Changing policy, legislation and its effects on inclusive and special education: a perspective from Wales

Jean Ware

This article, by Jean Ware of Bangor University School of Education, examines policy developments in education in Wales since devolution, and their implications for inclusive and special education. This is set in the context of the demographics of Wales, which, it is argued, have a significant influence on policy and on the nature of educational provision as a whole. The discussion initially focuses on issues related to the Welsh language. The article then discusses four policy initiatives (the Foundation Phase, the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, the Masters in Educational Practice and the proposed reform of initial teacher education and training), intended to respond to Wales’s poor performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment, and their potential impact, as well as the White Paper on reforming the special educational needs system in Wales. It is too soon to discuss the impact of these special educational needs-specific reforms, but the differences from the English special educational needs reforms highlight the inherent tensions in special educational needs systems. It is argued that the Tabberer Report’s critique of the teacher education system in Wales, which emphasises the need for teacher education to be strongly connected to relevant research, provides an opportunity to improve the quality of education in Wales for all children; but that considerable investment, and a willingness to address the potential tensions between the different initiatives, is necessary to achieve such an outcome.

Key words: special educational needs, inclusion, Wales, Welsh Medium Education Strategy, initial teacher education and training
Introduction
The context for special/inclusive education in Wales is complex and multifaceted. Over the past decade, there have been a number of major policy initiatives which have the potential to impact radically on the education of all learners, including those with special educational needs, namely:

- the Welsh Language Strategy (WAG, 2003; WG, 2010, 2012a);
- the Foundation Phase (Welsh Assembly Government Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, 2008);
- the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (WG, 2013a);
- the Masters in Educational Practice;
- special educational needs policy reform (WG, 2012b, 2014a);
- reviews of initial teacher education and training (Furlong, Hagger, Butcher & Howson, 2006; Tabberer, 2013).

Only one of the six initiatives listed is explicitly about the education of learners with special educational needs, but this article aims to show that all six are likely to affect inclusive education and the education of learners with special educational needs. At this point in time, it is only possible to discuss potential effects, as there is little research which explicitly examines the impact of any of these policy initiatives in these terms. After discussing key differences between Wales and England, the article briefly describes a number of demographic issues which influence the nature of schooling in Wales. This leads on to a discussion of the relationship between education and the Welsh language, and the impact of the Welsh Language Strategy. Two other recent policy initiatives, the Foundation Phase and the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, both designed, at least in part, to address Wales’s poor results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (2012) (OECD, 2013), are discussed next, followed by the proposed special educational needs-specific policy reforms. Finally, two initiatives addressing the issue of initial teacher education and further professional development are considered: the Masters in Educational Practice (MEP) and the Tabberer Report (Tabberer, 2013). The article concludes by suggesting that research assessing the impact of these reforms on inclusive and special education is urgently needed, as history suggests that policy initiatives in education can often have unintended consequences. For example, the tripartite system introduced by the 1944 Education Act was undoubtedly intended to be meritocratic, but in practice the selection procedure was shown to favour the middle class (Trowler, 2003).
**Key differences from England**

There are some key differences between education in Wales and that in England – some of these existed prior to devolution, mainly due to historical and demographic differences between the two countries, but since devolution the differences have increased.

The demographics of Wales and England are significantly different – Wales is a small country, with a population of around 3,000,000 (that is, less than 5% of the total UK population). Wales has *two* official languages, Cymraeg/Welsh and English, and around 550,000 of the population are Welsh speakers.

Approximately 19% of the population of Wales described themselves as able to speak Welsh in the 2011 census (WG, 2012c), but the proportion of Welsh speakers varies considerably from area to area (see Figure 1). The areas traditionally known as the ‘Welsh Heartlands’, where the first language of more than 50% of the population is Welsh, could appropriately be described as bilingual.

