

## CHAPTER ONE

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND GENERAL BACKGROUND

The research encompasses the interconnected areas of children's rights in education from the unique perspective of communication-disordered secondary pupils learning a modern foreign language, highlighting any barriers they encounter, what support for learning is available and what it means to them.

This chapter will comprise short sections on:

- Review of children's rights
- History of autistic spectrum disorders
- Dyslexia with communication disorders
- Modern language teaching in Scotland
- Support for learning issues in the modern language classroom

#### **Children's rights**

Until 1978 education had been very much focused on the pupil deficit model and it really was not until the 1974 Education (Mentally Handicapped Children)(Scotland) Act that all children were even pronounced "educable." This situation was altered by the recommendations of the Scottish Education Department's Report in 1978 and also the report in the same year by the Committee of Enquiry chaired by Warnock. Although many philanthropists were already working with great dedication from the late nineteenth century to improve the lot of this group and doing the best they could, most of those affected were regarded as objects of pity or even pariahs. The increased opportunities and progress in the course of last century for all those with impairments or learning difficulties are substantial however. Their position now, through legislation, to full-status individuals who have a bundle of rights would have seemed amazing to even those well-meaning philanthropists.

Children's rights and worldwide exposure to them have blossomed in this period. The Education (Scotland) Act (1980), introducing a duty for an education authority to open a Record of Needs for those with specific or complex needs has been followed in 1995 by the Children (Scotland) Act which legislated that the welfare of a child

must always be paramount. These two Acts have endorsed the main principles of the UN Convention on the rights of the child (1989) and the UNESCO Salamanca statement of 1994.

The Manual of Good Practice in Special Educational Needs (1999) brings together these legal developments in an educational context, highlighting the importance of interprofessional collaboration and the value of individualised educational programmes (IEPs). Such collaboration combined with a highly individualised approach is meant to empower young people and raise their level of achievement.

The most recent legislation affecting children's rights and of most current relevance is the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act (2000). The main change it introduces is the right of every child of school age to receive from its local authority a school education, in a mainstream inclusive setting, with special school education only appropriate in exceptional circumstances. To achieve a high level of participation would, ideally, mean removal of all environmental, structural and attitudinal barriers. This paper will be considering to what extent pupils are learning a modern language with these barriers removed.

In order to carry out these legal requirements in Glasgow, Glasgow City Council produced in June 2001 a consultation draft called "Impact of Disability on Children, Young People & Families". The principal officer in Special Educational Needs emphasises in an accompanying letter that "the issue of special educational needs is one which will increasingly be at the core of educational practice in the future". The document contains figures that give food for thought. Although no figures are given for secondary aged pupils in Glasgow, the National Autistic Society's latest figures for the Greater Glasgow Health Board suggest there are 481 diagnosed with autism in the age group 0 – 12 years although a proportion of these children will be considered to have extreme difficulties and will not be educated in a mainstream school. However many will increasingly be included in a mainstream setting.

A recently published report (Public Health Institute of Scotland, December 2001), conducted a needs assessment for those with autistic spectrum disorders in Scotland,

in order to provide information for service commissioners. It concluded many experience the “Snakes and Ladders” effect\* in accessing services which need to be improved and better co-ordinated. As far as education is concerned, the report recommends integration with mainstream peers as a “goal” but recognises that the desirability of this will depend on individual needs. It also acknowledges that while there will be those who can cope with a mainstream curriculum, even these pupils may need support for the “social and interpersonal demands”, (p. 39). As the focus of this research is to explore the current experience of high-functioning communication-disordered pupils in learning a foreign language in an inclusive or integrative setting, it may be useful to identify barriers this group face in such a setting. Although many MFL teachers have some awareness already of these in a MFL classroom, in future the teacher of modern languages will have to be even better prepared for the potential arrival in their classroom of pupils across a wider range of the autistic spectrum, and have strategies prepared to reduce the barriers their impairments may cause.

### **Communication Disorder impairments.**

#### ***Autistic spectrum disorders from past to present***

This paper is concerned with high-functioning young people with autism or Asperger syndrome, because most pupils in the Mountfield Communication Disorder Unit have received such a diagnosis.

