

## Current Special Needs Education and Integration in the United Kingdom (1)

~ The School System and The Special School ~

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### 1. Background

The United Kingdom is situated in two large islands (the island of Great Britain and the island of Ireland) in the North West of Europe.

The population is about 58.2 million (England: 48.3 million, Scotland: 5.3 million, Wales: 3.0 million, North Ireland: 1.6 million). More than 20 million people are under the age of 25 years old. The biggest population is in the South East of England where there are 18 million (London: around 7 million) (Moorhead, 1996). The official language is English.

The compulsory schooling is for 12 years. There appears to have been a general fall in the birth rate over recent years, and the highest school populations are now in the secondary schools rather than in the primary schools.

The population of the United Kingdom grew steadily from the end of World War II and included new immigrants from the Carribean and the Indian subcontinent. Since the early 1970s it has remained stable, but the demographic profile of the total population has changed in the 1980s and 1990s.

There are more old people now than ever before and there are almost 2 million single-parent families. The great majority of families are small. Over 80 per cent of households in Great Britain include dependent children (Moorhead, 1996).

### 2. The School System in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, compulsory schooling is for children between the ages of 5 and 16; there are 12 years of schooling. But, in recent years, more children begin school at 4 years of age, if they are accepted by the school. It is important to mention that the general school system includes a large percentage of pupils with Special Educational Needs

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receiving their education in mainstream or ordinary schools. Generally, the school (ordinary and special) system in the UK falls into four levels, as follows (O'Hanlon, 1993 ; DFE, 1994) : 1. Nursery : 3-5 years, 2. Primary : 5-11 years, 3. Secondary : 11-16/18 years, 4. Further, vocational and higher education : 16/18+ years. The special school system for pupils usually comprises the three main levels 1, 2 and 3, and often with a combination of 2 or 3 of the levels, eg. special schools for pupils aged 3-18 years(cf : aged 2-19 years, Nottingham, The Shepherd School, in June 1996).

### 1) Pre-School

Pre-school provision by a Local Education Authority (LEA) may take the forms as follows :

(1) Nursery classes within primary schools -separate classes for 3-5 year-olds which are an integral part of a primary school.

(2) Reception classes -children who are just under compulsory school age can gain early admission to the first (reception) class in an infant or first school.

Pre-school children may also attend day nurseries, which are provided by local Social Services departments, and regulated by the Department of Social Security.

Private provision, including playgroups and child-minders, have to be registered with local Social Services departments.

In the UK, around 33,000 children attend local authority day nurseries, around 174,000 children go to registered child-minders and approximately 477,000 children go to registered playgroups (O'Hanlon, 1993 ; DFE, 1994).

### 2) Primary School

The legal definition of primary education covers children aged 5-11 years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and 5-12 years in Scotland.

Primary schools are comprised mainly as follows :

(1) Infant Schools—for children aged 5-7 years.

(2) Junior Schools—for children aged 7-11 years.

(3) Combined Infant and Junior Schools—these are the most common and cater to children of both age groups.

An alternative system, introduced in some areas in the late 1960s, is the three-tier system, of lower (or first), middle and upper schools, based on the idea that the age of 8, 9 or even 10 was a more appropriate time for children to make the transition between the informal integrated teaching of the early years and the more formal vocational and professionally-focused subject teaching offered in the secondary stage (DES, 1978 ; 1980, Bennet, 1989, Braham, 1996).

Middle schools are developed in a variety of patterns ; some catered to 8-12 year-olds, others to 9-13 years-old, and yet others to 10-14 years olds.

But now, middle schools are confined almost entirely to England (DES, 1988), where as

Scotland has only two middle schools and Wales one (DES, 1989, DEF, 1994).

### 3) Secondary School

Secondary education is compulsory up to the age of 16, and pupils can stay on at school for up to three years beyond that.

Grammar, secondary modern and comprehensive schools in England and Wales (and, with different terminology, in Scotland and Northern Ireland) form the secondary school system. Maintained secondary education is now almost entirely comprehensive (O'Hanlon, 1993).

The principal characteristics of schools are as follows:

- (1) Grammar schools provide a mainly academic education for pupils aged 11 to 19 who have been selected on the basis of ability.
- (2) Secondary modern provide a general education for those who do not go to grammar schools, usually up to 16 years (though pupils can stay on longer).
- (3) Comprehensive accept secondary-age pupils of mixed ability and school aptitude.

In Scotland, the closest equivalent to English and Welsh grammar schools are called senior secondary schools, while the equivalent of secondary moderns are senior secondary schools (however, the phrase "grammar school" sometimes appear in the names of particular schools in Scotland).

