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The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in secondary school physical education[†]

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In light of the demands of the revised National Curriculum for Physical Education in England (DfEE/QCA, 1999) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Discrimination Act (DfES, 2001a), this paper presents some preliminary observations on how PE teachers endeavour to include pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in secondary school physical education (PE). Findings from a small-scale study revealed that whilst teachers expressed a commitment to providing pupils with SEN with 'equal opportunities'—to participate in the same learning contexts as their 'more-able' peers—in practice, this was not always the case. The paper concludes by suggesting that the apparent tendency of teachers to prioritise 'traditional' team games within PE serves to exclude, rather than facilitate the full inclusion of many pupils with SEN. Moreover, it appears that these pupils are in effect being integrated into, rather than included in, PE.

Keywords: *Inclusion; Integration; Special Educational Needs; Physical Education*

Introduction

Over the last decade or so, the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream education has become increasingly the focus of national and international policy on education (Armstrong, 1998). Before exploring the significance of this policy for physical education teachers and others within the subject-community, it should be noted that the phrase 'pupils with SEN' is employed here to refer to those pupils, some of whom may have disabilities, who have particular learning needs that arise from a wide range of difficulties—including cognitive, physical, sensory, communicative or behavioural difficulties (Audit Commission, 2002; Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2001a).¹ Thus, whilst there are no

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common definitions of SEN in (physical) educational policy (Audit Commission, 2002), pupils are typically considered to have SEN 'if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them' (DfES, 2001b, p. 6). Accordingly, these pupils are considered to have a learning difficulty if they:

- (a) have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or
- (b) have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority; or
- (c) are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at (a) or (b) above or would so do if special educational provision was not made for them (DfES, 2001b, p. 6).

Whilst this conceptual distinction of learning difficulties is useful insofar as it provides an indication of the criteria that help teachers to identify pupils with SEN, it is equally important to realise that:

A distinction needs to be made between children with special educational needs . . . and children with special educational needs in physical education. The latter group will include almost all children with movement difficulties, many of whom will not have formal statements of special educational needs. We also need to recognise gifted children as having special educational needs that are often not accommodated by schools (Department of Education and Science (DES)/Welsh Office (WO), 1991, p. 35).

However, with regard to the aim of including pupils with disabilities and SEN in PE, it is equally important to acknowledge the context specific nature of disability and SEN:

There will be some children who have special educational needs in other academic subjects, including some of those who have formal statements under the 1981 Education Act, who may not have special needs in physical education. By the same token, far more children, who do not have formal statements under the Act, will have special needs in physical education (DES/WO, 1991, p. 35).

Before exploring those salient issues which provided the context for the study, it is worth noting at this juncture, that whilst the term SEN may also refer to specially gifted pupils (Audit Commission, 2002; DES/WO, 1991; Department for Education & Employment/Qualifications & Curriculum Authority [DfEE/QCA], 1999), this group of pupils are not the focus of study here.

The study in context: inclusive education and 'equalising opportunities'

The commitment by many countries to providing a more inclusive education system and equalising opportunities for all pupils in mainstream education, was no more evident than in the Salamanca Statement on inclusive education issued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1994). In particular, the statement emphasised the need to develop an education system designed to account for the diversity of needs presented by the pupils found

therein, and was premised upon, amongst other things, the need to develop an 'inclusive' orientation towards education that would contribute to the development of a 'more inclusive society' (UNESCO, 1994). The focus of this paper, however, is the inclusion of pupils with SEN in secondary school PE in light of the revised National Curriculum Physical Education (NCPE) 2000 for England, which featured 'for the first time a detailed and overarching statement on inclusion' (DfEE/QCA, 1999, p. 3). Essentially, the inclusion statement in the revised NCPE created an expectation that teachers would ensure that all pupils 'are enabled to participate as fully and effectively as possible within the National Curriculum and the statutory assessment arrangements' therein (DfEE/QCA, 1999, p. 33).

Set in this context, by drawing upon the findings of a small-scale sociological study which explored PE teachers' views of, and their associated practices towards, the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream PE, this paper endeavours to examine some aspects of the inclusion of these pupils in mainstream PE whom, it is claimed, have been a notable omission in the growing body of research on inclusion and 'equal opportunities' (see, also, Penney, 2002; Vickerman, 2002). Before noting some of the salient aspects of (physical) educational provision for pupils with SEN in England as they have developed over the last 50 years or so, it is worth briefly outlining the often-conflated terms of inclusion and integration and the associated concept of 'equal opportunities' in the context of PE.

Conceptualising inclusion and integration in physical education

Recently, Vickerman (2002) has noted how the terms inclusion, integration and mainstreaming are often used interchangeably—by both academics and teachers themselves—with regard to the incorporation of pupils with SEN in PE. For Vickerman (2002, p. 79) this tendency has led to 'potential confusion in the interpretation of values and principles related to inclusive education'. It is not the intention of this paper, however, to explore in detail the often contestable differences—in theory and practice—between such terms,² but suffice to say it seems that there are nevertheless some broad areas of agreement on how they relate to the incorporation of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools.