Autism was largely unrecognised until Kanner published his research (1943) in America on “Autistic disturbances of affective contact” which set the benchmark for this disorder – often referred to as classic autism. Bleuler (1908) first used the word autistic (from Greek autos meaning self) to describe the social withdrawal he saw in some of his schizophrenic patients – a crucial behavioural characteristic still a century later. However, it is known that autism had already been around a long time, as can be seen in stories world-wide (for example, the “blessed fools” of old Russia, the “wild boy” of Aveyron, and the folklore changeling children with their puzzling behaviour).

\* Snakes and Ladders graphics used in the PHIS Report (2001) are developed from an idea by this researcher in March 2001, to illustrate the ups and downs in autism service provision and is acknowledged as such in the PHIS report.

The results from Kanner's follow-up report (1971) on his original case study youngsters with autism back in the 1940's include an update on 'Don'.

In view of the area to be researched in this paper – an exploration of the experience for CD pupils in learning a MFL – it is interesting that Kanner is able to inform us about 'Don': "In college his major was in French and he showed a particular aptitude for languages". This suggests that learning a MFL can be a successful experience for some, although there would need to be a caveat that methods for MFL teaching have changed considerably since the 1940's, as it now involves a higher level of competence in social interaction and communications. The research may indicate whether it is now a more challenging subject.

In 1944 the Austrian Hans Asperger identified a group with autistic characteristics, but his research findings, "Die autistischen Psychopathen im Kindersalter," published in German during the last war received little attention until translated and discussed by Lorna Wing in the 1980s. The syndrome bearing his name, described by Frith (1991) as being a "dash of autism" has given rise to controversy whether it is the name for high-functioning autism, or is but one variation of an autistic spectrum disorder. Wing (1998) and others have suggested that there is a continuum of such disorders and movement along the continuum is possible with maturity. There is some agreement that Asperger syndrome and autism share a common "Triad of Impairment" (Wing and Gould, 1979) – unusual social interaction and communication and a lack of flexibility or imagination. In the teenage years, the impairments this group have may become more pronounced. Their social advances are likely to be gauche and many of their remarks age-inappropriate. In social communication, they speak too loudly or too softly, and often out of the teenage register in accent and idiom. Their lack of flexibility varies in presentation, but often entails a need for structure and routine, preparation for change, and some opportunity for de-stressing (perhaps by allowing space for obsessive behaviours.)

There are many current controversies surrounding these autistic spectrum disorders, such as why Asperger syndrome is apparently on the increase. Wing and Gould (1979) suggested a general prevalence rate of 22:10,000 but in 1997 Jordan and

Jones were suggesting 58:10,000 as a more likely figure. There is also alarm that the triple vaccine given to toddlers to protect against measles, mumps and rubella may contain a catalyst (mercury) which causes autism in a vulnerable child. These questions, although most interesting, are beyond the scope of this paper.

In this education authority when a young person receives a diagnosis of any form of autism, a Record of Needs is usually opened. The child and his parents (there is a much greater chance that the high functioning autistic child will be a boy) will be able to access the support services of therapists and in-class support, although the exact form will vary with the area.

### ***Provision***

Educational provision for teenagers in this group is very mixed. It ranges from highly supportive inclusive units (for example MCDU) to individualised support in mainstream classes in less populated areas, to an uncertain fate for those who remain undiagnosed throughout their school education. In spite of a rise in numbers diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder, a recent study by Brogan (2000) in the Greater Glasgow Health Board area highlighted how many are still unidentified. By the criteria Brogan used, 1195 Asperger individuals could perhaps have been identified across the city by the services but in fact only 79 were found – fewer than 7%. The number of Communication Disorder units is gradually increasing in Scotland. There are now two in this city, and five other secondary autism specific units in Scotland. In less populated regions, support may be offered as appropriate by learning support staff on an individualised basis of need.

The objective of each of these units or resourced bases is to enact the legislation cited above, and by appropriate mainstream inclusion and integration to enable these young communication disordered teenagers to reach their potential, both in their school years and beyond. Many should be able to benefit from doing a wide range of subjects, such as the MFL, at Access 2/3, Intermediate, Standard or Higher grade, and go on thereafter to work or further education at college. There will be a case study of Mountfield CDU as part of the research for this study in chapter four.