In Northern Ireland, a selective system still predominates, though with a few comprehensive schools in certain areas. Corresponding to secondary moderns are secondary intermediate schools. About one-eighth of secondary pupils in Northern Ireland attend grammar secondary schools; the remainder attend secondary intermediateschools (DES, 1944; 1962; 1970; 1978; 1980; 1981a; 1981b; 1986a; 1986b; 1988; 1989a; 1989b; 1990a; 1990b; 1991; 1992a; 1992b; 1993; 1996a; 1996b; Judith et al., 1996).

### 4) Tertiary Education

Tertiary education is the third stage of education and is voluntary, non-compulsory post-school education. Tertiary education is divided into further general education, which takes place in colleges of education, and higher education, which takes place in universities, formal polytechnics and colleges of higher education. Pupils with special educational needs are placed into tertiary education according to college and university admission procedures.

An estimated 4 percent of pupils with special needs are included in this sector (Ainscow & Twedde, 1992).

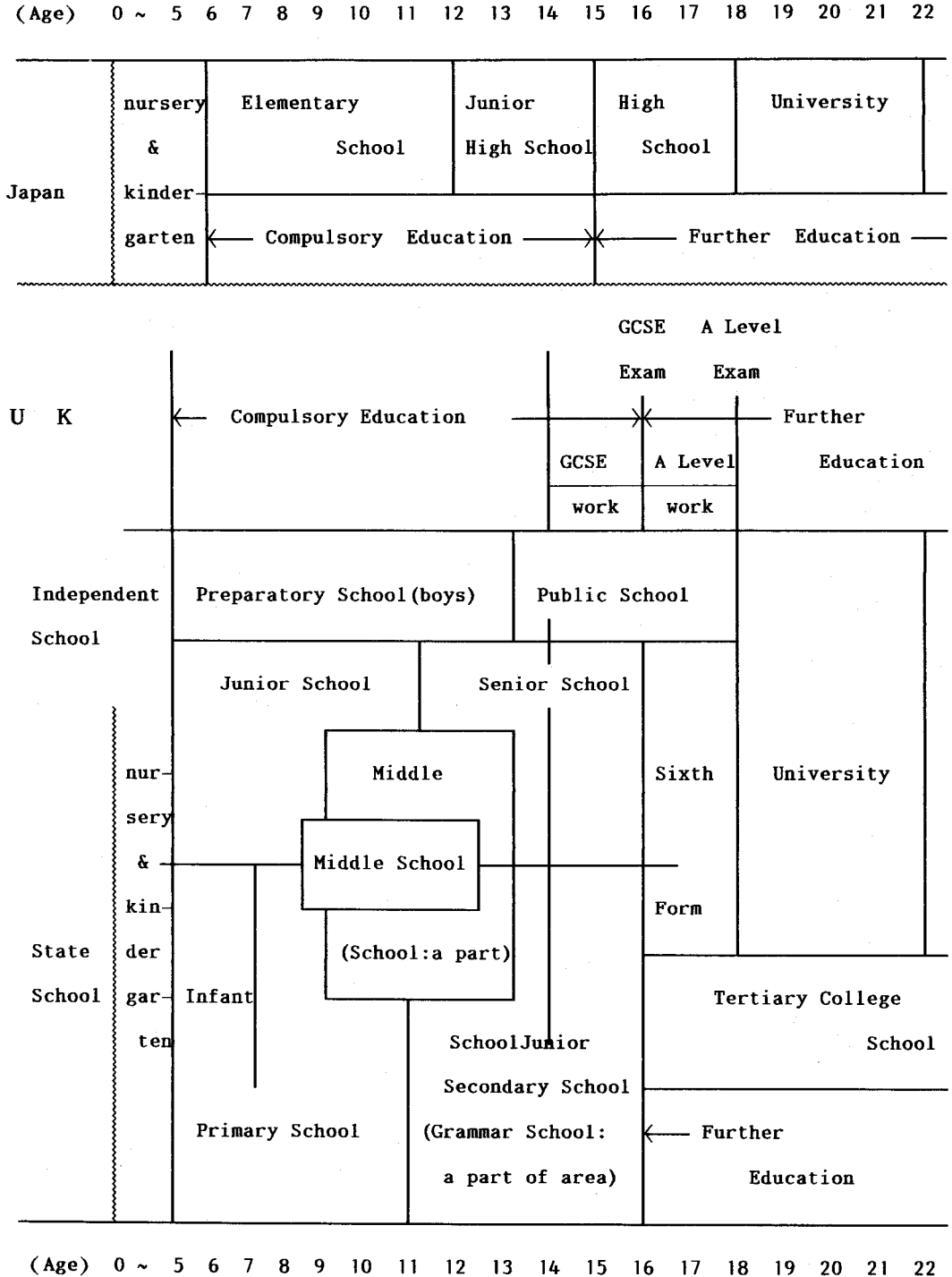


Fig. 1 Educational Systems in United Kingdom and Japan (Fumisato KAMADA: '97)

