Consequently, discussion prior to distributing the student questionnaire was avoided and

distribution of the parent questionnaire was accomplished without personal contact.

A significant problem with distributing questionnaires impersonally, as reinforced by

Knight (2002) is the low responses that will be received. Often many are ignored and it

is difficult to follow these up when completed ones are anonymous. This unfortunately

happened to my situation and, on distributing twenty-five parent questionnaires, only

eleven were returned. To avoid this situation reoccurring, I encouraged my students to

complete their questionnaires at my work place before going home. This enabled me to obtain five completed student questionnaires for my data collection and thus reinforces Bell's (1999) aforementioned beliefs.

Fink (1995) suggests the importance of conducting the research methodologies in the arranged environment applicable to the topic. For example, if the parents and children were to complete the questionnaire while on school premises they would be more focused than completing it while at home. I think that Fink's advice is valid, and the questionnaire is more likely to be forgotten when out of the contextual environment yet, again, this is rarely a viable option due to hectic lifestyles.

Having investigated the design and application of research methodologies I was able to incorporate many of the above views into both my questionnaires and interview.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

THE LOCAL MAINSTREAM SCHOOL SYSTEM

AND SEN PROVISION

In an interview with an Educational Psychologist[2] (EP) currently working for the

Ministry of Education (MOE), the following information was gathered on the local

school system and SEN practices in Singapore.

SEN POLICIES

At present, there is no Government legislation on special educational needs or equal

opportunities in Singapore and, according to the interviewee, there are no known plans

for such. This, she explained, was due to the fact that inclusion does not seem to be an

educational priority for the Government. Similarly, there is no formal written

special needs policy on education in Singapore, however, all mainstream schools are

expected to follow the same regulation, enforced by the MOE, stipulating that every

child must be freely accepted within mainstream school regardless of race, religion and

learning ability. Consequently, all children with SEN, no matter what diagnosis they

have, must be allowed to attend a mainstream school, even if their needs

could be more appropriately met in a special school.

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[2] The Educational Psychologist has requested to remain anonymous.

Evidently, some principals have occasionally refused entry to children because of their special needs. According to the interviewee, this has resulted in some parents withholding from informing schools of their child's diagnosis in order to guarantee a placement. The results of the parent questionnaire reveals that seven of the eleven students were diagnosed with an ASD before attending their current school, however, only five of the schools were made aware of this diagnosis prior to offering a placement. This confirms that two parents withheld this information and thus substantiates the interviewee's information. She expressed that parents should not hide their child's diagnosis as it causes the child to miss out or be delayed in extra support services. By all accounts, if a school does refuse entry, parents are able to contact the MOE to take action on the school. The interviewee claimed that the MOE are, at present, finalising a letter to be sent to every mainstream school principal reminding them that refusal of entry is not permitted.

SCHOOL STRUCTURE, EXPECTATIONS AND PRESSURES

The Singapore schooling system is highly academic. Streaming is involved from an early age and examinations take place at the end of every school term[3]. For details on the former please see Appendix Three, under 'School Streaming'. In order to meet the school demands most children, regardless of special needs, attend private tuition outside of school hours. The questionnaire results identify nine of the eleven children receive tuition in academic subjects. The most common subject being Mother Tongue, followed

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[3] There are three school terms per year in the Singapore school system.

by English. The amount of extra support ranged from a minimum of two hours for one child to ten and a half hours for another.

Schools compete against each other in having the highest examination pass rate and up until early 2004, the results of each individual school have been published in the national newspaper. This is in order for parents to see which are the top schools in academic achievement and which would therefore be the best to send their children. A consequence of school rating is that teachers experience a huge amount of pressure and stress in order to obtain high pass rates. In March 2004, schools were instead rated in 'bands' (groups), in order to alleviate some of this pressure. This change occurred due to continuous requests from schools. According to a number of newspaper reports, however, many parents are unhappy with the change.

Teachers in the local system work five and a half days a week[4], as well as attend school for meetings and administrative duties during some holiday time. The Government are currently in the process of cutting the half-day schooling on Saturdays by 2005. For further details on the school structure please explore Appendix Four, under 'School Sessions'.

Mainstream school classes tend to have approximately forty students to one teacher with no classroom assistant. Due to the pressure to complete the syllabus and achieve high pass rates teachers tend to distribute a large amount of homework to the children regardless of weekends or holidays. Seemingly, children unable to understand or follow

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[4] Saturday being a half-day and Sunday a day of rest.

the class subjects often get left behind as teachers rarely have time to go over material in more detail. 'Remedial Classes' are provided by teachers for those unable to meet the subject criteria, yet, often, learning is down to the student's ability and willingness. The MOE, however, has planned to reduce class sizes in 2005 from forty to thirty students in Primary One and Two (P1 and P2) in order to improve some of these problems.

EXAM ALLOWANCES

Mainstream schools apparently offer 'Special Exam Arrangements' (SEA), implemented by the MOE, in which schools with children unable to cope with 'normal' exam arrangements can apply.   In order to obtain this, the student's situation must be reviewed by a panel of professionals including MOE Educational Psychologists. According to the interviewee, however, the MOE are strict in offering SEA's. If successfully obtained, students are either allowed extra time to complete exams or allowed to complete the exam in a separate room from the rest of the class or both, depending on the student's needs. Schools can also apply for exemption of Mother Tongue where another panel, again with EP's present, will review the situation. Despite the Mother Tongue exemption, however, children still have to take another language but at a lower level.

According to the parent questionnaire results, only one of the eleven children has an SEA. This student's mother is apparently an ex-teacher at her son's school. It is possible, therefore, that she may have been more aware than other parents of SEA

opportunities and fought for such privileges. This suspicion is further supported by the

knowledge that five of the ten parents who claimed their child did not have any SEA

believed that such an option would benefit their child, if given the opportunity.

Furthermore, none of the five children involved in the student questionnaire claimed to

have an SEA, yet two felt they would be able to achieve higher results if allowed to

complete their exams in a separate room. Only one, however, stated they would like this

opportunity, perhaps this is due to the others feeling it would single them out as being

different from the rest of their class. Such arrangements are obviously practiced,

however, the question arises as to how many children are offered such privileges and how

many schools actually employ such a service?

SCHOOL SUPPORT ROLES

There are various support roles in operation within mainstream schools; these include

titles such as 'Disciplinary Teachers' (DM), 'Teacher Counselors' (TC) and 'Learning

Support Co-ordinators' (LSC). A brief synopsis of these can be found in Appendix Five,

under 'School Support Roles'. In addition to these roles, a 'Learning Support

Programme' (LSP) is now provided in every primary local school for children in P1 and

P2 who are weak in language and literacy[5]. Often these children come from families who

use Mother Tongue at home rather than English. According to the interviewee, children

with ASD and dyslexia regularly attend these classes. She believed, however, that the

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[5] The children are withdrawn from class and study in the 'LSP Resource room', with a maximum of ten
attending at one time. Classes are held daily for one hour during the class English lesson.

LSC is not always effective in helping children with ASD due to not being trained in the relevant skills.

Despite the available support roles and services mentioned, according to the parent questionnaire, only four students receive extra support in school. This is provided by the School Counselor, Form Teacher, Chinese Teacher and in a Remedial Class, respectively. This indicates that only a limited amount of extra support is provided for students with SEN, little of which appears to be specialized, apart from by the Counselor for one student. The results of the student questionnaire reveals that three out of the five students receive extra help in school, yet again in class subjects rather than in specialized areas. One of the two children that claimed not to have extra help expressed that such an opportunity would benefit him, if provided by the school. Furthermore, none of the students in either questionnaire were said to be attending or used to attend the LSP, despite eleven of the sixteen students[6] still being in primary school. This could possibly be due to the students having all ready been in P1 and P2 before the LSP was set up. Or, perhaps again it identifies a service implemented within schools that is not being provided to those with ASD, despite the interviewee's beliefs.

In investigating whether SEN children tend to have the support of a buddy system at school, the response from the student questionnaire identified three of the five children do have such support. Additionally, the parent questionnaire revealed six of the eleven

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[6] This number indicates the five children from the student questionnaire plus the eleven students from the parent questionnaire.

students to also have buddies[7]. Out of these six, only four parents claimed, however, that

their child benefits from this service. Another parent claimed that it both helps and

hinders, by stating, "Yes, [it helps] when he needs the help but no, when the help is

imposed on him." Another parent remarked, "What is lacking is to help ['X'] find a

suitable buddy to help him mix and socialize with the right group of friends." This

identifies that such a system may well be in action for some students however, how much

teacher involvement is provided to ensure the support is useful for the child with ASD is

questionable. Without teacher input and direction, the buddy system can be detrimental,

mainstream children can abuse the role and thus provide inappropriate support or too

much support to hinder the child's independence and learning. Again, it is another

proactive service provided by schools, yet its effectiveness will be challenged without

appropriate adult guidance.

ACTION TAKEN WHEN CHILDREN ARE UNABLE TO COPE ACADEMICALLY

IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOL

According to the MOE (2002), teachers are the "front-line managers who have primary

responsibility in meeting the needs of their pupils." It is their responsibility to identify

learning difficulties and to complete a Psychological and Guidance Services Branch

(PGSB) Teacher Referral Form[8]. When a referral is made, the parents have to complete a

consent form which highlights all the procedures the MOE may take when working with

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[7] One child was reported to have previously had a 'buddy' in school yet no longer requires one.
[8] The MOE supplies Teacher Referral Forms to every local school and trains all teachers in how to complete them accurately.

their child and his / her school. If parents do not sign the consent form the MOE cannot make an assessment or take any further action. Once the consent form is signed, however, the MOE will firstly, prioritise the case and then formally assess[9] the child. According to the interviewee, prioritising is essential due to the heavy case-load and lack of Educational Psychologists. She continued to explain that EP's are recent additions and previously only Guidance Counselors dealt with referrals. Now, one EP is assigned to each local school.

Following the assessment, a list of interventions[10] are provided by the EP for the teacher to implement. According to the interviewee, however, this list cannot be compared with an IEP due to the lack of resources and time. Similarly, reviews of each case are rarely possible for the same reason. As a result, it is apparently very hard to follow up on the child's / teacher's improvements or further difficulties. "When face-to-face feedback is able to happen it is always very rewarding but unfortunately it is a rare opportunity," claimed the EP.