The importance of giving these young people a supportive school experience perhaps should not be underestimated. An examination of the published materials of articulate Asperger adults writing retrospectively about their earlier years shows an often haunting frankness about difficult situations in school where their impairment was unrecognised and unacknowledged and can make uncomfortable reading. Clare Sainsbury (2000) has described herself as a “Martian in the playground” with days full of silent despair. Vanessa Royal (in Attwood, 1998) found that feeling so different to other people made her feel “second best” (p. 42). Where the Asperger impairment is recognised, even belatedly, as for Liane Holliday Willey, following her daughter’s diagnosis, there is relief and a realisation of what can result from appropriate early intervention and a good support system – “a myriad (of) possibilities” (Willey, 1999, p. 95)

It would appear to be important that in order for these possibilities to be fulfilled, the school education of this group has to be sympathetic and appropriate in order to reduce barriers they may face when accessing the curriculum – this applies to teaching and learning in the MFL classroom as elsewhere in school.

### **Dyslexia**

As dyslexia co-exists with autism in some of the pupils studied or identified through this research (research question five, chapter two), a brief overview of its significance will be given here. Dyslexia, like Asperger syndrome, is a hidden difficulty; that is to say, it is not obvious from looking at the person that they have quite a disabling impairment. It is not surprising therefore to find dyslexic adults ruefully reviewing their schooldays, and having some horror stories to tell. Christopher Lee (1992) recalls being sent out to the “stupid trailer” (p. 8) in the early 1970s at school. He also describes how he used a trick to hide his disability – always writing messily so that his spelling problem was less obvious.

Dyslexic pupils, as others, reach the age and stage of learning a MFL, whether it is in primary or the beginning of secondary. The choice of foreign language for a dyslexic

pupil may be important, some teachers participating in this study claiming that Spanish is easier to learn than French because it is largely phonetic, others that a pictorial characters language such as Cantonese would be better. The reality in Scottish schools is that they are most likely to encounter French as their second language, although in Highland region the Gaelic medium education programme offered in certain primary schools means this may be the second language for some dyslexics (Appendix 2, Highland Region report), mirroring a similar language immersion programme in Wales. In Wales, all children now learn Welsh from the age of four, but apparently it is easier for dyslexics to learn Welsh rather than English as the code of the Welsh language is largely phonetic (Times Ed. Supplement, 2000). Swansea is regarded as a model local authority in this area. They acknowledged that there was a danger of children growing up illiterate in two languages and have devised a highly structured, multi-sensory Welsh medium programme which appears to be successful for their dyslexic population. Perhaps it has to be of some significance that it is the language often spoken in the community and family, not to mention on the local television.

In the Mountfield CDU as elsewhere there are pupils who have dyslexic problems, possibly alongside a communication disorder. This study will consider the similarities and differences in the barriers facing the dyslexic pupil and the high functioning autistic one and whether recommended strategies to help one set of barriers (for example, for dyslexic people) may also address the other group.

Crombie and McColl have researched the barriers of dyslexic pupils in learning a MFL, and have co-produced a grid summarising the learner characteristics of a dyslexic pupil, which may need to be addressed in the MFL classroom. Crombie (2000) highlights the fact that while the SED in 1989 stated that all children should have the chance to learn a foreign language, the department at the same time acknowledged the experience for some with special educational needs might be 'unrewarding and burdensome'. For those with difficulties in phonological and information processing, short term memory and sequencing, the challenge of tackling a second language when they may only just be getting to grips with the first one

seem overwhelming. The new SEED proposals to standardise and regulate more stringently the amount of MFL in Primary school may prove challenging to some dyslexic pupils. Crombie's and McColl's research is a valuable contribution in an area where what little there is otherwise comes from the USA. Sparks and Ganschow (1993, 1995) have conducted research with “at risk” learners (to include dyslexic pupils), and their findings suggest the effectiveness of structured multi-sensory teaching programmes which may also be beneficial to other learners. As mentioned previously, the report in the Times Educational Supplement (2000) on Welsh education concurs with this view. Crombie and McColl (2000) in their research agree with this, offering practical and detailed advice on how to put this into practice, advocating the involvement of all the sensory channels including the ‘problem’ areas of reading and writing. Richard Johnstone (1994) is another whose work in this area suggests the effectiveness of a more holistic approach. Both Crombie and McColl have been sources of data collected for this research through interviews.

