

6 March 2017

James Dornan MSP
Convenor, Education and Skills Committee
Scottish Parliament

Dear James,

Identification and Support for Children and Young People with Additional Support Needs

We are writing to you in response to the Committee's recent session on the Additional Support Needs on 1 March 2017. We are both very concerned about some of the evidence which was presented to Committee. The views being expressed on the day were not supported by evidence and appeared at times to be overly anecdotal.

You will recall that COSLA submitted evidence to the Committee in advance of the session in November 2016. It is worth reiterating and developing the information provided at that time in response to the evidence which was presented on the 1 March.

It is important to begin by confirming that Local Authorities share the stated position of the Scottish Government – that, for most children with Additional Support Needs, mainstream education is the most appropriate environment. COSLA and ADES are supportive of the work to update Guidance on the Presumption of Mainstreaming, due to be consulted on this year.

We note that the Committee identified a variation in the number of children and young people with ASN across local authority areas. Teachers and Head Teachers may use a variety of approaches to support the children in their schools and both COSLA and ADES are clear that a variation in approach does not mean a variation in the standard which children and families can expect from these committed professionals. Instead, it is instead a reflection of the different ways in which support can best be achieved according to local situation and circumstance.

In some areas, learning and teaching and support will be delivered as a comprehensive aspect of a teaching role such that “additional support” is not always required. In other areas, services may be structured to provide support which is additional to that delivered by a classroom teacher. That is not to say one approach is better or standards not as good in some areas. The balance is multi-faceted depending on age and stage, class size, school-based resources (Units), and the needs of the children and young people.

It is also important to note that variations may exist due to the populations within Local Authority areas, for example the number of children who have English as an additional language, or children who are identified as “looked after”.

WHEN CALLING PLEASE ASK FOR: Jane O’Donnell 0131 474 9313 jane@cosla.gov.uk

It is fundamental that all children and young people are able to learn, develop and feel supported in the settings they are in. This is being achieved effectively, as recognised by the Deputy First Minister in his December letter to the Committee:

“Despite differences in recording practices I believe that, overall, the additional support for learning system is being well implemented in Scotland. We have a positive picture of children with additional support needs consistently achieving more each year.”

Where concerns may arise about the provision or structure of additional support in individual cases, Local Authorities take these very seriously. We are proud of the emphasis on discussion and early resolution which is the core of our approach. This is reflected in the low number of challenges which escalate to the Additional Support Needs Tribunal¹. The figures they provide show that from April 2015 to March 2016, of the referrals made, six cases were with regards to disability discrimination, 17 concerning coordinated support plans, and 45 about placing requests. In the context of the Scottish Government statistics, which noted that in 2016 that there were 170,329 children and young people with an additional support need, this is not reflective of a systematic issue.

We strive, working with children and their families, to get it right for every child. It would be remiss not to acknowledge that local government budget cuts have led to a cut in resources previously available to our families. However, it is imperative that the local integrated approaches to meeting the needs of children and young people with additional support needs are not compromised by new legislation. We are keen to work with government colleagues to ensure that the new guidance provides clearer, more helpful advice to parents and carers as well as local authority staff.

I hope these clarifications are helpful. COSLA and ADES officers are available to your committee clerks if you require any further information in this area.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Stephanie Primrose

COSLA Spokesperson
Education, Children and Young People

Maureen McKenna

ADES President

¹ <https://www.asntscotland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/ANNUAL%20REPORT%202015-2016.pdf>