Surprisingly, no mention is made, in the either questionnaire results, of any child being referred to the PGSB or in having an assessment provided by an EP. Such support services are obviously in action yet it does cause for speculation when none of the children involved in the questionnaires appear to experience these services. The interviewee previously commented on the limited number of EP's working for the PGSB

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[9] Assessments take place in school and are usually based on specific tests such as 'WISC' from the Wechsler series of Intelligence Scales for Children or 'WORLD' which is a local version of assessment, based on reading, spelling, comprehension and language skills.

[10] Interventions include the implementation of buddy systems, environmental changes and use of visual cues for children with ASD.

and the heavy workload each have. Could this consequently be the cause for children slipping through the system without being referred? Additionally, are children with ASD, especially those on the high functioning range, more likely to escape assessment due to being low priority compared to children with other SEN's?   Furthermore, is this perhaps due to an increase of children with SEN in Singapore?

When asked if the interviewee felt there are more children being diagnosed recently, she replied: "Yes, definitely. There appears to be a huge increase in children with dyslexia and ASD but not so much of children with ADHD." She believes this is because more teachers have become able to recognize difficulties and now have the opportunity to refer them for an assessment rather than because there are more children with SEN.

EP'S: A HELP OR HINDRANCE?

When asked how teachers react to the EP's, the interviewee explained that many think of them as a threat. Firstly, because they have the ability to report back to the principal and MOE those teachers that are not working to a satisfactory level, and secondly because: "Educational Psychologist spells work to many teachers." Evidently, some teachers avoid referring children or are reluctant to do so due to the extra time and work involved in implementing interventions. This confirms the suspicion that some children with SEN are not being referred and again identifies another possible reason why none of the students involved in the questionnaire appear to have been involved in the PGS services.

The interviewee mentioned, however, that in other situations some teachers of children with ASD are under such stress that they welcome EP's with great relief, in hope that they will improve the situation.

In response to being asked if teachers implement the interventions suggested, the interviewee described how this was a concern due to not having enough resources or time to be able to have reviews to check this. "It is a problem we need to tackle but it is not currently possible with such a limited numbers of EP's," she claimed. Apparently, the EP's have, on occasions, revisited schools and found teachers not implementing the interventions suggested or doing so very reluctantly. When this occurs the teachers are given warnings and are then reported to the principal and the MOE.

THE CHILDREN

DO SEN CHILDREN COPE IN MEETING SCHOOL DEMANDS?

According to the interviewee, from her experience, the majority of students do cope with the school demands, especially those with dyslexia or mild learning difficulties, however those with ASD or severe learning difficulties generally find it very hard. She believed that this is often because it is not so easy for the teacher to apply what they have been taught with regard to teaching children with SEN, especially when it involves following the curriculum. The parent questionnaire results confirm these views, revealing that eight of the eleven students experience varying degrees of difficulty in meeting the school demands[11]. Figure one depicts those children who struggle to meet the school demands.

Figure One:

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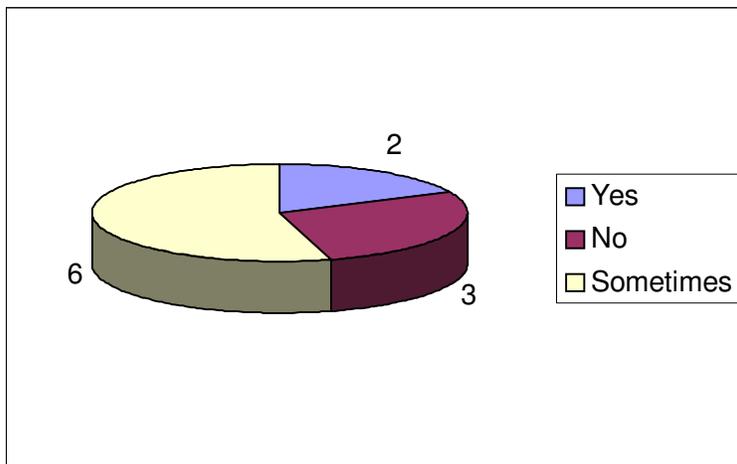
[11] Incidentally, one child was reported not to struggle due to still being in Primary school, yet, the parents feared this would change when in secondary school.

According to the student questionnaire, three children found their most recent school exams 'okay' and the other two found them hard. Figure two, however, illustrates the parent questionnaire results relating to how they felt their child performed in their most recent exams.

Figure Two:
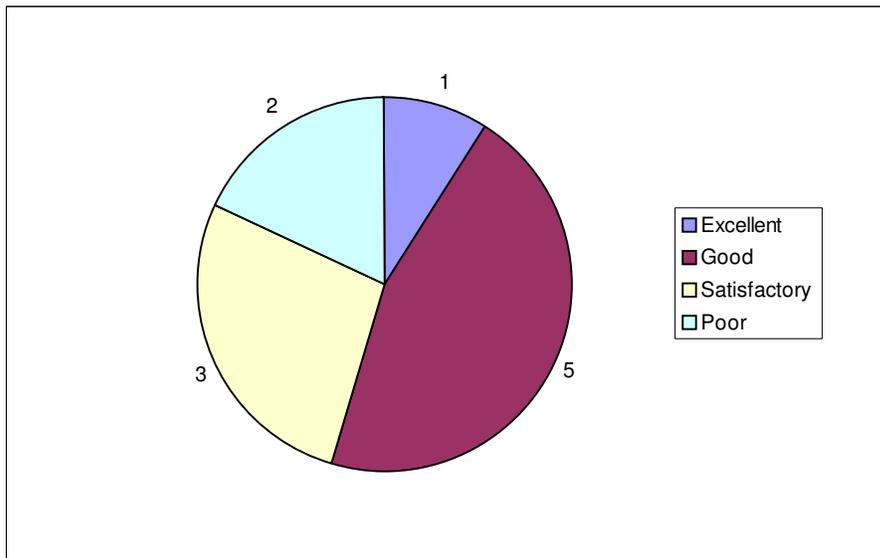
Issues to consider regarding these results, however, are that they are based on the personal views of the parents and students, which can be biased. Additionally, children in lower primary classes may find the current exams easy yet could struggle when in higher grades. The results, although undependable, do identify that some of the children are able to cope academically with the mainstream school demands. Figure three, however, represents the areas of difficulty the children with ASD experience at school, according to the parental questionnaire results.

Figure Three:
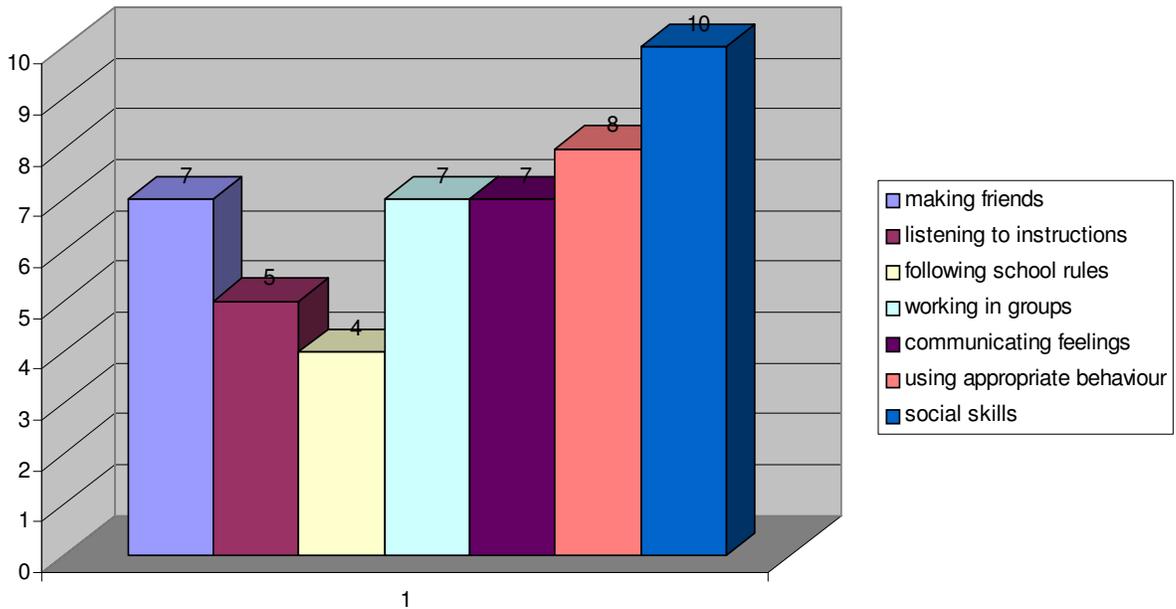
This demonstrates that many of the students experience a number of similar difficulties, the most common being in social skills. Of the seven skills listed, three children were recorded to have difficulties in every area and seven children were recorded to have difficulties in over half. These findings reveal that some children appear to struggle in a number of areas in both an academic and social level. Additionally, it reinforces the situation where some students appear to be coping academically yet in other skills they show vulnerability. According to the questionnaire results, seven schools have contacted the parents regarding concerns for their child's above difficulties exhibited at school.

When asked what action tends to take place if a child is able to cope academically but unable to cope socially / emotionally in a mainstream school the interviewee acknowledged that this was a big problem, especially for those children with Aspergers Syndrome. "Often," she explained, "teachers will perceive the child as being shy or odd rather then having a specific problem and so they will not think it necessary to refer them." This identifies yet another possibility why none of the students involved in the questionnaire appear to have been involved in the PGS services. Furthermore, apparently if a teacher is able to identify that the child has specific problems and makes a referral, these cases are not high priority compared to those with learning difficulties and so their needs are not always met, which reinforces a concern previously mentioned. As a result, no specific action tends to take place at present. This is a cause for concern as ignoring the problem can often result in the child being bullied and gaining low self-esteem.

According to figure three, the results reveal that ten of the eleven students struggle socially at school. In discussing ways in which this matter could be improved the interviewee suggested the use of Shadow Assistants (SA's)[12]. She explained, however, that SA's were strongly promoted by the EP's but that many principals do not allow it. Apparently, a further problem is employing willing SA's. According to the interviewee, a future plan by the MOE in dealing with this situation is to have a pool of SA's. Parents could then have the opportunity to pay for full or part time SA's to help implement their child's interventions, set by the EP, while in school. This could consequently help deal

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[12] Otherwise known as Teacher Aids (TA's).

with the academically and socially weak, as well as help alleviate some of the teacher's pressures. Whether this plan will eventuate, however, is questionable, based on the fact that principals are reluctant and SA's are so difficult to find. Additionally, if found, training of the SA's is an issue, especially when EP's are already so overworked. On a positive note, however, the opening of the Pathlight School in 2004 has provided the opportunity for children with IQ's above 75 who have ASD to experience mainstream education in small groups with teachers trained in ASD. This is the first school in Singapore to target children of this nature. Pathlight aims to target the social issues these children experience.