### *A modern language for all learners*

McColl (2000) has addressed the challenge of making a MFL accessible to almost all pupils in secondary schools by offering much practical advice in her book to help schools and MFL teachers tackle this issue. She wishes to offer encouragement to teachers to get to grips with why a MFL should be accessible to all rather than focussing on why it might not be offered.

She identifies key areas in learning a MFL where the needs of individuals may vary and where barriers arising from any impairments, including communication disorders, will particularly need to be acknowledged and addressed in order to allow good learning to take place. She highlights how the MFL curriculum needs to be appropriate to all learners, with support given to allow realistic short-term targets to be met.

This book covers strategies for addressing the needs arising from a wide range of impairments and presents examples of success and good practice for many such pupils in the MFL classroom. A short section is included on pupils with a



communication disorder. McColl found that the “psychological baggage” (p. 81) many autistic pupils have in their own language might explain their sometimes-unexpected willingness to adopt a different persona and use the foreign language. The MFL’s usefulness in developing social skills in this group is also noted and suggestions are made as to how to tackle a difficulty maintaining eye contact in dialogue (by using puppets, for example). This book is currently unique in Scotland in addressing these issues which arise surrounding inclusion of pupils with various types of difficulty, and makes a very positive contribution to teaching MFL to a wide group of pupils whether in mainstream, units or special schools.

The suggestions above for a holistic approach as beneficial to a wider group of at risk learners seem useful advice for the teaching of a dual diagnosis group – pupils with dyslexia and autism. However, Asperger and high functioning autistic pupils do perform well in language (concrete not abstract) tests this being one feature differentiating them from those with classic autism. Whatever barriers the autistic spectrum disorder pupils in MCDU have, they seem to relate less to phonological difficulties, than to semantic-pragmatic aspects of language. Most pupils in the Mountfield CDU are avid readers (particularly silent reading,) especially of non-fiction, although all the younger ones are hooked on Harry Potter. They all seem to have a mastery of the written language, with good comprehension skills. This research may help separate these two impairments with their individual barriers, when looked at closely in the MFL classroom.

### **Modern Foreign Language teaching in Scotland**

2001 is the European year of languages, yet for many British people, including Scots, this is of little interest or moment. As a nation we continue to be self-satisfied that most of the world speak English as a second if not first language and that there is minimal need to put ourselves out to learn another MFL. This complacency has some basis if little justification: Language Futures Europe (2001) gives statistics that English is indeed the first foreign language in all EU member states and is learned by 26% of European primary and 90% secondary children. French, in comparison, is the

second European language, and is taught to 4% European primary and 32% secondary pupils.

Language relates to identity and culture, two aspects of civilised life over which many states have gone to war. There has to be a strong argument at least that English must not obliterate worldwide diversity of languages, becoming an Orwellian 1984 "Newspeak", and that we have a duty to encourage MFL learning in our young people.

The problem of the monoglot Scot was thought to have been tackled by the introduction of MFL learning as part of the core examinable curriculum for all Scottish secondary pupils in 1989. Now the MFL is widely available in P6 and 7, although varying considerably in quality and quantity, with primary teachers given intensive language training. The Scottish Executive's putting into effect the Action Group on Languages' report suggests an entitlement of 500 hours starting from Primary 6. The majority of primary pupils are probably more receptive to the MFL and less self-conscious about speaking it or acting out role-plays, and this is probably a good way forward for most. However, the dyslexic population, or those with MLD, may not have a sufficient grasp of their own language at this stage to be able to cope with the peculiarities of another.

The Action Group also believe that there must be better promotion of the employability of language graduates and that businesses must become involved to promote the usefulness of proficiency in the MFL (Times Ed. Supplement, 2000). Their report wanted to see a wider diversification in languages, the return of foreign language assistants and a central rôle for ICT. Primary teachers must receive a MFL component while in training, whilst secondary teachers must get experience teaching at primary level. Although the Action Group proposed a more important place for the MFL at upper secondary level – maybe even becoming a core skill – it recommended removal of compulsory language learning to S4 provided pupils have received their MFL entitlement, which many have claimed has de-motivated large numbers of pupils, and this has now been confirmed by the Scottish Executive. The MFL has

been taught in schools following the 5 – 14 guidelines for modern languages. These guidelines have recently been revised.