Broadly speaking, it is generally accepted that the integration of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools involves 'placing' rather than 'including' these pupils in schools and curricula intended for pupils of higher ability (Barton, 1993). In this regard, integration has been considered an assimilating process through which pupils with SEN 'fit in' to the existing arrangements (such as the structure of the NCPE) in schools (Barton, 1993; Fredrickson & Cline, 2002).

Conversely, what is understood by inclusion in an education context has generated rather more debate than that surrounding 'integration', which has, in the process, tended to ignore the constraints within which teachers work. Nonetheless, an enduring feature of recent policy—both in England and elsewhere—is that inclusion 'within the field of education . . . is reflected in the development of strategies that seek to bring about a genuine equalisation of opportunity' (UNESCO, 1994, p. 11). Indeed, in the revised NCPE it is claimed that '(E)quality of opportunity is one of a broad set of

common values and purposes which underpin the school curriculum and the work of schools' (DfEE/QCA, 1999, p. 4). Such strategies might include planning PE lessons and curricula that suit the abilities and needs of all pupils—including those with SEN—rather than modifying what is already planned to accommodate them (Barton, 1993). This emphasis on giving all pupils an equal opportunity and right to participate in the same learning context is, according to Meek (1991), the principle behind 'mainstreaming', or better, the process of returning pupils with SEN from special schools to mainstream primary and secondary schools. In short, 'mainstreaming' in PE, suggests Meek (1991, p. 84; original emphasis), 'rests upon the assumption that *PE is for all children*'.

Having said that, it is worth reminding ourselves what a sociological perspective—on a highly political and emotive issue such as this—does, or perhaps more importantly, does not involve. The first point of note is that it is not the role of sociologists to proselytise upon a particular conceptualisation of inclusion and then suggest courses of action based upon one's own ideological inclinations; not least because this can, and frequently does, serve to undermine the effectiveness of the original course of action. As such, the intention of this paper is to recognise the processual and contested nature of various conceptualisations of inclusion and inclusive practices. That is to say, it is more appropriate to understand how the process of including pupils with SEN in PE develops and changes over time, whilst acknowledging how the contested nature of different interpretations of, and claims made for, those processes are likely to be circumscribed by people's contexts and values.

Educational provision for pupils with special educational needs

To conceptualise current (physical) education provision for pupils with SEN—and the recent re-emphasis on the inclusion of these pupils in mainstream education—as a purely recent development would be to make a significant error, for these contemporary developments form part of a long-term social process that can be traced as far back as the mid 1800s. Indeed, it is argued that the process of including these pupils in mainstream PE, as with all social processes, is best conceptualised as a long-term process that is 'not only unplanned, but also unfinished' (Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998, p. 229). In light of the relatively detailed coverage that this process has received elsewhere (see, for example, DES, 1978; Fredrickson & Cline, 2002; Halliday, 1993), I shall confine my discussion to an analysis of developments since the introduction of the 1944 Education Act.

Following the 1944 Education Act, pupils with SEN were assigned to medically defined categories, including: the physically handicapped, blind and educationally sub-normal (Halliday, 1993). Following a medical or psychological assessment pupils were placed into special education in predetermined categories of impairment which, Halliday (1993) suggests, did not consider their individual needs or competencies. Based on the recommendations of the Warnock Report (DES, 1978), these medically defined categories were replaced with the concept of SEN in the 1981 Education Act to prevent the sharp distinction between two groups of children: the handicapped and the non-handicapped. This reclassification of pupils, which was

based on their individual needs, led to the identification of as many as 20% of children considered to have SEN, of which only 2% were educated in special schools³ (DES, 1978; Thomas, 2003).

According to Halliday (1993), the legislation set forth in the 1981 Act further encouraged what has been a 'partial and gradual transference' of pupils from special to mainstream schools and thus mainstream PE. It has been partial in as much as it was typically those pupils with less severe disabilities who were being educated in mainstream schools, whilst those with more severe disabilities tended to remain in the special school sector (Halliday, 1993; Thomas, 2003). In recent years, however, and perhaps unsurprisingly given the demands of recent government policy (DfEE, 1997; DfES, 2001a), there has been a growing tendency for pupils with SEN of various kinds to be educated in mainstream schools.

In light of this development, it is worthwhile exploring a number of issues relating to the inclusion of pupils with SEN in PE, and NCPE in particular. Before doing so, however, it is useful to note the findings of the 'Every Body Active' project (Stafford, 1989), which concluded that pupils with SEN were frequently excluded from specific activities (most notably team games and athletics), offered a limited programme of activities, and rarely participated in extra-curricular PE (Stafford, 1989). According to Stafford (1989) it was in the context of these 'major deficiencies' (p. 106) in secondary school PE provision for pupils with SEN that the development of the NCPE and its implications for these groups of pupils were made.