Wales is also predominantly a rural country, with around 1,000,000 people living in rural areas, and with some 60% of its area being only sparsely populated. The bilingual nature of Wales and the fact that many areas are sparsely populated both have a significant impact on education as a whole. One in three primary school pupils in Wales attends a school with 90 pupils or fewer (described by Estyn as small schools) (Estyn, n.d.) and the future of these and the even smaller schools attended by many pupils in rural Wales is a perennial ‘hot topic’.

According to Hawker (2009), Wales is a predominantly working-class nation. Certainly average earnings in Wales, at just £472 per week, are lower than any region of the UK other than Northern Ireland (WG, 2013b). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that a significantly higher proportion of children in Wales are living in poverty than in England. (Of course, the actual percentage varies according to the method of calculation used, but even using the Westminster government’s method more than one in five children in Wales are living in poverty.)

There are also other important differences, perhaps the most critical of which relates to the issue of diversity of school type and the role of parental choice. In Wales the idea of the comprehensive school as a community school attended by all local children is commonly accepted. Only around 2% of children attend a private rather than a state school (WG, 2011). Except in relation to the language of instruction (that is, Welsh or English), parental choice plays a much smaller role than in England. Of course, this is partly due to the rural nature of much of
Wales, with many families only realistically being able to access one secondary school, but it also represents a policy difference: Wales has no academies or specialist schools even in its more densely populated areas, and no ‘free schools’ because of a belief in the ideal of comprehensive schooling. However, there is, I think, something of a tension between this ideal, and the ideal of enabling all parents who wish it to choose Welsh Medium Education.
The bilingual nature of Wales and the Welsh Language Strategy

The Welsh Language Strategy, ‘Iaith fyw, iaith byw’/‘A living language, a language for living’ (WG, 2012a), is perhaps the most radical and far-reaching policy in Wales, and it is underpinned by the Welsh Medium Education Strategy (WG, 2010). The Welsh Language Strategy includes what, in many contexts, might be seen as an inclusion statement:

‘Equality of opportunity is a cross-cutting theme integral to this Strategy and all policies of the Welsh Assembly Government. No one should be denied opportunities to access Welsh-medium education or learning Welsh as a language because of their race, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, age or religion in any part of Wales. Welsh-medium education should reflect the composition of the Welsh population as a whole, and should be available to, and accessed by, all communities, including those characterised by disadvantage and ethnic diversity.’

(WG, 2010, p. 12)

Both these documents and the predecessor of ‘Iaith fyw, iaith byw’ – ‘Iaith pawb’/‘Everyone’s language’ (WAG, 2003) – make it clear that the Welsh Government sees education as playing a key role in the development of ‘a bilingual Wales’. It is committed to upholding the right of all children in Wales to be educated through the medium of Welsh, if their parents so wish. The government also has a policy of increasing the number of children who are educated through the medium of Welsh, and those who are fully fluent in both Welsh and English. It is a policy with both measurable targets (in terms of increasing numbers of pupils being educated through Welsh) and teeth. It is made explicit within the policy that the Welsh Government will consider taking legislative powers to step in where local authorities fail to respond to parental demands for Welsh-medium education on a voluntary basis (WG, 2010). It is also Welsh Government policy that all children learn both Welsh and English from primary school onwards. That includes children with special educational needs.

So, overlaid on the system of comprehensive schooling, which has been strongly adopted in Wales, is parental choice in terms of the language of education, which in most areas of Wales means there are separate Welsh- and English-medium primary schools, and either separate Welsh- and English-medium secondary schools, or in many areas one dual stream school, where all children transfer to the same secondary school, but with a choice of language of instruction. However, in the Welsh heartlands of Gwynedd and Môn/Anglesey, all primary schools (except one in each county), are Welsh medium. Two of the
three special schools for children with severe learning difficulties also emphasise Welsh as the main language of instruction, while the remaining school describes itself as bilingual and attempts to support each child through the language of his or her home.