Additional ways to help children with poor social skills to cope better in school could be to provide:

- more support in school from both teachers and peers,

- extra lessons in social skills,

- more adult-directed buddy systems,

- more education in SEN for mainstream students,

- more directed group activities and Co-Curricular Activities (CCA's)[13].

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[13] This could encourage teamwork and provide opportunities for a social life at school with greater possibilities for making friends and improving social skills.

CHILD SUPPORT / LACK OF

Figure four represents the most common issues to upset the children with ASD at school, as recorded in the questionnaires.

Figure Four:
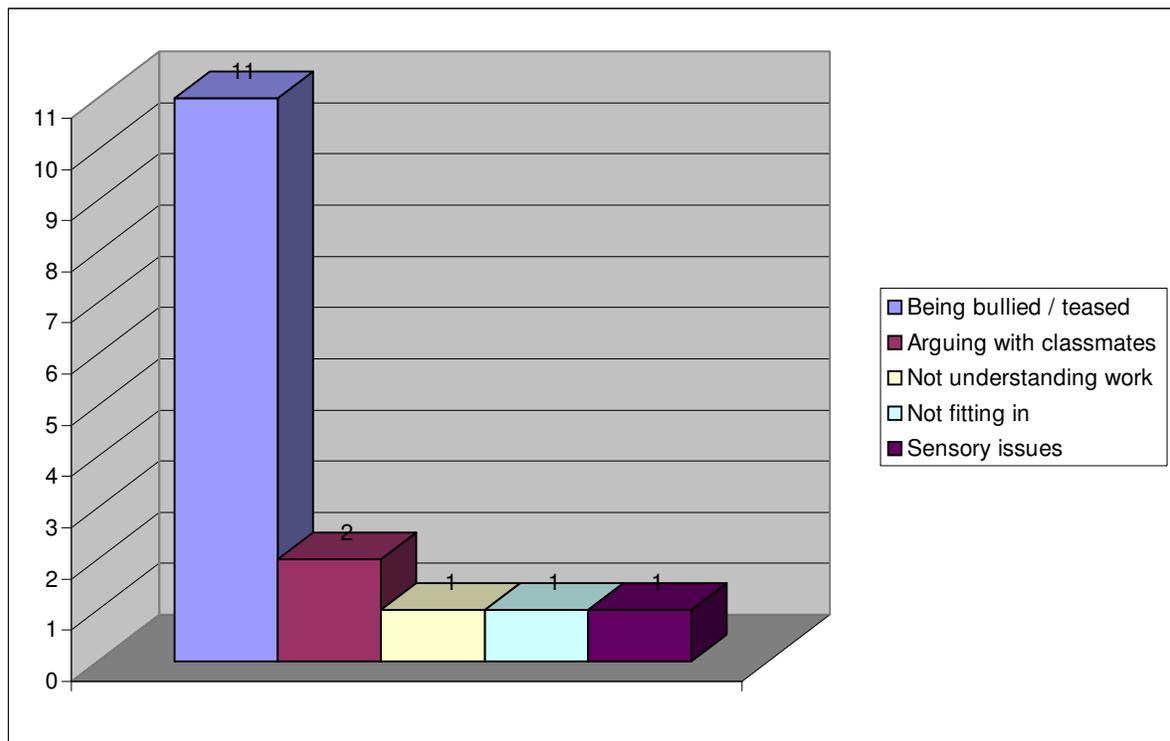
Worryingly, being bullied / teased is highlighted as a cause for all eleven children, two of which were reported to be by physical means. Additionally, all five of the children involved in the student questionnaire refer to being bullied at school. This gives the impression that bullying is prevalent in mainstream schools towards those children with SEN.   In fact, bullying seems to commonly occur for many children, mainstream and SEN, as is evident in a recent survey by the Singapore Children's Society which

identified 92% of secondary school students to have experienced bullying in school. (Swee, 2004) Consequently, this initiates the question, are schools / teachers doing enough to prevent this situation and are students provided with enough support? Evidently, some of the bullying experienced by the children with ASD occurs because of their unusual personalities and behaviours. Also, the mainstream peers seem quick to realize that these children are easy targets to take advantage of as many are unable to stand up for themselves. Many of the above suggestions given to help children with poor social skills could also be implemented to improve bullying situations at school.

Bullying could originate from a lack of awareness the Singaporean society has towards people with SEN[14], as well as from certain mainstream teachers showing unwillingness in teaching children with SEN. Naturally, if children hear negative comments about people with SEN from their family members they will be heavily influenced by such beliefs. Similarly, if students observe unsupportive attitudes towards the children with SEN by the teachers this could again encourage them to show negative behaviour towards them.

According to the questionnaire, ten parents stated the teacher knew about their child's diagnosis, six of which were described as being understanding and supportive of their needs and difficulties. Three were reported to 'sometimes be / tried to be' and another was said not to be understanding or supportive.   Results from the student questionnaire depict that two of the students felt their teacher was understanding when they have a problem and the other three teachers were 'sometimes / a little'.

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[14] This issue will be discussed in more detail later in the dissertation.

Despite such a high number of children struggling to meet the school demands as well as experiencing bullying and the other issues identified in figure four, eight of the eleven parents claimed that their children appeared to enjoy school. To support this, four of the five students that completed their own questionnaire stated they also enjoyed school. When asked what they liked about school the majority of students listed their friends and some teachers. When asked what they didn't like, all stated 'bullies'. One student described, "Bullies who have little remorse, even when they know I've ASD" and "teachers who don't give a hoot about me, especially when I'm in need." This signifies that some teachers and students do appear willing to befriend and help the children with ASD, but there also seems to be others who cause problems for these children.

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Only one of the five children involved in the student questionnaire claimed they would like to change school. The reason given was, "I do not really like the working environment, the number of projects and the high standard of mother tongue which I doubt I can make it to with the problems I am facing now." Whether changing school would solve this child's problems, however, is debatable, as all mainstream local schools seem to have the same pressures.

BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS

Six of the eleven children reportedly have difficulties in using appropriate behaviour in school, as can be seen in Figure three. In discussing behaviour difficulties and behaviour

modification programmes, the interviewee claimed that there is no systematic approach used in mainstream school for dealing with challenging behaviour relating to SEN. She described how teachers, due to lack of training, often perceive challenging behaviour as a discipline problem rather than a specific SEN issue. As a result, the child is generally sent to the Disciplinary Master (DM) who will generally use a punitive approach. If the problem continues to persist, the DM may refer the child but these referrals are generally sent to a Guidance Specialist from the PGS who will use a counseling approach to deal with behavioural issues. If the problem continues without improvement, the Guidance Specialists generally refer the child to the Family Service Centre for further counseling or to hospital for tests. If, however, the child's behaviour is suspected to be due to a SEN issue they may be referred back to see an EP at the PGS. As a result, the children can often come full circle due to lack of awareness in identifying the cause of the challenging behaviour which can naturally cause detrimental effects for the child as well as prolong the situation.

When asked if the EP's encourage teachers to use behaviour programmes[15], the interviewee confirmed that the MOE were very in favour of these, yet often experience difficulties with teachers being against reward systems. This is apparently due to a range of reasons including, not wanting to give preferential treatment towards those children with SEN and also because many teachers find it difficult to implement programmes with the ongoing syllabus pressures. The EP's deal with these situations by sometimes encouraging the teacher to discuss with the rest of the class the reasons why the child with SEN is receiving these rewards, in order to help them understand and accept the

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[15] Such as reward systems and visual cues.

situation. Most of the time, however, she stated, "we often have to tame down the behaviour programme to meet the needs and abilities of the teacher." This, she described, can generally be achieved by asking the teacher what system they are already following and, if possible, using and building on it.

In response to discussing the benefits and repercussions involved in informing class students of the child's SEN, the interviewee described how sometimes it can help the other children become more understanding of the child once they realize they have a specific problem. The difficulty, however, is that it identifies the child as being different. She described that if the latter is a concern, it is then necessary to make the behaviour programme more private or flexible. "It is important to be flexible and adapt our programmes to meet the needs of both the children and the teachers," she stated. According to the questionnaire results, students in five of the classes possessing children with ASD were said to be aware of their peer's diagnosis. Only one of these five, however, was recorded as being understanding and supportive towards the child. Three parents claimed that some of the students were occasionally understanding and another felt that none of them were. These findings, consequently, do not indicate that informing the other students of their peer's diagnosis has benefited their situations.

EXPULSION

In seeking information on the policy and procedures for expulsion, the interviewee was unable to provide answers but suggested that the 'School's Division' would be able to assist. On contacting the MOE School's Division, Mr. Tan from the Compulsory Education Unit, explained that since the 'Compulsory Education Law' was implemented in January 2003, schools are now trying their best to deal with problem children through various disciplinary methods and are refraining from expulsion of children. He maintained that, if the child is thought to have special needs they will be referred to the PGS. The information provided by the interviewee has all ready highlighted problems in this area, however. Mr. Tan continued by saying, if the child does not have special needs and the school is unable to deal with the problem child, the Principal and School's Division will work together to form a plan. This, he explained, may involve transference to another school. Mr. Tan stated, however, that this situation has not occurred since the passing of the Compulsory Education Law and schools generally prefer to keep these problems 'in house'.

According to the questionnaire results, only one of the students has changed school due to being unable to cope with the standard. Two of the eleven children, however, have reportedly been excluded from school, although apparently both occurred at kindergarten schools. Evidently, however, this appears to be common practice in pre-schools. An article written by a parent described, "Most childcare centers refused to accept him

because they couldn't spare an extra teacher to give him special attention." (Niazi, 2004. p.157)

INCLUSION

In response to discussing whether the interviewee felt that the needs of children with SEN are generally being met within the mainstream sector, she stated,

"Our mainstream schooling system is very inclusive in that we do not exclude anyone. However, it is a very crude policy in the way that children with SEN are included yet their difficulties are not supported. We do not have a clear inclusion policy in dealing with SEN difficulties. There is a lot of potential to be undertaken."