The National Curriculum for Physical Education in England and Wales

The introduction of the NCPE in 1992 established a 'broad and balanced curriculum' as a statutory entitlement for all pupils in all state schools in England and Wales. Whilst it is intended that all pupils should experience a broad range of involvement in the activity areas of games, athletics, dance, gymnastics, swimming and outdoor and adventure activities (OAA) that comprise the NCPE, Penney and Evans (1997, 1999) have repeatedly emphasised that since its inception, the NCPE has continued to 'privilege' sport over physical activity and sustained interest in competitive sport specifically, and team games in particular. In so doing, there continues to be a corresponding marginalisation of other activities—in particular, dance, swimming and OAA—within NCPE (Waddington *et al.*, 1997; Waddington *et al.*, 1998; Penney, 2002).

However, even prior to the implementation of the NCPE, it was recognised by the NCPE Working Group that teachers would experience difficulty in 'fully integrating children with (SEN) into all aspects of a physical education programme' (DES/WO, 1991, p. 36). Of particular relevance to the present study was the acknowledgement by the Working Group that 'traditional' team games is an area of activity in which teachers might experience 'particular difficulty' in incorporating some pupils with SEN (DES/WO, 1991). More specifically, it was suggested that:

Modifications to conventional games sometimes facilitate access, but the placing of a child with a visual impairment, or with a severe locomotor disability, in a class learning netball or rugby are not likely to be successful (DES/WO, 1991, p. 38).

Conversely, the Working Group considered those activities that are increasingly marginalized within the PE curriculum, such as dance, swimming and OAA, as particularly suitable activities in which pupils with SEN can be fully included with their peers in mainstream PE (DES/WO, 1991).

Hence, whilst the specific nature of a pupil's SEN and the support they receive in lessons can be fundamental in determining what activities they are able to participate in, it has been suggested that it is the nature of the activities (that is to say, the patterns of social relationships involved in various activities) provided in the PE curriculum that can ultimately preclude these pupils from participating fully with their peers in mainstream PE (Barton, 1993; Penney & Evans, 1995). Barton (1993) goes as far to suggest, in this connection, that the NCPE—which in his view prioritises 'games' and 'performance'—is one that is designed and intended more for pupils without than those with SEN. That is to say, in Barton's (1993) view, the latter are more likely than the former to receive, at best, an inappropriate PE programme that is typically an adapted version of the one intended for pupils without SEN.

Regardless of the accuracy of Barton's (1993) claims, it is Penney's (2002) contention that notwithstanding the recent emphasis placed on inclusion in the revised NCPE, and the loosening of requirements during key stage 4, competitive team sports (such as rugby and netball) continue to retain a pre-eminent position over more individualised physical activities (such as dance and swimming).

The National Curriculum for Physical Education 2000: towards inclusive physical education?

The revision of the NCPE for 2000 brought new ideologies of 'inclusion' and 'inclusive practices' to the heart of Government policy in relation to education and PE (Penney, 2002). More specifically, the revised NCPE 2000:

makes clear the principles schools must follow in their teaching right across the curriculum, to ensure that all pupils have the chance to succeed, whatever their individual needs and the potential barriers to their learning may be (DfEE/QCA, 1999, p. 3).

To this end, teachers in all subject areas, including PE, are now required to plan and teach the National Curriculum with due regard to three principles of inclusion:

- Setting suitable learning challenges;
- Responding to pupils' diverse learning needs; and
- Overcoming barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils (DfEE/QCA, 1999, p. 28).

By paying particular attention to these principles of inclusion, teachers are expected to employ differentiated strategies that are both appropriate and challenging in a variety of learning environments that are inclusive of all pupils (including those with SEN) who often manifest very diverse levels of ability and needs (Penney, 2002). It is in the context of these demands, amongst others (such as the recently introduced Special Educational Needs and Disability Discrimination Act, 2001), that I intend to examine PE teachers' views of, as well as their practices towards, the inclusion of pupils with SEN.

Methodology

Participants

Seven PE teachers (five male/two female) of which five were Heads of Department (HoDs) (four male/one female) and two (one male/one female) main grade teachers participated in the study. Three of the teachers (of whom two were HoDs) were 30 years of age or younger. Three (two HoDs) were between 31 and 40 and one (HoD) was over 40 years of age. The teachers were employed in five schools located in four urban towns with what might be regarded as a relatively broad economic base, with a small ethnic minority population.

The teachers were purposively selected (Bryman, 2001; Silverman, 2001) on the basis that they had had experience of (albeit, for some, limited) including pupils with SEN in PE in their schools. Consequently, the schools, PE departments and pupils with SEN therein were also purposively chosen to reflect the types of schools typical of those maintained by the LEA. The number of pupils the teachers reported teaching in their lessons across all school years ranged from as few as three in one lesson to as many as ten in another.