The impact of language policies on inclusive/special education

The right to be educated through Welsh

Fifteen years of devolution have led to an increased emphasis on the Welsh language and policies which enshrine the right to receive services through the medium of Welsh. Despite this, providing Welsh-medium education and other services to children with special educational needs is an acknowledged problem and one which has proved relatively intractable. Of the 42 special schools in Wales, only the three already mentioned in the north-west provide education through the medium of Welsh, and there are insufficient Welsh-speaking educational psychologists, speech therapists, and so on, to be able to assess and support children through the medium of Welsh (WAG, 2002). This means, in practice, that in many areas of Wales, Welsh-speaking parents who might prefer a special school for their child may have to choose between an English-medium special school and Welsh-medium schooling in a mainstream school. We might therefore expect to see more children, even with severe special educational needs, included in mainstream school in those areas of Wales (the great majority) where special schooling is not available through Welsh. However, the reported proportion of children with special educational needs in Welsh-medium schools is lower than that in English-medium schools (2% versus 3%) (WG, 2012d). This is a puzzling statistic, which demands closer consideration.

One possible explanation may lie in the fact that many children in Welsh-medium schools come from homes where no Welsh is spoken (Lewis, 2006). These children are learning Welsh as a second language, and just as in the case of children for whom English is a second language, there may be difficulties in assessing whether a child’s apparent difficulties in learning are due to being a language learner, or to some form of special educational needs (Fredrickson & Cline, 2009). Conversely, the lack of appropriately standardised Welsh language tests, and of Welsh-speaking educational psychologists, speech therapists, and so on, may make it difficult to assess children from Welsh-speaking homes at a young age. There is also anecdotal evidence that teachers are reluctant to label a child as having learning difficulties, when their difficulties may be due to the language of instruction. Thus, one possible impact of the language policy in Wales may be later diagnosis of learning difficulties/special educational needs. It is important to stress that there is no direct evidence of this, and that other
characteristics of Welsh-medium schools offer alternative explanations for the lower percentage of children with diagnosed special educational needs in these schools (see below).

There is also anecdotal evidence that parents of children with special educational needs may still be advised that it would be better to educate them through English alone, and that they may sometimes take this decision for themselves when they believe that their child is struggling or will struggle with two languages. Although there is no substantive research evidence on this subject from Wales, there is some research from other bilingual situations suggesting that this is likely to be the case. For example, in their review of the literature on bilingualism and learners with intellectual disabilities, Ware, Lye and Kyffin (forthcoming) report that they found six studies of the advice given to families on whether or not to raise their child bilingually. All these studies found that a substantial proportion of families had been advised not to raise their child with special educational needs bilingually, and some parents reported choosing to use more English because of their child’s difficulties (for example, Yu, 2011). As this research mainly concerns children who are being educated through a majority language which is not the first language of their home, it is difficult to apply it directly to the situation in Wales. In Wales the situation varies from area to area, but in many areas Welsh is a minority language, and English is the language of the community. Consequently, in some areas the great majority of children being educated through Welsh are from homes where only English is spoken (Lewis, 2006). Studies of language development in children with special educational needs (mainly of children with Down’s syndrome, autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) or specific speech and language impairments) suggest that there is no impact on first language development of being introduced to a second language, but that the children being studied developed varying degrees of fluency in the second language (Ware et al., forthcoming). Good quality research evidence is urgently needed to inform the debate on the issue of bilingual education for children with special educational needs, as the evidence from Wales in relation to children without special educational needs suggests that progress may be different for children from different home and community language backgrounds (for example, Rhys & Thomas, 2013).

As part of the Welsh Language Strategy, the Government also has policies in place to increase the number of Welsh-speaking academics working in universities, and to extend the range of courses available to students through the medium of Welsh. In time, this policy may address some of the shortages in professional roles, such as educational psychology and speech therapy, as noted above.
Diversity of pupil population of Welsh-medium and English-medium schools

Welsh-medium schools are less ethnically diverse than English-medium schools and have a smaller percentage of children whose first language is neither English nor Welsh (2% in Welsh-medium schools and 8% in English-medium schools). It may seem like common sense that Welsh-medium schools are likely to have fewer children from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language – this is partly, of course, because there are more Welsh-medium schools in areas where Welsh is the majority language of the community, where the population also tends to be less ethnically diverse, but the Government’s aim is that Welsh-medium schools should reflect the population as a whole.