### 3. Special Schools in the United Kingdom

Special schools provide education for children with special needs, on the grounds that they cannot be educated satisfactorily in ordinary schools. They are generally much fewer than mainstream schools: 83 per cent of special schools in the United Kingdom have 100 pupils or fewer; 99 per cent have 200 or fewer (August 1987). Special schools often take the full age range, including nursery and post-16. They have a lower pupil: teacher ratio than any other type of school: 6.3: 1 in the United Kingdom as of Aug. 1987 (Government Statistical Service, 1989). Special classes and units may also be provided in mainstream schools (especially primary) for children with particular needs, eg, partial hearing or partial sight, "disruptive" children or pupils with learning difficulties. In the United Kingdom in 1986, the numbers of such units officially recognized by the DES were 1,247 in primary schools and 660 in secondary schools. The percentages of children with different types of handicap in special schools are shown in Table 1 for the United Kingdom in 1982, the last year for which such data were collected (DES, 1988; 1989a; 1989b; 1990a; 1990b).

Since the 1981 Education Act came into effect in 1983, children assessed as having special educational needs were given an individual "statement" of these needs instead of being assessed within a category of handicap.

In 1988, around 138,000 children in the United Kingdom had statements of special educational needs: 1.9 per cent of the total school population. Table 2 shows that the great majority (68 per cent) of children with statements were educated in special schools, and a further 10 per cent were in officially-recognized special classes and units in mainstream schools. About 16 per cent were educated in ordinary classes in mainstream schools (DES, 1988; 1991; 1992a).

Since the 1981 Act, the percentage of the United Kingdom's total school population educated in special schools has fallen slightly, from just under 1.4 per cent in January 1980 to just over 1.3 per cent in 1987/8 (Government Statistical Service, 1989; DES, 1981a; 1981b; 1986a; 1986b; 1988; 1989a; 1989b; 1990a; 1990b; 1991; 1992a; 1992b; 1993; 1996a; 1996b; Judith and Juliet, 1996; ).

These figures can be further confirmed by reviewing more recent government statistics, given in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 1. Categories of handicap of pupils aged 5—15 years attending special schools, the United Kingdom, 1982 (Source: DES, 1991)

Categories of handicap of pupils	%
Educational subnormal (moderate)	49.5
Educational subnormal (severe)	17.7

Maladjusted	11.7
Physically handicapped	9.1
Delicate	3.0
Deaf	2.2
Speech defect	1.8
Partially sighted	1.4
Epileptic	1.2
Partially hearing	1.1
Blind	0.8
Autistic	0.5
Total	100.0

Table 3 shows that pupils in ordinary mainstreaming schools are increasingly being stated as pupils in need of special educational provision. Numbers have risen from 10,228 in 1989 to 11,084 in 1990.

Table 2. Educational provision for children with statements of special educational needs, the United Kingdom, 1988 (Source: DES, 1988)

Educational provision for children	%
Special schools (and awaiting admission)	68.0
Ordinary classes in ordinary school	16.0
Special classes in ordinary schools	10.0
Independent schools under local authority	4.0
Education outside school (including hospital schools)	2.0
Total	100.0

(Total number of children: 138,067)

Table 3. Special provision in ordinary schools  
(Source: DES, 1990a; 1990b; 1991)

Special provision in ordinary schools	1989	1990
Children newly receiving special educational provision under a statement in ordinary schools	10,228	11,084
Children transferring from special schools to special educational provision in ordinary schools	1,159	977

Table 4. Statemented pupils in ordinary schools (Source : DES, 1990a ; 1990b ; 1991)

Statemented pupils in ordinary schools	1987	1988	1989	1990
Total primary, middle and secondary pupils with statements	33,277	40,931	47,262	54,299

There are considerable numbers of children transferring from special to mainstreaming schools: 2,136 pupils in the two-year period. The total number of statemented pupils in ordinary schools has risen by 21,022 in the last four years (from 1987 to 1990), as shown in Table 4. There is definite evidence of an increasing inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in ordinary schools, and further evidence that this trend is affecting the number of pupils in special schools, whose overall numbers have decreased from around 7,800 in 1981 to around 6,100 pupils in 1990 (DES : 1991).

And special schools in the same period have decreased from around 1,600 to around 1,400 (DES : 1991).

Currently, there is a national figure of 2.68 per cent of the total school population with statements, of which 54 per cent in 1995 are in mainstream schools.

And the remaining 46 per cent were in separate special schools.

