



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

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Dear Minister

Thank you for the Scottish Government response to the Committee's report on the attainment of pupils with a sensory impairment.

The Committee would find it useful if you could provide some further information relating to a number of points set out below. Some of these points relate to the work of Education Scotland and so, in line with your previous response, I would be grateful if you could arrange for the agency to input as appropriate.

Data on attainment

Data on prevalence of sensory impairment

During the course of the inquiry, the Committee was told about various concerns relating to the lack of precise data on the number of children affected by a sensory impairment in Scotland. We highlighted some specific concerns in our report (at paragraphs 18 and 19), but they were not referred to in the Scottish Government response. **The Committee requests a response to these specific concerns and would like to know how the Advisory Group for Additional Support for Learning is seeking to address them as part of its "outcomes focus" for data collection.**

Scottish Government data

The Committee was also told about concerns relating to some of the attainment data published by the Scottish Government. We note one of these concerns in our report at paragraph 20, to which you also refer in the Scottish Government response,

namely the inability to compare directly the attainment of ASN and non-ASN pupils at a single specified age, for example, S4.

The Committee is aware of the data the Scottish Government collects in relation to school leavers (this is cited in the SPICe briefing at page 5). However, the data does not necessarily account for the possibility that ASN pupils may take longer to achieve their qualifications compared with their non-ASN peers and, therefore, does not allow a like-for-like comparison to be made for ASN and non-ASN pupils. **The Committee would be grateful for your response to this issue.**

Local authority data

Others told the Committee they were concerned about how local authorities collect attainment data on children with a sensory impairment. As noted in our report at paragraph 22, Education Scotland suggested more could be done to “standardise and achieve greater consistency” of data collection by local authorities. Again, the Scottish Government response does not provide detail in response to this issue. **Given Education Scotland’s role in sharing best practice among local authorities, the Committee seeks details of what Education Scotland (perhaps along with the Scottish Government) can do to establish consistency across local authorities in terms of identification of ASN for data collection purposes.**

Models of educational provision

The Committee welcomes Education Scotland’s intention to publish a best practice document for education providers of sensory-impaired pupils.

The Committee notes what the Scottish Government’s response states regarding Education Scotland’s work:

“Education Scotland has identified the need for schools and authorities to identify and address the barriers to learning identifying and tackling barriers to learning before they become entrenched, finding new ways to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse population of learners and personalising learning and support to take account of individual needs, choices and circumstances while relentlessly reinforcing high expectations.”

The Committee requests more detail showing how Education Scotland works with local authorities (and other providers) to improve support for pupils with a sensory impairment. In particular, the Committee would like to know what, specifically, Education Scotland’s work as referred to in the quote above has involved. Can examples be provided to illustrate how this work has benefited learners?

Habilitation lessons as part of the curriculum

The Committee notes that Curriculum for Excellence provides ways for habilitation skills to be part of the personalised approach to learning, including offering personal

development units and personal achievement awards. Nevertheless, the Committee was told that a greater emphasis on teaching habilitation skills in mainstream schools would help to improve attainment and employment opportunities for pupils with a sensory impairment. **The Committee requests further information on the availability of habilitation lessons, and the scope to enhance this important area of skills development in the curriculum.**

Number of qualified teachers

The Committee made two recommendations, at paragraphs 64 and 65.

While the Scottish Government response does not cite these recommendations directly, the Committee notes the information provided about the work underway to collect data on numbers of teachers and their qualifications. The Committee welcomes this work. **However, the Committee requests a response to the point made in paragraph 64 about incentivising teachers: “We recommend that the Minister considers the options available to incentivise teachers to become ToD and QTVI, building on the actions already implemented by Moray House School of Education.”**

At paragraph 65, the Committee noted that some local authorities have developed good examples of workforce planning (some examples are included at paragraph 59). The Committee was not clear, however, about the extent to which such good practice is disseminated, and recommended that Education Scotland, the Scottish Government and local authorities work together to ensure good practice is adopted across all schools. The Committee notes in the Scottish Government response that “Education Scotland, the Scottish Government and local authorities can work together to ensure that existing good practice on workforce planning is more widely adopted through engagement within the Advisory Group on Additional Support for Learning”. **The Committee requests further information on this important issue. In particular, it seeks examples of how the engagement referred to in the quote above has resulted in improved workforce planning.**

Qualifications of teachers

Thank you for the information provided on this matter. When you gave oral evidence to us, we were interested in your comment that “there needs to be much broader deaf awareness and training among secondary teachers ... There is much more that we need to do on that”. The Scottish Government response refers to current teaching standards, but does not mention any plans for ‘broader deaf awareness training among secondary teachers’. **The Committee requests an update on this issue.**

Technology and access to the curriculum

The response helpfully states Education Scotland’s view that “it is unacceptable that breakdowns in technology cause children and young people barriers to their

learning”. It also states that Education Scotland “is seeking to ensure that digital learning is a supportive aspect for all learners”.

However, the Committee remains concerned about this issue. As the Committee was told in evidence, the effective use of assistive technologies is vital in allowing many sensory-impaired learners to engage with the curriculum. In addition, it is clear that some schools are able to facilitate these technologies better than others.

The Committee requests further details of the work that Education Scotland is carrying out to resolve the problems experienced in relation to the use of assistive technologies in the classroom, to share good practice and, crucially, to ensure that such good practice is fully implemented.

I would be grateful if you could provide this further information by 9 March.

Yours sincerely

**STEWART MAXWELL MSP
CONVENER**