Does less diverse necessarily mean less inclusive? If a school educates all the children from the local area (as schools in Wales aim to do), it might arguably be inclusive, even if the pupil population is not very diverse.

It is also the case that significantly fewer children in Welsh-medium schools receive free school meals than in English-medium schools and, given the association between poverty and special educational needs, this may provide a credible alternative explanation for the lower percentage of children with Statements in Welsh-medium schools. However, the picture is complicated by the fact that some of the most deprived areas in the South Wales Valleys (Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda-Cynon Taf, Blaenau-Gwent) which have the highest percentages of children receiving free school meals are also some of the areas with the lowest percentage of Welsh speakers (See Figure 1) and the fewest Welsh-medium schools. Additionally, different local authorities give Statements of special educational needs to widely differing percentages of children. Therefore, in order to assess the significance of the difference in free school meals between Welsh-medium and English-medium schools, it would be necessary to compare schools within the same local authority area.

The cost of the Welsh Language Strategy

As Hawker (2009) has pointed out, governments (especially those like the Welsh Government which have no independent tax raising powers) have to make choices about how to spend the money they have available to them. There is no doubt that the Welsh Language/Welsh Medium Education Strategy is expensive, and that this must necessarily mean that other areas receive less funding, but there is no evidence as to whether or not this affects provision for inclusion/special educational needs.
The Foundation Phase
The statutory curriculum for all three- to seven-year-olds in Wales is the Foundation Phase, in which there has been considerable investment, including increased staff ratios (1:8 for three- to four-year-olds, and 1:15 for five- to seven-year-olds). The Foundation Phase was introduced gradually; the first pilots began in 2004, but it has only been fully operational since 2012.

The Foundation Phase Curriculum, which is developmental, skills-based and activity-led, has been designed taking into account international research evidence. Although many of the overall learning objectives are common with the Foundation Stage in England, in contrast to the English Foundation Stage, which stops at the end of the Reception Year, the Welsh Foundation Phase is for three- to seven-year-olds, and thus subsumes the whole of Key Stage 1. It is being implemented in both maintained and non-maintained settings.

The Foundation Phase has many distinctive features, such as making greater use of the outdoors, where children can spend part of their time every day, whatever the weather, engaged in a wide range of learning activities. The emphasis is on verbal communication, social skills and becoming effective learners. Where the Foundation Phase is being run as envisaged by its designers, children are allowed to move freely from one area of the classroom to another as they take part in different activities, and staff are trained to work intensively with both small groups and individual children to make sure each of the activities becomes a purposeful learning experience. The logistics are often complex, and tracking the children as they take part in the different activities places considerable organisational demands on the staff. Prior to implementation, concern was expressed about the potential impact of the foundation phase on those children with special educational needs (for example, those with ASD) who are seen as needing a highly structured environment. There have been a number of research reports on different aspects of the Foundation Phase, including an evaluation led by a team from Cardiff University and an independent stocktake led by Prof. Iram Siraj (WG, 2014b). None of these studies looks directly at the impact of the Foundation Phase on learners with special educational needs or inclusive education more generally, although some relevant information is available within these studies. Reports from the evaluation team so far show rather mixed results, with results sometimes differing between different phases of the Foundation Phase roll-out. Of particular interest to this article is the extent to which the implementation of the Foundation Phase is being successful in reducing inequalities between pupils, which was one of its key aims. The data analysed by the evaluation team to date (Davies et al., 2013) show that inequalities in
Absenteeism and achievement have not been reduced following the implementation of the Foundation Phase. For absenteeism, the results are difficult to interpret, as absenteeism in general appears to increase slightly following the introduction of the Foundation Phase, and the differential between those with and without special educational needs does not appear to be reduced. For attainment in both mathematics and English (assessed in Year 2), the differential between children with and without special educational needs appears to have widened. The results for the end of Key Stage 2 have not yet been published.