IMPROVING THE SITUATION

Clark et al (1999) [cited in Ainscow (2000)] claim the importance of needing to "transform the mainstream in ways that will increase its capacity for responding to all learners." (p.76) In discussing the interviewee's thoughts on this statement she believed that in order to do this effectively the number one priority is to train teachers to understand the condition of ASD and increase awareness of SEN. "We also need to stop detrimental behaviour used by teachers due to their lack of awareness," she said. Additionally, she commented on the importance of working to increase the capability for

schools to accept and support all children. She described how some schools have

recently had younger principals join them, who tend to be more willing and enthusiastic

towards change. Another positive outcome she mentioned was the recent integration of a

mainstream school with a special needs school, in which very encouraging feedback was

been reported. This, apparently, was a private arrangement between the principals of the

two schools initiated by the special school. The interviewee claimed that the MOE are

very wary of turning such practice into a policy, however.   Teacher training, she

believed, is a viable option, yet teacher aids, extra funding and support are things the

MOE want yet are not so viable.

THE TEACHERS

STAFF TRAINING

The course to train as a special needs teacher is the same length as a mainstream teaching qualification but with SEN modules. Special needs teachers, however, get paid significantly less than mainstream teachers, which has resulted in numbers being few. As a result, due to the great need for people to work as teachers in special schools, qualifications are not deemed necessary. Instead 'on the job training' is available, which, according to the interviewee, causes an either 'sink or swim' effect. When questioned on this, the interviewee claimed that payment for special education teachers was currently under review, yet was unable to disclose further details.

At present, teachers in mainstream schools have to obtain a teaching qualification but primary teachers do require a degree and many do not. Professional Development Leave (PDL) is available for mainstream teachers in which teachers can apply to take time off from school to obtain further qualifications and are guaranteed their job back when they return. This is unpaid leave, however, and the courses have to be paid for by the teacher. The MOE does offer generous scholarships for certain teachers wanting to take PDL, if agreed to by a selection panel. The interviewee, described, however, that often it is necessary to have many years of teaching experience behind you before you are allowed to go on PDL.

When questioned on staff training in SEN, the interviewee agreed that teachers would benefit greatly from receiving more training. She described the optional module in SEN which trainee teachers can choose during their teacher qualification course, yet concurred that very few students choose this option as they do not feel there are children with SEN in mainstream schools. This, she emphasised, is very wrongly thought. Teachers are therefore unaware of how to deal with SEN. The EP stated that the MOE are currently in debate over the possibility of making this SEN module compulsory, in order to improve this situation.

According to the interviewee, teachers have one hundred hours of training time allowed per year, which can be taken during school time, while a supply teacher covers their class. Teachers are allowed to choose any courses or seminars they feel would benefit them as a teacher. Their choice, however, must be approved by the School Supervisor and, if cleared, is paid for by the school. Despite this, however, it is uncommon for teachers to choose training in SEN. Another difficulty is that SEN training in Singapore can often be expensive and consequently may not be approved.

In order to improve situations in SEN, the EP's at the MOE have started providing complimentary two-day workshops in learning difficulties, dyslexia and ASD, once a year at every primary local school. Additionally, a complimentary three-hour workshop on dyslexia, run by the MOE, takes place yearly in every primary school. Furthermore, in 2001 a publication on Learning Difficulties was written by the MOE and distributed to every primary and secondary school teacher to improve their awareness.

When asked if schools are allowed to bring in external professionals for specialised training and advice the interviewee declared that all schools are given block funding by the MOE in which they can spend on anything they feel is important. It is therefore possible for them to bring in external professionals for specialised training if they so wish, subject to approval, but it rarely happens, she stated, and they will generally choose to spend their money on other areas.

DIFFERENTIATION

In discussing the use of differentiation in mainstream school the interviewee described how differentiation is something teachers are taught during their teacher training course and encouraged by the visiting EP's, yet it is rarely implemented and is a great source of frustration. "They are trained in it but it is not seen," she complained. When asked, if the interviewee felt this was due to the large class sizes and pressures on the teacher, she agreed yet added that the reduced class sizes for P1 and P2 in 2005 may make a difference but teachers would still need to implement differentiation for it to have a positive effect. "It is something that needs to be employed now," she stated, "reduction may not help unless differentiation is implemented."

COLLABORATION

When asked if collaboration occurs between teaching staff, the interviewee admitted that unfortunately it rarely occurs. She stated that, when a meeting is arranged, the EP's try to insist that all teachers attend but they regularly complain and do not understand why it is necessary. She claimed that often they will arrive late and will lack positivity. Yet, the meetings, she felt, nearly always end successfully when teachers share their views and experiences. "We, as EP's try to devise a network where teachers support one another, increase consistency and collaborate regularly," she commented. Accordingly, these meetings, despite being very positive on the outcome, rarely occur and without them collaboration is not apparent. "Teachers are so busy they do not see it as a priority," she mused. In collaboration appearing to be rare, it highlights the situation that consistency in teaching strategies and behaviour management must also be absent.

TEACHER SUPPORT

In discussing support for teachers, the interviewee stated that inadequate support is provided for teachers, especially for those dealing with children with SEN in their classes. She reinforced this by commenting on the high number of resignations from teachers and the regular referrals for teachers with stress related problems to the 'Institute of General Health'. Junior teachers, she remarked, are assigned a mentor for the first two years of teaching but from then on there is nothing. Evidently, the MOE provides a

counselling service for teachers called the 'ICARE Lodge' but referrals for this are extremely low. "It is also a cultural issue because Singaporeans tend to avoid seeing counsellors or sharing problems with strangers," she professed. This is supported by Dr. Chua Hong Choon, the chief of the Institute of Mental Health, who states: "There is still a great amount of stigma associated with mental health disorders and people are therefore reluctant to come forward because of that." [Cited in Lim, C. (2004)] The interviewee agreed that teachers experience greater pressure and stress when a child with SEN is in their class.

IMPROVING THE SITUATION

The interviewee suggested that such pressure could be reduced by increasing the support in school through the use of Reporting Officers and Supervisors. She also agreed that staff training, (with the possibility of gaining qualifications), extra resources and funding, extra incentive points, smaller class numbers, greater staff support and counselling would all help this issue. When asked if she believed any of these were viable options she replied, "We are reviewing the situation at the moment and are open to any form of innovation and enterprise to improve this area."

THE PARENTS

The questionnaires reveal that less than half of the parents feel supported by their child's school. Figure five exposes their answers.

Figure Five:
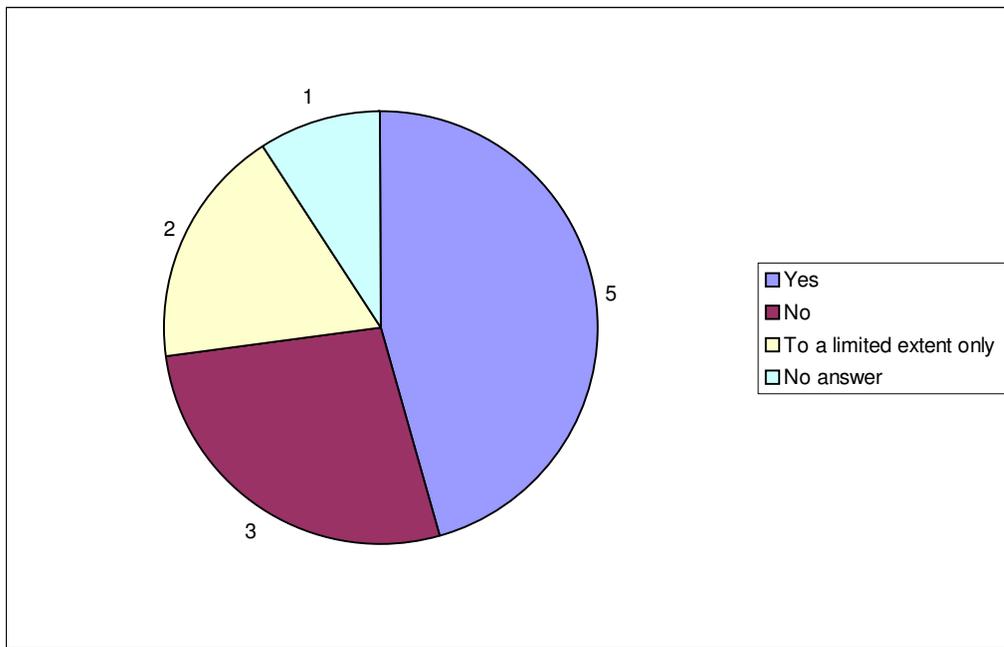
They claimed they would like more parent-teacher communication regarding their child as well as more mainstream teachers trained in ASD. One parent stated, "The Education Ministry should be more proactive to acknowledge / identify these students and [provide] at least one trained teacher equipped with skills / know-how to help these pupils." Another parent remarked that schools needed to be more aware of the children's needs and should seek help from the MOE to improve situations. Yet another parent stated, "It

would help better if a school Educational Psychologist could be arranged to periodically follow-up and review [X's] progress in school & support the teachers in their understanding in working with ASD children." These answers indicate that some parents are aware of the support available by the MOE yet realize that referrals are not being provided for all children and that there is a lack of provision in following up interventions.

Similarly, four of the five children involved in the student questionnaire claimed they would like to see changes in school that would help them feel happier and more settled. These included, "more understanding teachers" and "more education among students on learning disorders."

Ominously, only two of the eleven parents claimed to feel there was more support available for them as parents of children with ASD. One parent claimed that support was limited unless it was through private practices. The interviewee stated, parents are frustrated with the lack of support they receive and they are definitely becoming more demanding. She continued by explaining that they have an increased level of education these days and are more aware of what they are not getting and what they want. Instead of complaining to the MOE they now tend to go directly to the Minister. Accordingly, their push for change is getting stronger and they are forming more groups and collaborating to gain in strength. "Parents regularly compare Singapore to the facilities and services available overseas," complained the interviewee. This is supported in an article written by Samar Niazi, mother of a child with ASD, who claimed, "In the US,

Britain and Australia, kids like Ryan have a higher chance of success because of the understanding they receive from society." (2004, p.157)

Similarly, when asked if parents feel there is more provision available for their child and other children with ASD's, only three answered yes. Once again, one parent reported, "[Provision is] limited except for support or help from individuals / specialists in private practice." This is evident by the parent questionnaire results which reveal that four of the eleven children receive specialist services in behaviour therapy and social skills, each of which are through private practices.