The Scottish examination system for the MFL is in transition as for other subjects and is changing to the Higher Still programme. Pupils will take courses at Access and Intermediate levels, as well as Higher. Access 2 and 3 seem to be suitable courses for those who require a highly structured course, with reduced language content, which can impart some awareness of a country's culture. Downey and Snyder (1999), cited in Crombie (2000), have observed that less language content combined with a more structured approach in MFL teaching in the USA meant dyslexic pupils' achievements compared well with those of the general population, and time will tell whether similar success will be the result of the Access courses in Scotland. One interesting and refreshingly realistic option the Action Group for languages considered was an acceptance of lower overall fluency in the MFL and a mix and match of the MFL + English + non-verbal strategies: a so-called "mixed-mode communication". This could complement the multi-sensory approach referred to above and may be an encouraging way forward for many pupils, including those with special educational needs.

### ***MFL trends generally***

Studies such as "Foreign Languages in the Upper Secondary school: a study of the causes of decline" (SCRE, 1999) have made uncomfortable reading for those involved in languages teaching in Scottish schools. Uptake at Higher in modern languages has declined by 50% since the late 1970s and echoes what has been happening in England. Although the S4 and S5 pupils interviewed for the research refuted the now clichéd view of themselves as "little Scotlanders," they did not believe an MFL Higher to be that useful in achieving admission to their chosen career, and indeed many consider it a difficult subject to get a top grade in. An important point was also made about the self-oriented content of the MFL curriculum that necessitates pupils sharing information about themselves. (This is also potentially a stumbling block for socially impaired pupils). The report highlighted

students' fears that the expectations of fluency in the MFL are set too high, resulting in a feeling of failure and lowering of self-esteem.

Another report (SOED, 1995) reviewed the opinions of the public, employers, parents, teachers and pupils on the relative importance of certain school subjects. While employers rated a MFL at 74% in the Scottish Office research (for example, Maths 90%,) the Scottish public rated a MFL at 61% (but Maths still 90%).

There appears then to be a widespread malaise in Scotland regarding MFL, which the Scottish Executive's response to Action Group may or may not succeed in addressing. Indeed it is hard to see how to create in Scotland, and its schools, the frenzied appetite for learning another world language, as seems apparent from television and newspapers in so many overseas countries for learning English. But if we are not to cheat our young people of future opportunities – particularly those youngsters who are already disadvantaged – we must keep trying to find a way forward on this issue.

#### ***Lessons from the Gaelic medium education programme***

Previous mention has been made of Swansea's handling of Welsh medium education and dyslexic pupils, and further comment on this is beyond the remit of this study. It is worth considering Highland Council's Gaelic medium education programme (GME), in some primary schools, and especially the 1994 procedural paper produced by them, (see appendix) in consultation with other areas, relating to GME and children with different special educational needs caused by, for example, language difficulties. This paper considered whether pupils who have dyslexia or a communication disorder should or should not be placed in GME classes. It concludes that where children have pronounced difficulties – severe speech and language difficulties, sensory or communication difficulties – entry to the GME programme would not be recommended. Those with a Record of Needs may be accepted on to the programme, provided the region could provide them with the support they require. If that is not possible, then GME will not be offered. Where the decision is not clear cut, additional factors will be taken into account, such as whether Gaelic is

spoken in the child's home, or if it is a significant language of the community. As far as dyslexia is concerned, where a pupil has entered the GME and is struggling, it may be proposed that they continue with Gaelic speaking only, so that they continue to derive some benefit from the programme. High functioning autistic and Asperger pupils are not specifically mentioned, but as their language skills are usually strong they would probably be given the chance to enter the programme, particularly if this was the language of their community. This report is interesting and perhaps relevant to the current paper in recommending continuing with GME where a natural multi-sensory approach within the community can support those with certain difficulties.

### **Support for Learning issues in the MFL classroom.**

A barrier, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is “an obstruction which bars advance or prevents access” and this definition seems apt in describing the hurdles many face (not just those with special needs) in accessing the full mainstream curriculum, including a modern language. In this section, the issues surrounding barriers those with communication disorders face will be considered, and then how the resources, both people and aids, can help address these barriers.

### ***Possible barriers in the classroom***

Powell and Jordan (1997) have said that one should regard the challenges autism causes not in terms of deficit but rather as a “different way of thinking and learning” (p. 3) and as each child is an individual, the focus must always be on the individual pupil at that time, in that context.