Arguably, the relatively high staff ratios (which are exclusive of any learning support assistants appointed for individual children) should make it easier to provide inclusive education in the Foundation Phase. However, as Siraj and Kingston (WG, 2014b) report, previous research has consistently found that the positive impact of enhanced ratios (for all children, including those with special educational needs) is likely to be diminished when additional staff lack specific training or qualifications, as is the case for Foundation Phase settings. The stocktake also suggests that in some settings Foundation Phase staff lacked knowledge of how to promote children’s language and social development, which is of particular concern in relation to many learners with special educational needs.

**The Literacy and Numeracy Framework**

Wales performed less well than the other three countries of the UK in the 2012 PISA tests (Wheater, Ager, Burge & Sizmur, 2013). In its determination to address these results, in 2013 the Welsh Government introduced a new literacy and numeracy framework, together with literacy and numeracy tests for seven- to 14-year-olds. However, by contrast with the situation in England, this framework has been deliberately designed to include all learners and the term ‘all learners’ actually means just that – all learners. The literacy and numeracy framework provides a complete series of possible steps from *Routes for Learning* (the Welsh Assessment for Learners with PMLD) (WAG Qualifications and Curriculum Group, DELLS, 2006) through to more able and talented 14-year-olds.

The availability of such a framework should facilitate the inclusion of students with special educational needs – but on the other hand the use of literacy and numeracy tests in schools (introduced in September 2014) could lead teachers to focus on those aspects that are to be tested. Concern has been
expressed, for example, about the potential impact of these tests on the Foundation Phase.

Special educational needs-specific reform

Similar special educational needs systems were introduced across the UK more than 30 years ago; consequently, there are still strong parallels between the current systems in place in England and Wales. There are, however, important differences. In 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government introduced the term ‘additional learning needs’, encompassing all those with special educational needs, plus a wide range of other groups (for example, travellers, young parents, asylum seekers, more able and talented learners) (WAG Qualifications and Curriculum Group, DELLS, 2006). This means that there is a variation, not just in terminology (with some school co-ordinators being referred to as SENCos and others as ALNCoS (additional learning needs co-ordinators)), but also in the scope of their role, with some ALNCoS/SENCos being responsible for provision for all pupils with additional learning needs, while in other schools the two roles may be split. It is also important to note that, in contrast to England, there is no specified training for SENCoS in Wales.

There is wide agreement that the special educational needs system is in need of reform, and in 2012 the Welsh Government outlined proposals for the reform of special educational needs provision in Wales. In many ways these proposals were similar to those being put forward in England, with provision to be made in an integrated way from birth to the age of 25, and special educational needs Statements being replaced by integrated plans designed to have a multi-disciplinary basis and to apply to those in further education as well as those at school. In both countries, the Government proposed to issue a new code of practice, and to put in place provision to ensure multi-disciplinary co-operation in the interests of children and young people. However, there were also important differences, and the next section will discuss two of these: terminology, and the range of children and young people intended to receive statutory provision.

In England the Government proposed to keep the term ‘special educational needs’, while in Wales it was proposed to replace it with the much broader ‘additional needs’, potentially bringing into one unified system of provision children and young people with a range of medical and social needs and those whose disabilities or difficulties had more obvious consequences for their education/learning. However, following consultations with stakeholders (ISOS Partnership (UK) LLP, 2013), the term ‘additional needs’ has been replaced
by ‘additional learning needs’ (ALN) which, it appears from the White Paper (WG, 2014a), will be narrowed in scope from the 2006 definition to become a replacement term for ‘special educational needs’ and learning difficulties and disabilities:

‘Our intention is that the learners captured by the definition of ALN will include all of those currently regarded as having SEN (i.e. children and young people supported through School/Early Years Action, School/Early Years Action Plus and with statements of SEN). In addition, we intend that the term will also be used to encompass young people up to the age of 25 who are currently said to have LDD.’