Since 1982, just before the implementation of the 1981 Education Act, the trend has been towards an overall national decrease of pupils in special schools, from 1.72 per cent in 1982, to 1.47 per cent in 1991, as shown in Fig. 2, and it shows the percentage of 5-15 year olds in special schools in England (1982-1992). But Fig. 2 shows this decreasing trend might be reversing from 1992, when the figure increased to 1.49 per cent. The most recent figures for 1993-1995 are not yet reported. Furthermore, the Adult Commission Report in 1992 indicates that since the passage of the 1981 Education Act there is an increasing proportion of pupils with special needs educated in ordinary, rather than in special, schools. The Report supported the practice of integration or inclusion of all pupils in its evaluation of ordinary schools, and which were said to match special schools in the quality of the learning experienced by pupils with special educational needs (Brahm, 1990 a ; 1990b ; 1992 ; 1996).

However, it was found that there was great variability in the responses of LEAs to the implementation of the 1981 Education Act, due to a lack of clarity on what constitutes "special educational needs" and the responsibilities of the local authorities towards these pupils (Welton, 1982). There was also a lack of accountability for pupil's progress and school resources, and a general lack of incentive for local authorities to implement the 1981 Act. It was found that the proportion of pupils statemented in local authorities varied from less than 1 per cent to more than 3 per cent (Brahm, 1996).

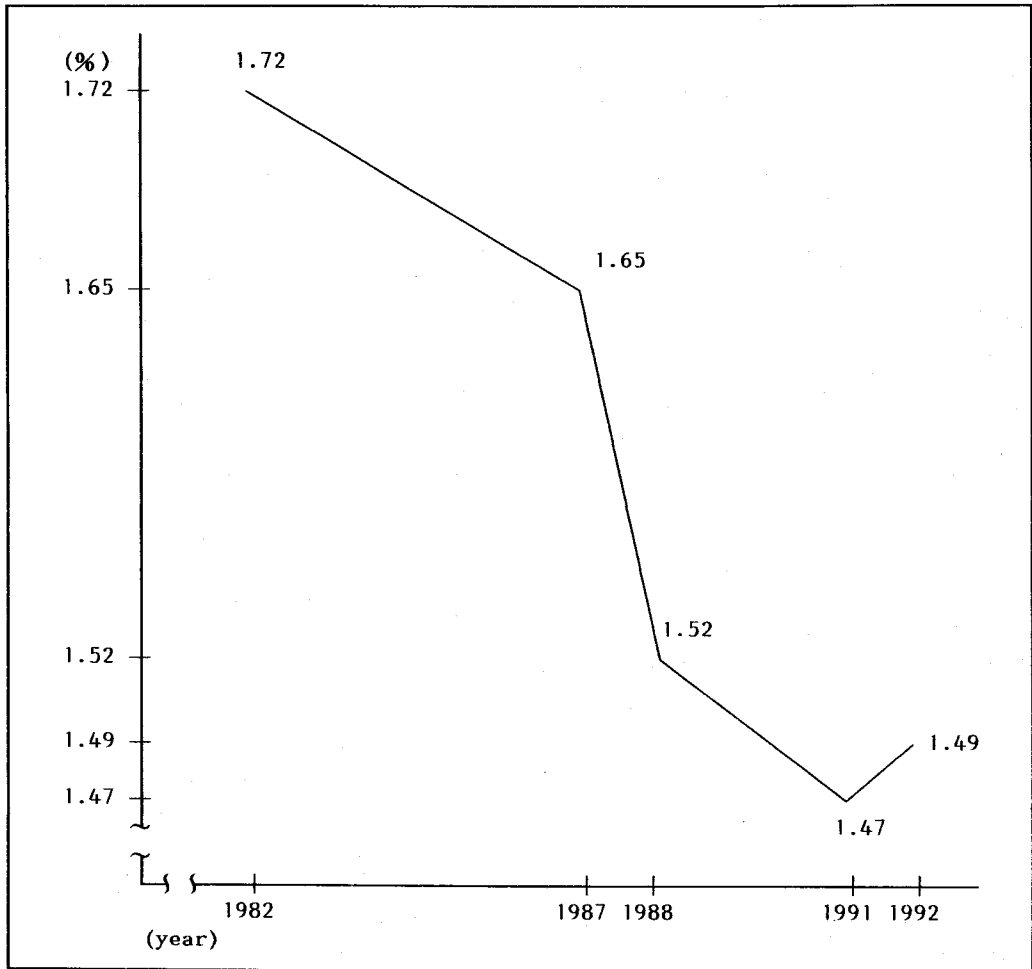


Fig. 2. Percentage of 5-15 year olds in special schools in England, 1982-92

(Source : Brahm Norwich, 1996)

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