Tony Attwood (1998), a world figure in Asperger syndrome, discusses instances where a pupil's Asperger behaviour may cause a barrier to learning. The so-called triad of impairments found across the autistic spectrum causes barriers particularly in social behaviour: their gestures may also be awkward, their movements stiff and repetitive, their facial expression inappropriate. These varying characteristics will not help them merge seamlessly into a mainstream school setting and work in pairs or groups may present a problem. Other teenagers' responses to their “faux-pas” (literally, false steps, so rather appropriate) – for example, sniggering behind their

backs – may cause them to “close down” in class or react with a frustrated verbal outburst. No learning takes place while these issues remain to be resolved.

Another barrier to learning is the tendency of many to become “hooked” on a routine or special interest – the third aspect of the triad. Tony Attwood describes many with harmless interests or obsessions, such as collecting the lids of Smartie tubes, and the Pokemon cards have indeed fascinated some in the last two years. However, these obsessions can take over, dominating their thoughts and words, and can persist when their peer-group has moved on to the next craze, causing them to be regarded now as “sad” for their outmoded obsession.

A necessity for order and routine is a common trait (Attwood, 1998, p. 99) but it can become a barrier when a pupil’s work in class suddenly stops because something is not right that day, in that classroom, with that whiteboard, book, pencil, chair or lunchbox . . . Teachers and auxiliaries need to be as understanding as possible when this occurs, because the pupil will close down as far as learning is concerned until order and routine is re-established. Because Asperger type pupils are cognitively high functioning, within autism, as they progress through secondary school (even in a supportive environment) they become increasingly aware of their own barriers, of which stress of one kind or another has to be the greatest, and in itself is self-perpetuating. Theo Peeters (1997) suggests that the more someone on the autistic spectrum feels a situation is becoming really difficult, the more they will fall back on ritualistic behaviour or habits to keep their fear under control. In social skills classes pupils are encouraged to talk about the negative effects of stress on them, and to devise, with the speech and language therapist, strategies which may address it.

### ***Response to barriers***

In considering a response to the barriers, we should maybe look to articulate high functioning individuals as well as to the experts to see what is considered most effective in reducing barriers. One should perhaps add the caveat that many of this population may have a lack of interest in the social aspect of autism (which "normal" people regard as an impairment) and take a similar view to Temple Grandin that: “ If

autism and dyslexia were prevented maybe the price would be turning potentially talented individuals into ones with mediocre talents” (Grandin, 1984, p. 147). Such a quotation gives this researcher much food for thought.

Most of this group of individuals, however, acknowledge that there were times in their lives, particularly at school, which were very difficult to cope with. One such has said he responded best to teachers who were very process, not achievement orientated (anon, 1999, on non-verbal learning disorder line on Internet), and this would corroborate the need for structure which the inflexibility aspect of the triad may produce. It is also probably true that whilst secondary teachers focus on end of year examinations or assessments and future prelims and external examinations, this group may find it challenging to focus on some point or goal in the future which does not seem relevant to their work in the present.

Another articulate Asperger writer, Clare Sainsbury, has several recommendations for teachers, having gone through the academic powerhouse St. Paul’s Girls School undiagnosed. Her suggestions consolidate experiences of other academic high flyers from across the world whom she made contact with by e-mail.

She feels that teachers need to make explicit all the unspoken classroom rules; that pupils’ strengths and clusters of ability should be valued, instead of often making them feel a failure. She also offers specific advice that these pupils should be allowed to move out of a classroom with a noisy vibrating strip light, and in physical education classes should be allowed to stay on the periphery. These suggestions illustrate quite graphically how alien her school environment felt to her and how different her sensitivities were. It also shows how supportive, understanding adults around her could have made an enormous difference (and she was more fortunate than some in this respect.)

Liane Holliday Willey, writing in 1999, speaks of her earlier confusion in life (before her adult diagnosis) the "running in circles for most of my life" followed by relief on diagnosis that “the storm had lifted” (p. 88–89). This seems to echo Sainsbury’s

feeling of alienation, both crying out for help through their autistic confusion, which caused them great distress.

Vanessa Royal, cited in Attwood (1998), describes how although she looks normal, little things just make her wild. Unfortunately, such behaviour will be taken by most teachers in a mainstream setting to be unacceptable, and highlights the need for these pupils not to be abandoned in a big mainstream school, without providing for them supportive teachers or auxiliaries who can act as their advocates when things do go wrong.