(WG, 2014a, p. 20)

The introduction to the White Paper states that one of the things which has influenced its development is the reforms to special educational needs provision in England under the Children and Families Act, 2014. However, the White Paper proposes that in Wales all children with ALN will be entitled to an individual development plan (IDP) which will replace the current Statement of special educational needs. This contrasts with the situation in England, where only those with complex needs will receive an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The evidence suggests that local authorities in England intend to keep the eligibility criteria for an EHCP the same as those for a Statement of special educational needs (Spivack, Craston, Thom & Carr, 2014). In Wales, the White Paper makes clear that all those with special needs (that is, not just those with a Statement of special educational needs, but also those who would currently be on School Action, or School Action Plus) would be entitled to an IDP. (School Action is taken when, in order to meet a child’s special educational needs, a class teacher provides interventions that are additional to or different from those provided as part of the school’s usual differentiated curriculum offer and strategies. School Action Plus is taken when, in order to meet a child’s special educational needs, the school needs to call on external specialists and resources in addition to the steps taken under School Action.) In England, School Action and School Action Plus are being abolished and instead local authorities will have to inform families with a child or young person with special educational needs of the local offer – resources and support available to them in the area. Through the Welsh Government’s White Paper it is hoped that the provision of IDPs to all children and young people with special educational needs will be fairer and will give families more confidence that the support needed by the child or young person will be available and that it will, as a consequence, be more flexible to meet changing needs. As the
White Paper was only published in May 2014, it is far too early to comment on the consequences of this proposal. However, it seems possible that the provision of an IDP to all those who would previously have been on School Action or School Action Plus, in addition to those who would previously have had a Statement, may prove costly, and difficult both to resource and to manage. This difference between the special educational needs reforms in England and Wales highlights a tension which is ever present in designing special educational needs legislation: how to balance the very severe and complex needs of some learners against the needs of the majority with special educational needs, and of all learners. Revised appeal arrangements will also apply to all those with an IDP.

As noted earlier, SENCOs in Wales (unlike those in England) do not need to have specific training, experience or qualifications. The White Paper proposes that Additional Learning Needs Coordinators (ALNCos) will replace SENCOs; but it is not yet clear if training for ALNCos will be mandatory as there is to be further discussion on a definition of their role and the experience and/or training they require before the new ALN code of practice is issued:

‘We will use the new Code of Practice to require governing bodies to ensure that ALNCOs have certain experience or qualifications or both, and to confer other functions on these governing bodies relating to ALNCOs. The detail of the ALNCO’s responsibilities would be set out in the Code of Practice, and we will work with key stakeholders to develop guidance on the role, to be consulted on in due course.’

(WG, 2014a, p. 30)

The Masters in Educational Practice
The Masters in Educational Practice was introduced by the Welsh Government in 2012 as an Early Professional Development Qualification, which is available free of charge to all newly qualified teachers in Wales (except some supply teachers). It is a blended model qualification involving some face-to-face teaching, distance learning, school-based tasks and in-school mentoring by experienced teachers. It thus includes several elements which have been demonstrated to contribute to effective continuing professional development (CPD) (for example, Cordingley, Bell, Rundell, Evans & Curtis, 2003). A module on ALN is included in the second year of the course. As the Masters in Educational Practice is only now reaching the end of its second year, there are, as yet, no data available on the effectiveness of the programme.
Reforms to initial teacher education and training (ITET)

There have been two reports on ITET in Wales in less than 10 years, commonly known as the Furlong Report (Furlong, Hagger, Butcher & Howson, 2006) and the Tabberer Report (Tabberer, 2013).