On a more positive note, seven of the eleven parents reported that the public are more aware of ASD in Singapore. One parent stated, "The people in my social circle can recognize the symptoms of ASD compared to the last few years." They believed the increased awareness to be due to more talks, forums and media publications taking place, as well as through the recent opening of the Pathlight School. One parent, however, stated, "More needs to be done for them to be understood and accepted."

ALTERNATIVE PLACEMENTS

There are currently twenty local run special needs schools (given the abbreviation 'SPED' for 'Special Education') in Singapore, the most recent having opened in January 2004. Each of these are run by 'Voluntary Welfare Organisations' (VWO) and funded by

the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the National Council of Social Services (NCSS). For details on each of these schools please see Appendix Six, under 'Local Special Needs Schools in Singapore'.

Apparently, if parent's heed the school's advice and agree to withdraw their child from mainstream school, the child is then referred to one of the most appropriate SPED schools, based on the child's age, intellectual ability and catchment area. According to the interviewee, however, if no alternative placements are appropriate or available for the child with SEN the child stays in mainstream. "It happens a lot," she sighed. It appears that most, if not all SPED schools are oversubscribed and waiting lists are consequently up to three and four years long for some, especially for placements of children with ASD. The Association for Persons with Special Needs (APSN), which is one of the VWO has a strict criteria and until very recently, used to be adversed to taking children with ASD claiming they had no resources to deal with such children. According to the interviewee, however, within the last two years the MOE have supplied money to SPED in order to train their teachers in ASD so that they must now accept children with ASD. This has helped to reduce waiting lists slightly.

Not only are the waiting lists a concern, but there is also a disparity of age ranges for SEN placements. For example, a child in mainstream school is educated up until the age of sixteen and older if able to meet the demands of further education. If a child attends SPED, however, some schools have a leaving age of twelve years old, yet the age acceptance for most Day Activity or Training Centres tends to be eighteen.

Consequently, some children remain at home during these 'gap' years and often lose many of the skills obtained at school, as well as being deprived of the social benefits. This is certainly an area which needs to be targeted, not only through the opening of more schools, as is planned, but in providing the same mainstream school age range in order for smooth transitions to occur from one placement to another.

PARENTS VIEWS ON SEN SCHOOLS

Despite there being a number of SEN schools in Singapore, many parents prefer to send their children with SEN to mainstream school. The interviewee agreed with this, stating, "Many parents have a lack of understanding of special schools." Apparently, they think of MINDS rather than schools for less severe children. They also seem to have heard bad things about SPED schools and often feel that their children will worsen if mixed with other children with SEN. Another significant reason is because of the social stigma involved with sending their child to a special school. This is evident in two of the responses from the parent questionnaires, one of which stated, "We feel that he is not an extreme case of ASD… At the moment we do not want him to feel the 'stigma' of being in a special school." Another reason given was due to the higher school fees, which, according to the interviewee, is not always so and, if applicable, is not a substantial increase.

Apparently, three of the eleven children's current schools have suggested that their needs could be more appropriately met at an alternative school, yet none of these parents have followed the schools advice. Two, however, have considered special school, due to the teaching provided by trained SEN teachers, yet being able to model mainstream peers seems to take priority for most parents.

IMPROVING THE SITUATION

In discussing with the interviewee whether this situation should be modified and if so, how, she replied, "It's a wider problem, in fact it's a nation wide problem. People with SEN are treated very separately in Singapore." People with disabilities tend to be treated with wariness and sometimes fear due to ignorance / lack of understanding and compassion. Additionally, society tends to believe that having a child with SEN is a fault on the parents part and consequently often an embarrassment to the family. Due to this, children with SEN are generally kept at home, when not in school. Due to the public rarely seeing people with SEN in society they appear uneasy when confronted with such an experience. They therefore tend to avoid a situation rather than go out of their way to help a person in need.

The interviewee explained how 'publicity' for people with SEN is rare, yet when it does happen, those with SEN are always highlighted as being extra special which consequently reinforces the differences between them and us. She wished the focus could

instead be on how we are all the same and how people with SEN should therefore be readily accepted within society. Niazi similarly remarked, "I wish public awareness about children like Ryan could increase. This would help improve understanding about the dilemma these kids and their parents face, because despite their talents, their social inabilities create hurdles for them." (2004, p.157) Furthermore, the interviewee claimed, "Singapore is not disable friendly. It is hard for people with physical disabilities to get around and people often seem to perceive them with intrigue and sometimes fear rather than equal citizens." For more details on this situation please refer to Appendix Seven, under, 'Singapore: An Unfriendly Disabled Environment'.

The interviewee stated that she did not know how to change or improve this issue, although felt that failing to have SEN as a core-component in teacher training did not benefit the situation. She also mentioned that it comes down to how you are educated. Fullbrook states, "I try not to blame people for their ignorance. If you haven't been in a situation, it's not always obvious what's needed." (2000, p.11) The interviewee believed that if more people with SEN were seen in public places, greater understanding and acceptance would occur. "We need to focus on priorities and focus on placing enough importance on how people with SEN can contribute significantly to Singapore as well as non-SEN people," she commented.

In discussing the benefits and difficulties arising from alternative placements, the interviewee claimed that some children are better off in SPED. "They learn more and experience a more continued education." Yet, the difficulty with alternative placements, she felt, was that it detracts from inclusion. Additionally, she explained that there are often problems with students returning to mainstream. "If this was built in, it would make alternative placements better," she stated.

The interviewee described the Pathlight School as an example of offering both benefits and difficulties as an alternative placement. She considered it greatly beneficial for those children unable to cope socially and emotionally in mainstream school yet whose academic ability is capable of coping with the mainstream syllabus. However, she was concerned with the negative repercussions caused from segregating these children from 'normal' schooling to be in a school by themselves. In order for the outcome to be fully beneficial, she believed integration with mainstream children was vital, otherwise the gap between SEN and non-SEN children would become wider, even for those who are academically able.

Bullying has been mentioned as a common problem to occur from mainstream placements, linked with the limited amount of support provided for children with SEN. Large student numbers per class also appears to restrict children with SEN from receiving extra assistance in both academic skills and pastoral care. Furthermore, due to the local school system being focused on achieving high results, children have high demands to meet. Often many become anxious over school exams and streaming situations, especially those with SEN, and this can lead to low self-esteem and sometimes depression. Additionally, staff lack training in SEN and are therefore unable to provide the guidance and appropriate teaching skills required when teaching these children.

An example of the benefits of inclusion can be found in <u>Appendix Eight</u> where the views from a student diagnosed with Asperger's on his inclusion experiences within mainstream secondary school are given. The benefiting factor for this student is that he is academically equal to his peers and is therefore able to survive without requiring additional learning support. He achieves good results in his exams and has benefited greatly from the local educational system. Socially, however, he is weak and is a solitary child while at school. On observation, it appears that his peers tend to think of him as odd and generally ignore him. This demonstrates that despite being able to cope academically in school, as previously mentioned, socially some children still require support and guidance.

Children with SEN in mainstream placements, however, experience full inclusion and have the opportunity to learn from their mainstream peers. They are provided with the same learning opportunities and experiences as their classmates. They are prepared for higher education and have the opportunity to work towards a range of qualifications. Students in Singapore appear to be more employable having come from a mainstream school than a special school, regardless of qualifications achieved. This is again due to the stigma associated with people with SEN. Another benefit is that mainstream schooling is provided consistently from nursery through to University without any age gaps as in some special schools and training centers.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Since 2000, Singapore has experienced many welcome changes and re-organisation in the field of education. This includes:

- the passing of the Compulsory Education Act;

- the implementation of the LSP for primary children;

- the designation of an EP for every primary school and the opportunity for children with SEN to be referred for assessments;

- the implementation of yearly workshops in SEN within primary schools;

- the publication of a booklet on Learning Difficulties, distributed to all mainstream teachers;

- the modification of school ratings to a band system;

- current plans to reduce schooling from 5 ½ to 5 days a week.

- future plans for 2005 to reduce P1 and P2 class numbers.

An additional change is that Mandarin is now no longer necessary to join University in Singapore. Evidently, this has been a stumbling block for many as it prevented those children exempt from taking Mother Tongue at school from achieving a place in University. This apparently resulted in many parents being forced to send their children to other Countries for further education. "This change should open far more doors for graduates," professed the interviewee.

Many of these changes seem to have coincided with the arrival of a New Minister for Education, Mr. Tharman Shamugaratnam. Mr. Shamugaratnam took over from Radm Teo Chee Hean on August 1st 2003. The interviewee also believed that Singapore has benefited from the former Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Goh Chok Tong, who has dyslexia and whose nephew has an ASD. "This," she stated, "has ignited a greater awareness of SEN in Singapore and in developing areas in this field."

TARGETING PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

In discussing the noticeable targeting of primary schools rather than secondary schools for many of the new changes, the interviewee declared, "We have to start somewhere… At the moment EP's and the MOE are overstretched with what they can do all ready." She explained that the reduction of class sizes can not physically be done throughout the school years due to the lack of teachers. She continued by stating that the future aim is to target secondary school staff and children but that the MOE have to work within their resources and therefore primary has to take priority. Apparently, assessments are available for secondary school children but the referral rate is low because staff have not been trained in how to identify SEN. In order to increase the awareness of secondary school staff the PGSB published a 'Teacher's Reference Guide on Learning, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties faced by Pupils in School' in 2001 and distributed one to every school teacher in Singapore. Additionally, the interviewee remarked that secondary staff have the opportunity to attend the yearly SEN workshops if they wish to.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

In discussing future plans for SEN schools, the interviewee claimed that there are plans to open more SEN schools for children with below 75IQ. Additionally, according to the Dr. Ng Eng Hen, Minister of State for Education and Manpower, in the speech given on 20th March 2003, he claimed that the MOE had started a 'redevelopment programme' aimed to improve the SPED schools facilities. "Once re-developed, our SPED schools [will] be purpose-built with facilities customized to their specific needs." (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2003)

An article in the Sunday Times recently reported that the new Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong[16], claimed that the MOE would be providing S\$220 million over the following four years to help improve schooling for SEN children. This plan is aimed to provide an extra \$12 million a year for the twenty SPED schools for the next four years. Reportedly, "Funds will help schools improve curriculum, recruit better-qualified teachers, and bolster staff training." (Teo, 2004, p.8) Additionally, the facilities and homes of nine SPED schools will be improved by 2008 instead of the originally planned 2012. Furthermore, more support is planned for mainstream schools. This is said to be through designating twenty primary schools and thirty secondary schools to cater for students with dyslexia and ASD. Evidently, 10% of all mainstream local school teacher's will be "trained to identify and manage children with mild learning disabilities," (Teo, 2004, p.8) and extra funding will be provided for the designated schools in order for these staff to help those children with learning difficulties.