Before outlining the nature and purpose of the semi-structured interviews conducted with the teachers, it is worth adding a small caveat regarding the use of the purposive sampling technique in the study. In particular, it is worth noting the observations of Bryman (2001) and Silverman (2001) who assert that despite the tendency for small-scale studies (such as this) to make use of small samples, this does not preclude some—albeit tentative—generalisations being made. Thus, whilst the sample of teachers included in the study cannot, and should not, be regarded as a representative sample we may, nevertheless, be able to generalise the findings to many PE teachers (Green, 2000c).

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were employed in the study to facilitate the in-depth exploration of the processes that appear to have particular significance for PE teachers' views of inclusion and their reported practices (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bryman, 2001). The interview with each teacher, which was conducted by the present author at the teacher's school in late June/early July 2002, typically lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, although some interviews lasted 90 minutes due to the willingness of the teacher to continue talking. The following broad areas of enquiry were explored during the course of each interview: the number of pupils with SEN teachers were currently teaching; the range of SENs pupils had; teachers' views on 'inclusion' and 'inclusive practices' in PE; and how, and in which activities, teachers include pupils with SEN in NCPE, and the involvement of those pupils in extra-curricular PE.

Finally, consistent with the semi-structured nature of the interviews (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bryman, 2001), the use of open questions that were employed to address these broad areas of interest were in turn complemented by opportunities for teachers to elaborate upon things that were important and relevant to them

within the context of the discussion. As such, this gave the interviewer the opportunity to probe additional areas of interest as and when they presented themselves during the course of the interviews.

Data analysis: qualitative content analysis

All of the interviews were audiotaped with the teacher's permission and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. The transcripts of the taped interviews and field notes made by the researcher were then subject to content analysis. Essentially, this process took the form of noting, and then analysing, the frequency of particular words, phrases or themes (Bryman, 2001) which, in turn, formed the basis from which an analysis of the patterns found within interviewees' responses—and the 'searching-out' of underlying themes therein—could be performed (Bryman, 2001). Thus, qualitative analyses of this kind involved the 'search for meaning and understanding' (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 150) of the data in an attempt to comprehend the perspective of the interviewee. Following identification of themes, the interview data was arranged into categories based on the key themes of the interviews which were, in turn, continually refined to ensure that all of the different kinds of 'units of analysis' (Bryman, 2001, p. 183) were considered, thus enhancing the overall adequacy of the thematic categories used as a basis to explain the data; a brief synopsis of which is discussed below.

Results and discussion

The number of pupils with SEN in mainstream physical education

All of the teachers in this study suggested that more pupils with SEN were being educated in their PE lessons than was the case over the past five years or so:

We're increasingly having more and more children that would have been in special schools five or six years ago coming into us (male, 44, HoD).⁴

We're now taking more kids from special schools because they're closing down around here (male, 33, HoD).

This was, perhaps, an expected finding given government policy of returning pupils with SEN to mainstream schools (and thus PE) 'unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise' (DfEE, 1997, p. 44). However, as intimated above, the schools in the study were selected in part because of the number of pupils with SEN of various kinds and range of SEN in each school year and thus PE. With this in mind, it is interesting to juxtapose the comments of one HoD who had little experience of teaching these pupils in PE lessons, with those of other teachers who had more experience of including pupils with SEN in PE lessons. The former had particularly strong reservations about inclusion:

It worries me, I'll be quite honest with you ... we have enough problems with kids with behavioural problems ... we're struggling (to cope) with those ... I think I'm gonna be doing a lot of head shaking over the next few years thinking why this child is in mainstream (education).

He continued:

If we're not careful the kids could be victimised ... it could backfire. It makes me think whether the government has thought this through ... you say to yourself could this have a negative impact too? I had a kid who is blind in my class, what can I do for that child? (male, 33, HoD).

Other teachers who were at the time of interview working with a greater number (frequently up to ten in each lesson) of pupils with SEN were similarly concerned about the demands of inclusion on them:

It's (inclusion) more taxing on me to plan a lesson ... I have real concerns about integrating a pupil with a disability fully and ensuring it isn't to the detriment of others (male, 32, main scale).

It's inappropriate to expect one member of staff to teach 28 students of which one or two are disabled or a special needs student ... to cater for those students is a lot more difficult (female, 29, HoD).

For these teachers then, the extent to which pupils with SEN are included in PE is a matter of particular concern. More specifically, this clearly demonstrates that the number of pupils with difficulties of various kinds and the constraints this places on teachers, will, perhaps inevitably, vary between schools, and within schools, PE classes.

As such, this realisation illustrates the point that PE teachers work in a world that is processual: that is to say, they experience widespread continuity alongside degrees of change (Green, 2002) which, in this context, includes the growing number of pupils with SEN to be found in PE lessons in recent years.