The Tabberer Report (2013) sent shockwaves through those universities engaged in teacher training. The second major report on initial teacher training in Wales in less than 10 years, it has to be seen in the context of the PISA results (see above). The commissioning of this report by the Welsh Government was a major part of its response to the PISA results. Tabberer is critical of the quality of teacher education in Wales, and of the quality of applicants who are attracted to the ITET courses. He is particularly critical of the weak link between research in education and teacher education:

‘It is essential that the leadership teams in each ITT Centre, and in the collaborating HEIs, take the initiative in reviewing their ITT research engagement and make clear plans to re-build active links between teaching and research. The current position, whereby research has a low status in a professional training environment, is un-tenable. It should be an expectation that managers, tutors and trainees will be engaged in research and will be influenced by practical, scientific inquiry.’

(Tabberer, 2013, p. 25)

As Tabberer points out, the basic issue is that, in Wales, for the most part those engaged in teacher training do not engage in research, and those who see themselves as educational researchers are not involved in the training of teachers, and little of their research is relevant to improving the effectiveness of teaching and teacher training. Tabberer sees this as a result of the malign influence of the Research Exercise Framework (REF), the system through which the quality of research in British universities is evaluated. Tabberer characterises the REF as directing funding towards ‘research teams, and activities, that do not suit the professional and school-based training environment that the ITT Centres seek to manage’, with the result that, with few exceptions, tutors’ work is not strongly influenced by research, and consequently neither is that of their trainees.

The REF, however, is not the only issue with regard to strengthening the link between educational research and teacher education in Wales. A historical lack of CPD opportunities, high teaching loads and a small pool of eligible recruits for the staffing of ITT centres, particularly in the Welsh Heartlands, where being
fluent in Welsh is an essential requirement for teacher educators, have also contributed significantly to the divide between teacher training and educational research.

Examining the evidence from those countries whose education systems perform best leads Tabberer to conclude that one way forward for teacher training in Wales would be for teachers to be provided with the research skills that would enable them to diagnose student problems swiftly and provide effective help to students experiencing difficulties. In my view, if this route is pursued, it could have a profound impact on inclusive and special education, because during their initial training teachers would acquire skills which are needed to teach all children, including those with special educational needs, effectively. However, doing so would require a substantial investment of both time and money in professional development for teacher educators (many of whom may not have had the opportunity to acquire these skills themselves). This seems unlikely in the current financial situation.

**Conclusion**

Reflection on these various policy initiatives highlights the unevenness of the developments and their sometimes contradictory nature, and the potential for the different policy initiatives to interact with each other, perhaps producing unintended effects for inclusive and special education. The higher education aspect of the Welsh language policy should contribute to more children with special educational needs from Welsh language backgrounds receiving timely and appropriate assessments, but it needs to be combined with opportunities for ITET staff already in post to develop research capacity; otherwise, it is likely to have little impact on the quality of teacher education in Wales. There is also an urgent need for investment in research on how best to support children with special educational needs who are being educated through a second language, especially where that is neither the language of their home, nor of the majority of the community where they live.

The need for the ITET centres to respond to the Tabberer Report, combined with the MEP, could provide a possibility for restructuring teacher education and training into something which is seen to continue across a teacher’s career, perhaps enabling teachers to gain specialist skills and knowledge (for example, for becoming a SENCo or ALNCo, or a specialist teacher of children with visual impairments) as a next step. If this is to be achieved, staff need to be in place in the universities to support this training.
Nevertheless, as Tabberer suggests, the most pressing need is to reverse the disconnect between educational research and the education of teachers in Wales. Given the current financial constraints, it seems unlikely that this will happen in the near future. On the other hand, if vice chancellors and heads of ITET centres take seriously the threat of having their ITET provision removed to other providers, it is just possible that one positive outcome of the Tabberer Report may be a stronger link between research and teacher education – which might just possibly mean that teachers and schools are better equipped in future both to evaluate their own practice and to evaluate and use research to inform the provision they make for all children.

References

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Address for correspondence:
Dr Jean Ware  
School of Education  
Bangor University  
Normal Site  
Bangor  
Gwynedd LL57 2PZ  
UK  
Email: j.ware@bangor.ac.uk