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[16] Mr. Lee Hsien Loong took over the role of Prime Minister from Mr. Goh Chok Tong in August 2004.

Singapore seems to be focusing highly on improving situations for SEN children, which is very encouraging. There does appear, however, to be some discrepancy in how some of these plans will be achieved successfully. For example, who will provide the training is questionable, especially when there are currently so few EP's available and whose current working roles are all ready over loaded. Additionally, planning for 10% of teachers to willingly be trained is a very a proactive plan, yet will enough teachers want to volunteer for such a role when they are all ready under such work pressures and who have obviously chosen to be mainstream teacher's rather than special needs teachers when they did their initial training. The plans mention extra funding for schools but does this mean extra pay for the teachers? Without such an incentive volunteers may well be limited. Additionally, the report claims that teachers will be trained to work with children with mild learning disabilities but what does this mean for children with more severe learning difficulties as well as those with social and emotional difficulties? Will funding and training be provided for these and if not, will many continue to struggle in mainstream without their needs being effectively met?

In order for such goals to succeed it is possible that training may need to be provided externally by private practitioners who are specialized in the field of SEN. This is due to the limited number of professionals trained in SEN within the local system. Additionally, the training and use of shadow assistants within schools could be an alternative option rather than using the current teachers who, as mentioned, may not be willing to take on such a responsibility. The shadow assistants could then be used as classroom assistants to support the teacher and therefore minimize their pressures as well as to oversea SEN

interventions / behaviour programmes. Of course, in order to obtain a pool of SA's, as

mentioned previously, will be difficult and this is how more publicity in SEN could

encourage the public to become aware and consequently more willing to be involved.

Naturally, a satisfactory wage could also benefit this situation. Similarly, an increase in

teachers in both special and mainstream schools would greatly benefit and could perhaps

occur if teachers were provided with more tempting pay schemes. This also extends to

the recruitment of EP's in which extra funding and support may also encourage more

people to opt for such a career. An increase in EP's would allow more teacher training to

occur, more assessments to take place and could enable reviews to occur more regularly.

It is extremely encouraging that the new Prime Minister appears to be focusing on

improving the current situation for people with SEN in Singapore. He recently stated,

"We want ours to be a society that cares for all its members; one that does not ignore the

needs of those who are born or afflicted with disabilities." Lee [(2004) cited in Teo

(2004) p.1] With the current plans for improvement initiated by Prime Minister Lee,

perhaps a change in Government legislation is no longer such an unlikely goal.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

I now realize that when I began this dissertation I had a very incorrect view of the local school system in Singapore. I believed that children with SEN were not included within mainstream schools but that many 'slipped in' by default due to parents refraining from informing the school of their child's diagnosis. Although, the latter does occur, I now realize that the Singapore local system is a very inclusive one in that it accepts all. Additionally, I previously believed that a large amount of expulsions took place, which I again have found to not be true. On conclusion of the interview with the EP and in exploring the local system in detail I have also realized that a great number of positive developments in terms of SEN support and provision have been happening over the last few years and more continues to be made. In fact, throughout writing this dissertation I have had to make a number of changes regarding the school system, new services, future goals and funding being provided. Many of these appear to be influenced by the new Minister for Education and the former and new Prime Minister of Singapore. Disparities and problems involved in some of these current provisions and future plans have, however, been identified. These appear to be mainly due to lack of:

1. RESOURCES:
    - including teaching staff; staff and student support; EP's; teacher training; funding;

2. SUFFICIENT AND REALISTIC PLANNING:

- Despite monetary resources now being more readily available since the instatement of the New Prime Minister it is debatable that this money will be greatly beneficial if effective planning is not carried out.

3. TIME:

- for EP's to provide more teacher training, assessments, follow up programmes and reviews;

- for teachers to attend training, to provide specialist services / support groups, to carry out EP suggestions and programmes, to monitor and record behaviours and to attend reviews;

4. COMMITMENT AND DESIRE:

- by some teachers[17].

5. SOCIAL STIGMA:

- the nation wide situation of the social stigma affiliated to people with SEN.

In addressing each of these issues, current and future plans to improve SEN provision will become more effective.

Support for students with SEN seems to be a common issue of concern within mainstream schools. It is apparent that support is provided for some students through the LSP, remedial classes, SEA's and buddy systems, yet evidently some children escape

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[17] As mentioned, this is possibly due to a number of reasons such as syllabus pressures, school rating pressures, pressures from parents and the principal, large class sizes and administrative pressures. An additional reason could also be due to teachers choosing to train in and work with mainstream children and therefore being reluctant in having to deal with children with SEN.

such opportunities. It appears that schools can apply for certain services yet do not

necessarily do so and many parents do not appear aware of such facilities unless involved

in the teaching system themselves. Services therefore need to be made more readily

available for more children of both high and low priority, including those with ASD, and

schools need to be more willing to utilize these options. Furthermore, those provided

with opportunities such as buddy systems do not appear to fully benefit due to lacking the

guidance required when such a system is implemented. Additionally, support in

specialized areas such as social skills and behaviour management appears lacking. This

is probably due to teachers being untrained in how to deal with these issues and in

lacking the time. In order to make more students with SEN meet the school demands,

however, these areas need to be embarked. More teacher support in both social and

academic areas could benefit this situation. The implementation of differentiation within

subject teaching could also help to prevent children from falling further behind in

subjects as well as reinforcing their ability of achieving. Differentiation is necessary for

many children with SEN who are unable to effectively learn using conventional methods

or in the same way as their mainstream peers[18]. Devising individual long and short-term

goals for each student with SEN can also reinforce achievement, which can lead to an

increase in self-esteem. Additionally, collaboration between teachers can encourage the

use of consistency in both teaching strategies and behaviour management. Of course, the

common denominator to enable this to occur is to increase training for teachers in order

for them to have the knowledge in how to do this. Furthermore, teachers would need to

find the time to include both training and implementing the new teaching strategies

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[18] Alternative methods of learning / understanding can, for example, be through small group activities, written instruction, pictures, symbols, the use of the computer and social stories, depending on the needs of each student.

within their busy schedules; in addition to monitoring and reviewing each student. The concern with this is; firstly, is this really viable and secondly, are we continually increasing the workload and pressures for teachers by expecting them to do this?

As revealed in the questionnaire data, peers of children with SEN also require attention in order to increase their understanding and limit negative views. Support provided by the teacher could therefore assist in the education of mainstream peers in learning about SEN and in accepting and supporting each other. In increasing the awareness of today's generation, bullying and social stigma can begin to be targeted. Principals can focus on whole school education of people with SEN through assemblies and in initiating projects, school visits to SEN schools and centers and fundraising in attempt to change the current negative views and stigma associated with SEN. This would need to be an ongoing target.

There is also a need to change the opinion of teachers towards making referrals and in liaising with EP's. All teachers should view this service as a benefit rather than a cause for extra work. Teachers should be keen to receive help instead of being reluctant. As mentioned, the use of SA's could help this situation. Once again, this of course means that more EP's need to be available in order for more referrals to be carried out effectively. Teachers would also benefit in being trained in challenging behaviour. This would enable them to understand why behaviours occur and consequently implement appropriate behaviour management strategies.   This would avoid the mistake of treating children as odd or shy instead of investigating any SEN issues. In teachers gathering a greater understanding of challenging behaviour they will be more likely to make

appropriate referrals. Consequently, children will be directed to the correct service for assistance rather than being passed from one service to another, as described by the interviewee.

In reflecting on Booth's (1999) statement on 'Inclusion', first quoted in Chapter two[19], and having now investigated the current school system in Singapore, I realize that the initial part of this statement is applicable to the local system. As we have discovered, however, this is in a slightly 'raw' context and not as effective as it could be if more support was provided. The latter part of Booth's statement, however, appears yet to be addressed by the education system and this is where action is required to improve situations.

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[19] "Inclusion in education is about increasing access to, participation within and reducing exclusion from, local centers of learning. It is about creating inclusive cultures, policies, curricula and approaches to teaching and learning." Booth (1999)

CHAPTER 6

<u>SELF REFLECTION</u>

This dissertation has enabled me to gain answers to the questions outlined in the introduction and to obtain a deeper understanding and knowledge of the local school system; the role that society plays in the perception towards people with special needs; the development that Singapore has made with regards to meeting the needs of child with SEN; in addition to the areas in which continued provision, services and support need to be improved.   As a result, I now feel I have an increased ability to give advice and guidance to local children with special needs, their families and school staff.

According to Coghland & Brannick (2001) the purpose of an action research is to build a collaboration between researcher and client. Additionally, Heron & Reason [(1997) cited in Coghland & Brannick (2001)] suggest it must "forge a more direct link between intellectual knowledge / theory and action so that each inquiry contributes directly to the flourishing of human persons and their communities." This action research has enabled me to gain in confidence in doing exactly this.

I also feel more able to provide more informed empathy towards situations that both children with SEN and parents experience in Singapore; to give encouragement in detailing how provisions and support have vastly improved and are continually being targeted by the MOE, and lastly to give hope that a greater priority by the Government will be made in the near future towards people with SEN in providing a formal

legislation, more financing, more publicity and an emphasis to change current social

attitudes. Perhaps much of this will happen sooner than expected with the recent change

of Prime Minister in August 2004.

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APPENDIX ONE

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS

1. Does your child attend Primary or Secondary school?

   Circle the one which applies: Primary / Secondary

2. Was your child diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) before attending their current school?

   Yes / No

3. Was your child's school aware of this diagnosis prior to offering a placement?

   Yes / No

4. Who first identified your child as having difficulties? (Yourself, the teacher.)

   _____

4b. What age was your child?   ____ years old.

5. Does your child struggle to meet the school demands?

   Yes / No / Sometimes

6. Please rate your child's general level of ability in the following subjects:

   1 = excellent; 2 = very good; 3 = good; 4 = satisfactory;
   5 = below satisfactory; 6 = very poor; (leave blank if not applicable).