Teachers' understandings of 'inclusion' in physical education

In almost all responses to the question 'What do you understand by the term inclusion as it relates to PE?' the phrase 'giving equal opportunities' featured prominently, and for the most part, explicitly. In this regard, teachers' views often reflected those made in recent official pronouncements (see, for example, UNESCO, 1994; DfEE/QCA, 1999):

I think to a large extent it (inclusion) is largely a political key word ... It's about giving equal opportunities really (male, 44, HoD).

(Giving) everyone an equal opportunity ... everyone is entitled to a PE curriculum ... regardless of their ability and needs (male, 30, HoD).

... providing students with relevant, appropriate curricular where the opportunities given (to all pupils) are the same (female, 29, HoD).

Thus, for many teachers the 'underpinning rationale' (Penney & Harris, 1997) of the policy of inclusion in the NCPE is to ensure that all pupils, including those with SEN, have an 'equal opportunity' to participate in PE. Indeed, this was a recurrent theme that penetrated teachers' views regarding inclusion; that is to say, by claiming to provide 'as much opportunity as possible', the teachers appeared to be suggesting that they had fulfilled their statutory obligation to include pupils with SEN in PE. However, should the criterion for ensuring the full inclusion of these groups of

pupils in PE be simply providing them with the ‘same opportunities’ as their ‘more able’ peers to experience the PE curriculum available in schools—as outlined in the revised NCPE—then this could also provide the opportunity for such provision to become unequal.

It is also noteworthy in this context, that whilst the phrase ‘giving equal opportunities’ was a more-or-less common feature of many teachers’ views on inclusion (‘Inclusion is a process that refers to the removal of any barrier facing a child for them to *access the curriculum*’, male, 44, HoD; emphasis added), as well as a justification for what they did in practice, it appeared that upon closer scrutiny, what they considered inclusion to ‘be’ was more in keeping with traditional conceptualisations of integration as they are expressed by academic commentators (see, for example, Barton, 1993; Fredrickson & Cline, 2002). More specifically, the teachers appeared to conceptualise inclusion as an assimilating process (some examples of which are identified in the next section) through which pupils with disabilities and SEN are required to ‘fit into’ the PE curriculum and lessons therein, as they were already planned (Barton, 1993; Fredrickson & Cline, 2002). Consequently, for most teachers there appeared little or no difference between the processes of inclusion and/or integration of pupils with SEN in PE (‘They’re virtually one and the same thing’, male, 32, main scale).

On the other hand, it was interesting to note the observations of two teachers who, it appeared, conceptualised integration and inclusion as two rather distinct, and thus different, processes:

Integration ... mean(s) integrating students into what you have got planned in your lesson ... inclusion would mean planning your lesson to include everybody (female, 29, HoD).

Any kid of any ability or disability is included into your lesson. Treating them more of an equal. Integration is like sticking a disabled pupil into a crowd and letting them get on with it without paying any attention to their disability or needs (male, 33, HoD).

This supports Vickerman’s (2002) contention that whilst some teachers might conceptualise the inclusion and integration of pupils with SEN as two somewhat different processes, others do not make such a distinction and often use the terms interchangeably. Thus, it could be argued that the way in which teachers understand and conceptualise inclusion can, and perhaps does, inform the ways in which they seek to include pupils in PE and, in so doing, affects PE as it is experienced by pupils.

Including pupils with special educational needs in NCPE

Consistent with the findings of Penney and Evans (1995) and Stafford (1989), findings from this study suggested that whilst pupils with SEN may be afforded an equal opportunity to participate in the same learning contexts as their more able peers, in practice, many of them did not appear to experience the same range or types of activities as their peers in NCPE:

I don’t know how many of our present pupils (with SEN) would be able to access completely the NCPE. With the emphasis on teams and games it makes it more and more difficult for them to access the curriculum (male, 44, HoD).

Indeed, whilst the individual nature of a child's disability or SEN can, and frequently does, determine those activities in which they are able to participate, a number of these pupils were often excluded from, or took a limited part in, specific activities; most prominent amongst which were team games and to a lesser extent athletics. All of the teachers commented on the difficulties they experienced in including these in competitive team games in NCPE:

I think the difficult ones to include pupils with disabilities and special needs are team games. It's alright in situations when you are developing skills and fitness but when it comes to the actual game there is not a lot you can actually do (female, 26, main scale).

You've got to be very careful with contact games in particular ... and the physical element. You want games to be building up to the most realistic scenario as possible and I think at times you are not ... able to make it that realistic (male, 33, HoD).

When questioned why this was the case, several teachers suggested that it was 'the nature of the sport or game' that prevented a pupil's full participation in these activities. In fact, it was not untypical for many of these pupils to leave the learning situation (and their peers) to 'practice other skills' or 'do another activity' if they were unable to 'fit into' what had been planned for the rest of the group. The following exchanges with two teachers illustrate this point:

If we think there is a *problem with an activity* ... for example ... five-a-side football ... so they (the pupils) can still be involved in physical activity we offer them other options (such as) ... table tennis or another activity that we know they enjoy (female, 29, HoD; emphasis added).