One of the greatest areas of difficulty for high functioning and Asperger pupils is making transitions (again because of the inflexibility aspect of the triad) and changing schools (for example, to secondary) can cause initial problems. Asperger himself, cited by Dewey in Frith (1998) noted: "At school they cannot be handled in the ordinary way" (p. 195).

Many practical and workable suggestions for addressing Asperger syndrome barriers in the classroom are put forward in Cumine, Leach and Stevenson's excellent practitioner's manual (1998). This publication fills a gap and will be helpful particularly to mainstream teachers meeting such a pupil in their class for the first time. Perhaps the factor that can make the biggest difference to their outcome in school is the people who work with them, and support them in good times and bad, in a caring and age appropriate manner. These people learn to identify what will make the difference to a particular individual – maybe having a haven to go to at break instead of the playground; maybe a laptop computer to help in class; maybe simply a clock on their desks in a mainstream class so that tasks are completed to schedule. In other words, people and aids are linked inexorably together as powerful ways of facilitating the school and classroom experience for this vulnerable group.

### **The authority for evolution of support for learning**

Over the last quarter century support for learning in schools has evolved considerably as a result of three important reports.



1. The education of pupils with learning difficulties report (PWLD), 1978
2. The DES Committee of Enquiry into special educational needs (Warnock report), 1978
3. Effective provision for special educational needs (EPSEN), 1994

### ***Recommendations relevant to this paper***

#### **PWLD**

This report introduced (inter al.) the key idea of support being done alongside pupils in class by support for learning teachers, who would require specialised training.

#### **The Warnock Report**

It recommended that local authorities should be aware of the extent of special needs in their population which could be up to 20%. Some children with special needs should join a special class or resourced base attached to a mainstream school. More resources should be developed to meet these special needs. Within two years of the school leaving age, each pupil should have a future needs assessment, to consider further schooling or entry to work or FE.

#### **The EPSEN Report**

This recommended the identification of special educational needs in terms of each individual at a particular time so that appropriate provision can be targeted. It highlighted that the presence of barriers to learning does not mean disabilities, rather that the crux of the problem is usually accessing the curriculum. This should be appropriate to their needs, planned through realistic target setting and individualised educational programmes (IEPs). School management, teaching staff (including support for learning staff) and parents should develop an interactive and co-operative approach to enable these pupils to achieve certification and empower them for later life by encouraging independence of thinking.

A recent document (1999), the Manual of Good Practice in Special Educational Needs, summarises the wider legal framework in this area and provides guidance on how to promote the highest possible achievement for these pupils. In Key area A – working together – the involvement of all those concerned in the pupil's education is stressed. In Key area B, providing an appropriate curriculum, the importance of

collaboration between all the support services is highlighted, a “common involvement with client groups” (SOEID 1998), for example when working on the IEP, with the intended result of the so-called "joined-up thinking."

This theme is further developed in "Raising standards: Setting targets" (SOEID 1999) where collaborative planning of targets, detailing staff and resources required, is viewed as essential. Many of these support for learning issues and recommendations have been considered and acted upon in the Mountfield CDU - see Chapter Four, case study MCDU.

## **SUMMARY OF CHAPTER ONE**

This chapter has reviewed the current situation in the different areas relevant to this research, which is considering whether learning a modern language is all pupils' right or not right for all, with reference to secondary-aged high-functioning pupils with autism.

It appears that children's rights generally are now the subject of legislation which gives them similar rights to life opportunities as others for the first time. Criteria for diagnosing communication disorders have become wider and more young people are being identified, and given a Record of Needs. Suitable educational provision is being provided, which will increasingly be in a mainstream setting. Some children will also have coexisting impairments such as dyslexia, which will require certain strategies to help them fully access the curriculum. A multi-sensory approach is considered by some to be highly beneficial.

As autism gives rise to particular behaviours which may cause barriers to learning, an awareness of what these are likely to be is helpful so that strategies can be formulated to address them. Those who went through school undiagnosed found many aspects of school life difficult. The experience of learning a MFL will be more beneficial if their needs are understood and addressed appropriately by a MFL teacher and support staff. This, however, needs to be set against quite a negative background in Scotland, where modern language learning may not be perceived as a top priority subject amongst pupils and the general public despite increasing ties with Europe.