Tick which level applies:

	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5	6
Art							Mathematics						
Chemistry							Mother Tongue						
English Language							Music						
English Literature							Physical Education						
Home Economics							Physics						
Humanities							Science						
Any others:													

7. Does your child have difficulties in any of the following areas:
   Tick which box(es) apply:

Making friends	
Listening to instructions	
Following school rules	
Working in groups	
Communicating feelings	
Using appropriate behaviour	
Social skills	

   Any others, please list: _____

8. Has the school mentioned its concerns regarding your child's difficulties, as highlighted in questions 6 and 7?

                                                                   Yes / No

9. How did your child perform in the most recent school exams?
   Tick the box which applies:

Excellent	
Good	
Satisfactory	
Poor	

10. Are any allowances given to your child during exam time? (For example, longer time for completion, examination completed in a separate room from the other students.)   Yes / No

10b. If yes, what allowances are given? _____

10c. If no, do you think this would benefit your child during future exams?
                                                                   Yes / No

11. Does your child receive any extra support in school?   Yes / No / Used to

11b. If yes, by whom (i.e. Counselor, Learning Support Teacher, Form Teacher)
                                                   _____

11c. How often?   _____ hour(s) per week / month

12. Does your child receive extra tuition / support outside of school?   Yes / No

12b. If yes, how often? _____ hour(s) per week

12c. In which subjects / areas? _____

13. Does your child get upset about certain matters at school?   Yes / No / Sometimes

13b. If yes, which are the most common issues that upset your child?
    Tick which boxes apply:

Being bullied/teased	
Arguing with classmates/friends	
Not understanding work	
In trouble with teacher	
Not fitting in	

Any others: _____

14. If your child has been bullied at school, what was the cause?

_____

_____

15. Does the teacher and / or the students know your child has an ASD?

Teachers: Yes / No
Students: Yes / No

15b. If yes, are they understanding and supportive of your child's needs and difficulties?

Teachers: Yes / No
Students: Yes / No

16. Is there a buddy system for your child at school?   Yes / No

16b. Does this appear to benefit your child?   Yes / No

16c. If yes, how? If no, why?

_____

_____

17. Does your child appear to enjoy school?   Yes / No

18. Has your child ever changed school?   Yes / No

18b. If yes, for what reasons?

_____

_____

19. Has your child ever been excluded from a school?   Yes / No

20. Has the school ever suggested that your child's needs may be better met at an alternative school?

                                                       Yes / No

21. Do you, as a parent/member of the family, feel supported by your child's current school?

                                                       Yes / No

21b. If no, what changes would you like to see?

_____

_____

22. Have you ever considered sending your child to a special school?

                                                       Yes / No

22b. Why or why not?

_____

_____

23. Do you feel the public is becoming more aware of ASD's in Singapore?

                                                       Yes / No

23b. If yes, how?

_____

_____

24. Do you feel there is more provision available for your child and other children with ASD's?

                                                       Yes / No

25. Do you feel there is more support available for you / parents of children with ASD's?

                                                       Yes / No

Thank you very much for taking the time in completing this questionnaire. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me.

APPENDIX TWO

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

1. Do you attend Primary or Secondary school?
   Circle the one which applies: Primary / Secondary

2. Do you enjoy school?   Yes / No

3. List three things you like and three things you dislike about school.

Like ☺	Don't like ☹
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

4. Do you find the following subjects easy, okay or hard?
   Tick which boxes apply.
   Leave blank any subjects you do not take.

	Easy	Okay	Hard		Easy	Okay	Hard
Art				Mathematics			
Chemistry				Mother Tongue			
English Language				Music			
English Literature				Physical Education			
Home Economics				Physics			
Humanities				Science			
Any others:							

5. Do you find the following areas easy, okay or hard?
    Tick which box(es) apply.

	Easy	**Okay**	**Hard**		**Easy**	**Okay**	**Hard**
Making friends				Working in groups			
Listening to instructions				Communicating feelings			
Learning new topics				Using appropriate behaviour			
Following school rules				Using appropriate social skills			
Any others:							

6a. Do you receive any extra help at school in the subjects you find hard?
    Circle which applies.

Yes / No / Used to

b. If no, do you think this would benefit you?   Yes / No

7a. Do you like the other students in your class?   Yes / No / Some

b. Give reasons for your answer. _____

_____

8. What do you usually do during recess? _____

9. How did you find your most recent school exams?   Easy / Okay / Hard

10a. Do you think you could achieve higher results if you were allowed to
     complete your school exams in a separate room from the rest of your class?

Yes / No

b. Would you like this opportunity?   Yes / No

11. Do the following things happen to you at school?
   Tick which box(es) apply.

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Being bullied/teased			
Arguing with classmates/friends			
Not understanding work			
In trouble with teacher			
Not fitting in			

   Any others: _____

12. What do you tend to get into trouble for the most at school? _____

_____

13a. Is your teacher understanding if you have a problem?

Yes / Sometimes / No

b. Are the other students in your class understanding if you have a problem?

Yes / Sometimes / No

14a. Do you have a buddy to help you in school?   Yes / No

b. If yes, how does this help you? _____

_____

15a. Have you ever wanted to change school?   Yes / No

b. If yes, why? _____

_____

16a. Are there any changes you would like to see in school that would help to make you happier and more settled?

Yes / No

b.   If yes, what are they? _____

_____

APPENDIX THREE

SCHOOL STREAMING

All children in mainstream are assessed in English Language, Mother Tongue (Mandarin, Malay or Tamil) and Mathematics at the end of Primary 4 (P4). Streaming in P5 is based on these results. According to the MOE, "The purpose of streaming is to place your child in a language stream for which he is most suited so that he completes primary education successfully." (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2004)

The streams in primary include EM1, EM2, EM3 and ME3. The lowest ability stream is EM3 and caters "for pupils less able to cope with English Language and Mother Tongue." (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2004) Pupils in EM3 are taught 'Foundation English Language' and Mother Tongue at basic proficiency level. The Mother Tongue classes focus on aural skills, reading and listening comprehension and conversation. EM1 and EM2 prepares the students for higher level subjects and ME3 allows students to learn Mother Tongue at higher level and basic level English Language. All subjects in ME3 are taught in Mother Tongue. Not all schools provide ME3 unless there is sufficient demand. Children may be transferred to alternative schools if there is not enough demand in certain streams such as ME3.

At the end of P6 all children must take the PSLE, however, according to the interviewee, this is impossible to fail. The marks obtained dictate which course each child will follow in secondary school. There are four courses, one to cater for every child. According to

the interviewee, however, those children with severe learning difficulties will still struggle with the syllabus of even the lowest course. The courses available are: 'Special', 'Express', 'Normal (Academic)' and 'Normal (Technical)'. Special and Express involve taking seven to eight subjects (with the possibility of nine) at GCE 'O' level examinations. This includes two languages, Higher English and Mother Tongue, Mathematics, Science and Humanities. The 'Normal (Academic)' course involves taking six to eight subjects in GCE 'N' level examinations and the 'Normal (Technical)' course involves taking five to seven subjects in GCE 'N' level examinations. Students placed in the 'Normal (Technical)' course are prepared towards 'technical-vocational education and training' in Technical / Commercial Institutes.

Ministry of Education, Singapore (2004) <u>Special Education in Singapore</u>. http://www1.moe.edu.sg/specialeducation.html (14 June 2004)

APPENDIX FOUR

SCHOOL SESSIONS

Primary classes range from Primary 1 (P1) for six / seven year olds through to P6 (eleven / twelve year olds). Secondary classes range from Sec 1 (twelve / thirteen year olds) through to Sec 4 (fifteen / sixteen year olds). Students then continue on to Junior College. Most primary local schools follow a 'split session' system whereby children attend either morning or afternoon classes from Monday to Friday. Morning sessions are generally from 6am until 12.20pm and afternoon sessions from 12pm until 6.20pm. Children alternate between morning and afternoon school yearly. Teachers either teacher morning or afternoon classes, however, many are involved in 'Co-Curricular Activities' (CCA) or 'Remedial'[20] classes outside of teaching hours. Secondary schools follow a single session system from 7.30 until 2pm. Most schools also run on Saturday's for CCA and Remedial, although by 2005, Saturday schooling is planned to stop. Reportedly, this is "to allow teachers more time to reflect and improve on teaching methods." (Swee, 2004, p.39) Apparently, this is a welcome relief for teachers although the concern for such a move is that longer weekdays at school will eventuate. Students are also concerned about the repercussions of longer hours added to their extremely busy existing weekdays. One student stated, "My lessons already end late, at around 5pm, and with CCAs being pushed to the weekdays, I'll be exhausted mentally and physically." (Swee, 2004, p.39)

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[20] Extra lessons for children unable to meet the subject criteria.

Swee, D. (2004) Teens Want to go to School on Saturdays. <u>The Sunday Times.</u>

Singapore Press Holdings Publication. Singapore. September 19th, p.39.

APPENDIX FIVE

SCHOOL SUPPORT ROLES

A <u>Discipline Master</u> (DM) is an assigned class teacher who deals with all the discipline problems in school. Children are sent to the discipline master for 'punishment'. Every mainstream school has a DM. The DM is not required to undergo any training in behaviour management for this post.

<u>Teacher Counselor</u> (TC).

All teachers have basic counseling knowledge from their teacher training course. There are, however, two trained teachers in every school that are assigned as TC's. These teachers experience a three-day training course to gain this role. The TC's are classroom teachers who have to counsel children in addition to their normal teaching schedule. As a result, they rarely have time to counsel due to curriculum / syllabus pressures. Additionally, it is a restrictive service for the children as they can only see the TC outside of school teaching hours.

Schools are also at liberty to bring in free-lance counselors, once a week, from the Family Service Centre (FSC) and are provided money for this facility. Unfortunately, however, there is apparently a heavy stigma affiliated with seeing a counselor and most children are consequently reluctant to see one. As a result many schools no longer see the benefit of using this service.

A <u>Learning Support Co-ordinator</u> (LSC) is a mainstream teacher who is chosen by the principal to experience minimal training by the Psychiatry Service. Being a LSC is a full time position with which their class teaching is relinquished. LSC's will often become the case co-ordinator for all children in both the primary and secondary school who have SEN. According to the interviewee, this is a huge role and a difficult one for someone who has limited training in SEN.   With someone in this role, however, it can allow for interventions to be followed up and reviews of children to be more viable. The LSC, according to the interviewee, is slightly comparable to a SENco although does not have as much training or experience. In some large schools two full-time LSC's are trained.