Sometimes when we've got (a) support (teacher) ... (and) I want to get into a full size game ... it might be better for the student to go away and have a few extra shots (or) ... sometimes they might (go) into the weights room for some physiotherapy or weights work (male, 32, main scale).

This is not to say that these pupils did not participate in team games at all, for teachers suggested that modifying games often enabled pupils to be 'fully included'—as they perceived it—in an activity, although this invariably depended on the specific nature of their disability:

We've got one lad who has got haemophilia and is deaf as well ... he'd be involved in rugby (he cannot be tackled) as a scrum half ... he's an important link (between the forwards and backs) ... they (the other pupils) can't achieve success without him. He's an integral part of the game. If we're doing lineout work he'll throw the ball in, he loves it! (male, 33, HoD).

If (a pupil) was say somebody in a wheelchair they could ... be integrated more easily into games where you use your hands such as basketball, netball (and) handball ... but if they are in a wheelchair and you are doing football it is more difficult (female, 29, HoD).

It appeared that on the whole, therefore, teachers were suggesting that, as Penney and Evans (1995, p. 10) have commented, 'games as an area of the PE curriculum did not lend itself to (inclusive) provision'. Indeed, it would appear that, at present, many pupils with SEN are being required to 'fit' into the curriculum—that is to say, it seems they are being 'integrated' into, rather than 'fully included' in, mainstream PE. The comments of one teacher is particularly illuminating in this regard:

We have a lad who, because of his disability, cannot do a lot of PE. He (can) do table tennis so we integrate him by getting the table tennis stuff set up next to where others

in the group are playing (a different activity) ... and get him to play with a friend ... but that isn't inclusion (female, 26, main scale).

Pupils with SEN were more easily included in those activities that are increasingly being marginalized within the PE curriculum such as OAA and dance (Penney, 2002; Waddington *et al.*, 1997; Waddington *et al.*, 1998):

We do outdoor education activities (including) ... team building challenges where all pupils have to work together, that's very good for kids who are dyspraxic [sic] for example (male, 33, HoD).

Dance is more individual; you can work to what you can do (female, 26, main scale).

Another HoD suggested that 'individual activities like gymnastics, trampolining ... badminton and tennis' (female, 29, HoD) were also more conducive to the inclusion of these pupils in PE. Overall, teachers often considered these activities as 'particularly suitable' not least because:

They are individual or team based where the rules and regulations can be set by the group ... with games you have a more formal set up where pupils can have difficulty with positional and tactical awareness and ... the physical nature of the activity such as in rugby (male, 44, HoD).

In this vein, teachers suggested that, in practice, they experienced 'particular difficulty' in fully including pupils with SEN in PE the further they moved from individualised, moderate and rhythmical physical activities (such as dance) towards more complex, physically vigorous activities (such as 'traditional' team games). This can best be explained, at least in part, with reference to the rather different pattern of social relationships involved in physical activities and team sports (see, for example, Waddington *et al.*, 1997; Waddington, 2000). Associated with this, physical activities are more likely than are team sports to involve physical movements of a rhythmic nature which, in addition to the intensity and duration of the activity, can be controlled to a much higher degree by the individual participant (Waddington *et al.*, 1997; Waddington, 2000). Thus, from the limited evidence reported here, we might tentatively suggest that pupils with SEN are perhaps more likely to be fully included in those physical activities in which they are able to move in ways that best suit their own physical capabilities, and in which they are more able to control the intensity and duration of those movements.

Nonetheless, the findings reported here lend weight to the substantial evidence reported elsewhere (see, for example, Roberts, 1996a, b; Penney & Evans, 1999; Green, 2002) that those activities (most notably 'traditional' team games) in which teachers apparently have most difficulty in fully including some pupils with SEN, continue to dominate most PE curricula in schools. Thus, the provision of what might justifiably be regarded as a limited and somewhat narrow range of activities for some pupils with SEN raises serious questions about the extent to which they can be fully included within the PE curriculum—in its present form—and the activities therein. In more specific terms, the 'privileging' of sport over physical activity (Penney & Evans, 1999) would seem to mitigate against the full inclusion of these pupils in PE, not least because the former involve a complex interweaving of the actions of a large number of players and the use of complex movement patterns

and physical and psychological skills (Waddington *et al.*, 1997; Waddington, 2000), that, it is claimed, may be beyond the capabilities of some, although not all, pupils with SEN.

Including pupils with SEN in extra-curricular physical education

In recent years, the findings of numerous studies (Roberts, 1996a, b; Penney & Harris, 1997; Armour & Jones, 1998; Green, 2000b) have indicated that extra-curricular PE typically features a strong orientation towards sport generally, and team games specifically. This realisation has led to expressions of concern amongst some commentators (see, for example, Penney & Harris, 1997) regarding the kinds of activities on offer to pupils and for whom they are intended.

Consistent with the findings of these studies, all of the teachers in this study were involved in, and professed to devote a lot of time to, extra-curricular PE ('we spend an immense amount of time on extra-curricular ... after school and always at lunch-times', male, 33, HoD). For many teachers this involvement typically revolved around sport, and team sports and practices in particular ('We have football, cricket, basketball and netball teams for every age group', female, 29, HoD); that is to say, those activities in which teachers suggested they experienced most difficulty in fully including pupils with SEN in NCPE. It is also worthy of note that teachers invariably professed a commitment to providing both competitive and recreational sport in extra-curricular PE:

We feel that *competitive sport is important for ... the higher achievers ... so that they are given the opportunity to progress to a higher standard. However ... a lot of team practices are also open recreationally to anybody who just wants to play ... so we have a balance between competitive and recreational activities* (female, 29, HoD; original emphasis).

The first point to note in this context—and consistent with the findings of Green (2000b)—is that not only did teachers claim to provide competitive team sport and recreational sport in order 'to get as many pupils as possible to come' (female, 26, main scale), but many of them felt able to reconcile these two 'philosophies' (competitive and recreational sport) without finding this immediately problematic. However, it was equally apparent that whilst teachers claimed to place equal emphasis upon competitive and recreational sport, upon closer scrutiny, what they tended to do in practice, was to place rather more emphasis on the former than the latter; the implications of which, require further examination.

In accordance with the comments of several teachers in Green's (2000b) and Armour and Jones' (1998) study, all of the teachers described extra-curricular PE and 'team practices' as 'open to everyone', insofar that all pupils of whatever ability could attend if they so wished:

all the clubs are open to everyone ... we give as much opportunity as we can (female, 26, main scale).

There's no discrimination against anybody who wants to come to extra-curricular ... it's suitable for anyone that wants to come and take part regardless of whether they are in a wheelchair or on the SEN register (male, 30, HoD).

This notwithstanding, almost all of the teachers in this study suggested that few, if any, pupils with SEN participated either recreationally or competitively in extra-curricular PE, and when they did, it was typically those with particular kinds of SEN who did so:

There are definitively students who have got learning disabilities, not major ones, who take part or even play for teams. No (physically) disabled students come to my teams (female, 29, HoD; original emphasis).

Some kids with learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) come (but) those who have statements for more severe learning and physical difficulties ... don't attend. We certainly haven't got any pupils with dyspraxia participating (male, 44, HoD).

We've got people on the SEN register playing for the football, cricket and basketball teams ... (pupils with disabilities) ... come to the practices without representing the school team (male, 30, HoD).

The following excerpts illustrate two, albeit scarce, examples where teachers recalled pupils with SEN participating competitively and recreationally in extra-curricular PE:

Deaf children are massively involved in our extra-curricular programme ... in every activity even rugby, and competing at a high level (male, 33, HoD).

(Pupil's name) who has cerebral palsy dances in local festivals ... and (another pupil) who has one hand sometimes comes along to rounders (female, 26, HoD).

Whilst the notable absence of pupils with SEN of various kinds from extra-curricular PE might be explained, in part, by the relatively small numbers of these pupils in schools, several teachers cited a number of other reasons—as they perceived them—for this absence. These included, among others, 'issues' of transport ('a lot of them get picked up by community transport and wouldn't be able to stay behind and do extra curricula', female, 29, HoD), time ('a lot of them need help changing and that would eat a lot into lunchtime clubs', male, 32, main scale) and the self-confidence of pupils ('It's confidence ... some students are self-conscious of their physical disability and are therefore not keen to take part in PE unless they have to', male, 44, HoD).

Clearly, whilst these factors—in addition to the specific nature of a pupil's disability—can, and do, have real implications for these pupils' participation in extra-curricular PE (see, for example, Sport England, 2001), the 'content, organisation and delivery' of extra-curricular PE (Penney & Harris, 1997, p. 41) is equally significant in this regard. Indeed, it appeared from teachers' comments that the extra-curricular PE they provided was, as Penney and Harris (1997) put it: 'dominated by traditional team games', typically had 'a competitive focus' and, as such, might have provided '*limited opportunities to only a minority of pupils*' (p. 43; original emphasis). That is to say, teachers' focus on—one might even say preoccupation with—team games, in addition to the particular circumstances of individual pupils, would appear to exclude many of these pupils from extra-curricular PE rather than facilitate their participation as such.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that by its very nature, extra-curricular PE is not subject to the statutory requirements of NCPE and, to this end, teachers are not constrained—at least legally—to ensure that pupils with SEN are included, in one way

or another, in the activities on offer in extra-curricular PE. Indeed, I would concur with Green (2000b) and Penney and Harris (1997) that over the past decade or so, extra-curricular PE appears to have remained largely independent of developments in NCPE and continues to feature a strong orientation towards sport, and within sport, team games. Although we are yet to see if this will continue following the recent revision of the NCPE, at present there appears to be little evidence to suggest, or little reason to believe, that there will be a re-orientation of extra-curricular PE away from providing 'more of the same for the more able' (Penney & Harris, 1997), towards the provision of activities that might be considered as more inclusive of all pupils generally, and those with SEN specifically.