APPENDIX SIX

LOCAL SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOLS IN SINGAPORE

The twelve Voluntary Welfare Organisations are as follows:

- Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA)

- Association for Persons with Special Needs (APSN)

- Autism Resource Centre (ARC)

- Canossian Daughters of Charity (CDC)

- Metta Welfare Association (MWA)

- Movement for the Intellectually Disabled (MINDS)

- Presbyterian Community Services (PCS)

- Rainbow Centre (RC)

- Singapore Association for the Deaf (SADeaf)

- Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped (SAVH)

- Spastic Children's Association of Singapore (SCAS)

Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA)

The AWWA Special School runs an 'Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children' (EIPIC), from birth to 4 years and a special educational 'Programme for Children with Multiple Handicaps' (PCMH) between the ages of 4 to 12 years. Also,

since 2001 the school has catered for children with Autism and behavioural concerns under the title 'Project Challenge'.

Association for Persons with Special Needs (APSN)

There are five APSN schools in Singapore, which cater for children with moderate [21]learning difficulties, with IQ's between 50 and 70. Children between the ages of 6 and 12 can either attend Chao Yang Special School, Jervois Special School or Katong Special School[22]. Children between the ages of 13 and 16 can attend Tanglin Special School and those between the ages of 17 and 19 can attend Delta Senior School, which prepares the students for employment through a range of pre-vocational training programmes.

Autism Resource Centre (ARC)

The ARC are the latest to open a special needs school in Singapore. This is known as the 'Pathlight School', opened in 2004 and which caters for children between 6 and 16 who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Pathlight School offer's mainstream education for children with specific Special Educational Needs who have IQ's above 75. It caters for children cognitively able to cope with the mainstream syllabus, yet unable to cope socially and emotionally in mainstream school. Students are provided with autism friendly facilities, small class sizes and qualified teaching staff in the field of autism.

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[21] In Singapore 'Learning Difficulties' are often referred to as 'Intellectual Disabilities' and the abbreviation 'ID' is often used for persons who are 'intellectually disabled'.
[22] Placement of a child into an APSN or MINDS school or a Day Activity Centre is generally based on the geographical positioning of their family's home.

Canossian Daughters of Charity (CDC)

The CDC operates a primary school known as the 'Canossian School for the Hearing Impaired' (CSHI). On reaching Primary Six the pupils take the Primary School Leaving Exam (PSLE) and, depending on their results, will either transfer to a [23]mainstream school catered for children with hearing impairment or to the 'Vocational School for the Handicapped'. The 'Magdalene Kindergarten' is a feeder school for pre-primary aged children with hearing impairment.

Metta Welfare Association (MWA)

The MWA runs the 'Metta School' which caters for children with mild to moderate learning difficulties, with I.Q.'s between 55 and 75. The age range for the Metta School is 6 until 18 years old.

Movement for the Intellectually Disabled (MINDS)

There are five MINDS schools, which cater for children with moderate to severe learning difficulties, with IQ's below 50. Children between the ages of 4 and 18 can either attend Lee Kong Chian Gardens School, Jurong Gardens School, Guillemard Gardens School, Towner Gardens School or Yio Chu Kang Gardens School. On leaving school, students have the opportunity to either attend one of the two MINDS Day Activity Centres at Clementi or Ang Mo Kio, or attend one of the three MINDS Employment Development Centres / Sheltered Workshops.

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[23] Designated Secondary local schools, which cater for children with hearing impairments, are 'Boon Lay Secondary School' and 'Balestier Hill Secondary School'.

Presbyterian Community Services (PCS)

Since 2002, the PCS has run the 'Grace Orchard School' (GOS) for children between the ages of 7 and 16 years, with mild learning difficulties and IQ's from 55 to 70.

Rainbow Centre (RC)

The Rainbow Centre operates two schools, namely, 'Margaret Drive Special School' (MDSS) and 'Balestier Special School' (BSS). Both schools cater for children with Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and other neurological conditions. The schools follow three programmes: 1) 'Early Intervention for Infants and Children' under 4 years old; 2) 'Programme for Children with Multiple Handicaps' between 4 and 16 years; and 3) 'Structured Teaching for Exceptional Pupils' (STEP), for children with Autism up to the age of 12 years.

Singapore Association for the Deaf (SADeaf)

The SADeaf runs a primary school known as the 'Singapore School for the Deaf'. On reaching 14 years old the students can transfer to the 'Vocational School for the Handicapped' or, if able to pass the PSLE, can transfer to a designated mainstream school as listed in footnote 23, below.

Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped (SAVH)

The SAVH operates a primary school known as the 'Singapore School for the Visually Handicapped'. The majority of students follow the mainstream curriculum, although there is also a remedial class for slow learners and a special class for children with

multiple disabilities. On passing the PSLE the students can transfer to a [24]mainstream

school. The SAVH also runs a 'Vocational Training Centre', which is for people with

visual impairment aged 18 and above.

Spastic Children's Association of Singapore (SCAS)

The SCAS runs the 'Spastic Children's Association School' for children with cerebral

palsy between the ages of 5 and 18 years. The school curriculum is modified to meet the

varying needs of each student. Vocational training and employment is also available at

the SCAS 'Goodwill Rehabilitation and Occupational Workshop' (GROW).

The above information has been verified by telephone discussions with many of the listed

schools Social Workers or Administry Departments.

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[24] Designated Secondary local schools, which cater for children with visual impairment, are 'Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School', 'Bedok South Secondary School', 'Dunearn Secondary School' and 'Ghim Moh Secondary School'.

APPENDIX SEVEN

<u>SINGAPORE: AN UNFRIENDLY DISABLED ENVIRONMENT</u>

For such a developed Country, provision, in terms of facilities, for people with physical disabilities, much like Government legislation, does not appear to be a priority, and is therefore behind many other Countries in terms of development. New buildings are now incorporating basic facilities for wheelchair users but often you will find that sufficient investigation of the needs of people with physical disabilities has not been fully carried out. Public transport is also exceptionally difficult for people in wheelchairs. Buses have high steps to alight and the train system, known as, Mass Rapid Transport (MRT) has escalators leading down to the platforms. In a recent telephone discussion, however, Glen Copsey from the 'Land Transport Authority' (LTA), claimed that all MRT stations are currently being installed with lifts as part of a rolling programme of upgrading. In an additional telephone conversation with Jonathan Wilcox, also from the LTA, the completion date for lifts to be installed within every MRT station was predicted to be by 2007. Mr. Wilcox, however, claimed that there were no plans towards making buses wheel chair accessible.

Similarly, 'outdoor' provision for wheelchair users, the elderly and parents with pushchairs for young children is very poor. Pavements are regularly uneven and slippery with high curbs and huge drains running along side the 'pathway' without barriers to prevent people from falling in. Similarly, many shops have steps leading to the entrance and shopping isles that are too narrow for wheelchairs. Unfortunately, this difficulty

extends further when the general public are often reluctant to help people in need. In an 'I-S Magazine' article written in 2000, the author, David Fullbrook describes his experiences in Singapore when he broke his leg and had to travel around on crutches. He commented on how people continually stared at him and never came to help. Unfortunately, cases such as Fullbrook's are not uncommon.

As part of the article by Fullbrook, Mr. Goh Chong Chia, the ex-president of the Singapore Institute of Architects (1993-1996) and current Nominated Member of Parliament, was contacted and asked if high costing is involved to make buildings disable-friendly. Mr. Goh's reply was that it is not expensive but it is the "loss of saleable area that affects developers. When social service facilities start encroaching on saleable areas, that's when developers resist." He claimed that in order to avoid this problem, the government needs to "change their ruling and not consider handicap-friendly facilities part of the allowed saleable area." Mr. Goh continued by saying, "we've definitely made an effort to make Singapore handicap-friendly – a lot of buildings now have ramps, lifts and handicap toilets". Mr. Fullbrook, however, stated,

> "Sure, things are changing, but Singapore still has a long way to go. There are far too many lifts with buttons out of reach of the disabled – assuming they can get up the stairs to the lift lobby… Many corridors seem too narrow, cramming people in and making it difficult for disabled people to pass. Easy-to-miss low-level obstructions and slippery pavements are particularly hazardous."

Mr. Fullbrook suggestions to improve this situation included changing architects and designers views and priorities so that they focus on disabled facilities in all building plans. He also described the importance of making the able-bodied more aware of SEN and less reserved in offering help.

In another interview between Mr. Fullbrook and Mr. Ron Chandran-Dudley, chairman of

the Disabled People's Association, who is visually impaired, Mr. Chandran-Dudley's

views on whether Singapore is disable-friendly were:

> "In terms of accessibility, it has certainly developed… from the time of dinosaurs! But it has not developed in tandem with the rate at which it has developed for the non-disabled. In terms of global transportation, we cannot call ourselves World Class."

On the transport system he states:

> "There is no way people with disabilities here can travel by bus. The bus driver's here swerve ruthlessly, don't know how to stop near the curb and the steps are too high – we need low-floor buses. The MRT is fine – if you can get to the station! And because there are no lifts in the MRT stations, how are people in wheelchairs and crutches meant to get to the platform? And taxis, though the most appropriate means for now, are expensive compared to traveling by bus or MRT – and that's before you add on the booking charges."

He continued to say "Many places are inaccessible… the pavements are unnecessarily

inaccessible and the drains enormous."

When asked what legislators, developers and transport authorities should keep in mind

when designing for people with disabilities, Mr. Chandran-Dudley replied,

> "Basically, the idea is independence – to allow those who can to travel independently. As long as there are inaccessible pathways and transport systems, people with disabilities become prisoners in their own apartment. These are more than just architectural barriers."

When questioned on what the answer is to this situation, Mr. Chandran-Dudley suggested

a 'Transportation Day' in which free petrol and diesel is supplied to taxi drivers for one

day and the earnings from each taxi driver to be donated to a centralized fund. The

money collected would then be exchanged for taxi coupons and distributed to people with

disabilities through social workers and welfare groups in order for them to benefit from

free trips to and from work. According to the LTA, however, a 'Transportation Day' has

not taken place as yet. In fact, in contacting the LTA, nobody seemed to have any

knowledge of such an idea.

Fullbrook, D. (2000) 'Best Foot Forward'. I-S Magazine. Asia City Publishing Pte.

Ltd, Singapore. pp.11-12.