This would appear to be the case not least because recent evidence concerning PE teachers' professed practices in, as well as their 'philosophies' of (or, rather, ideological⁵ inclinations towards) extra-curricular PE, indicates one significant point: 'when they can, when given a relatively free hand, many PE teachers are inclined to choose sport' and within sport, team games (Green, 2000b, p. 201). In addition to this, one needs to appreciate that, as Green (2002) observes, PE teachers continue to be constrained on a variety of levels and by a range of people, to produce successful school teams through extra-curricular PE for a number of reasons. The point here, however, is that this emphasis placed upon competitive sport generally, and 'traditional' team games in particular, by those within and beyond the PE subject-community would seem to do more to exclude, than include, some pupils with SEN.

It would appear that, as Thomas and Green (1995) have noted, an unintended consequence of including pupils with SEN wherever possible in mainstream schools, and thus PE, may be a corresponding decrease in the opportunities available for these pupils to participate in extra-curricular activities. Indeed, this would appear consistent with the findings of a recent national survey which suggested that 40% of young people with disabilities (compared to 79% of the general school population) took part in extra-curricular PE (Sport England, 2001). Hence, it might be suggested that these pupils are neither receiving the same extra-curricular opportunities, nor participating to the same extent in specific activities, than they might have done had they remained in the special school sector (Thomas & Green, 1995).

Conclusion

By drawing on the views and reported practices of PE teachers, it has been the intention of this study to offer some tentative and preliminary observations on how pupils with SEN appear to be included in secondary school PE. Whilst these pupils cannot be described as a homogenous group, it would nevertheless seem that the findings reported here indicates that, regardless of the particular difficulties a pupil may have, one key issue remains: the apparent emphasis placed upon sport and team games within the PE curriculum appears to do rather more to exclude, than include, some of these pupils from particular learning situations in PE.

Consequently, if an aim of those within PE is, indeed, to ensure the full inclusion of pupils with SEN in the activities provided within the curriculum, then it would seem that a broadening of the curriculum to incorporate a wider range of physical activities

other than 'traditional' team sports, might be the best course of action. In addition to this, Vickerman (2002, p. 92), amongst others (see, for example, Robertson *et al.*, 2000), has also stressed 'a need for the profession to establish a clear and consistent approach to inclusive PE' through initial teacher training (ITT) programmes and continuing professional development (CPD). Indeed, whilst there is a tendency to over-emphasise the significance of training for PE teachers practice (Green, 2002), it may well be the case that we should perhaps begin at the level of ITT with trainees themselves, and through CPD programmes with their already qualified colleagues, to further facilitate the inclusion of pupils with SEN in PE.

Whatever the eventual course of action may be, what is clear, is that for the teachers in this study at least, the 'underpinning rationale' of the policy of inclusion is essentially about providing pupils with SEN with 'equal opportunities' to participate in PE (typically, although not exclusively through 'traditional' team sports) as their more able peers. Any subsequent policy decisions that are made in this regard, would need to account for the realisation that the types of, and ways in which, activities are delivered by teachers to promote 'equal opportunities', and the degree to which this can facilitate the inclusion of pupils with SEN in PE, are frequently the outcome of 'teachers' subconscious predispositions (what, in sociological terms might be called 'habitus') and the practical circumstances in which teachers (find) themselves' (Green, 2000a, p. 124).

In conclusion, it should be noted that it was not the intention here to claim anything remotely resembling the 'truth'—whatever that may be—nor was it the intention to suggest that all PE teachers are likely to express, or hold, exactly the same kinds of thoughts as those in the present study. Indeed, it should be the task of future research to build upon, refine or even question the adequacy of the insights provided here by further exploring teachers' and pupils' (see, for example, Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2003) perceptions on the inclusion of pupils with SEN in PE.

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Notes

1. Despite the inadequacy of these somewhat simplistic and descriptive categories that refer to a diverse range of pupils, they have nevertheless been utilised for instructive purposes and ease of explanation.
2. For a more detailed discussion on the associated concepts of inclusion, integration and mainstreaming in PE, see Vickerman (2002).
3. Recently published data suggests that approximately 1 in 5 school children are now considered to have a formally, or informally, identified SEN of one kind or another (Audit Commission, 2002).

4. It should be recognised that the characteristics noted after each quotation—(e.g. sex, age, position)—are a selection. They are intended to give the reader a brief ‘flavour’ of the context and biography of the teacher cited. Since all of the teachers were located in one of four urban towns, this has been omitted from the characteristics noted.
5. For a more detailed discussion of PE teachers’ ideological orientations towards extra-curricular PE, see Green (2000b).

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