

1. The context for the Committee's analysis of education for children with additional support needs in this report is the 'exponential' increase in the recorded incidence of children with additional support needs in Scotland in recent years. The methodology and 'sample' of those who provided submissions and were consulted with needs careful consideration.
 - This data is fundamentally flawed with inconsistencies across LAs. The methodological issues which have been raised many times about this data need to be acknowledged in relation to the reliability and validity – and the conclusions which are subsequently drawn from it.
 - We would challenge the assumption that the variation in ASN data across authorities is an indication of authorities not recognising additional support needs, and under-resourcing the provision to meet needs. Arguably it may be the case that those authorities which are 'below average' in the overall % of ASN, have universal provision which meets a wider range of needs, thus reducing the need for provision which is 'additional' (as per definition of ASN). We are confident in our LAs that we are meeting the needs of pupils within the resources we have available to us.
 - Of all LAs represented at ASLO, they report that the number of places in Specialist Provisions have grown rather than decreased and pressure has increased on parental requests to access these provisions.
 - There is no reliable correlation that can be made between numbers of ASN and the statements regarding teacher numbers
 - Other sources of data need to be included within a wider methodology, e.g. analysis of HMIE school reports in relation to quality indicators. (QI 3.1)

2. The analysis of the evidence in relation to mainstreaming and ASN should also consider the following:
 - How have the views of Children and Young People been gathered ?
 - Have the Ambassadors for Inclusion (Education Scotland) been consulted ?

3. The reported reduction in the number of specialist staff in classrooms, the reduction in specialist support services and the reduction in special school places:
 - Special school places – see point 1 above
 - Not all LAs report a reduction of specialist staff. Triangulation of data with local authorities needs more scrutiny
 - Specialist ASN teachers are being used in schools regularly to cover teaching duties across Scotland to cover staff absence when no supply is available.
 - The reduction of specialist staff could also be seen as an indication of building capacity and the pedagogy of class teachers and not necessarily a negative point. There is a strong evidence base that the pedagogy of 'what works' for additional support needs is the same pedagogy used universally, e.g. co-operative learning approaches
 - The assumption cannot be inferred that support can only be implemented by specialist staff.

- There are no national ratios for numbers of specialist staff for local authorities.
4. The Committee acknowledged that it only heard from those who wanted to respond to its call for views, and so naturally comments centred around what needs to improve. More has to be done to establish the extent to which the experiences conveyed in evidence are happening across Scotland. Having children in mainstream education who benefit from it is the starting point, but insight into the real experiences of children with additional support needs in mainstream education is vital to the success of inclusion, including mainstreaming. The positive aspects of practice which have been acknowledged in the report need highlighting and lessons learned shared more widely.
 5. We agree with the recommendation that the Scottish Government, having established a process of quality assurance as part of the review, reports to Parliament on an annual basis providing qualitative as well as quantitative evidence on additional support for learning in mainstream education. The caveats already referred to regarding current limitations with the ASN census should be taken into account.
 6. We acknowledge the reference to the Equity gap and additional support needs, in particular the engagement with families who experience the greatest inequities and disadvantage. The correlation between ASN and deprivation, and pupil equity funding should strengthen the targeting of resources to children with additional support needs.
 7. We question the recommendation that the Scottish Government increases the provision of advocacy services and looks at how these could be best targeted at raising awareness and supporting parents from areas of deprivation. The function and purpose of this needs to be further clarified. It does not appear to be having the desired effect in relation to adversarial parental complaints at present.
 8. ASLO agrees with the recommendation that education authorities seek to collaborate more, including in respect of designing and delivering training in order to remove duplication of effort. Informal arrangements already exist between some authorities which can be strengthened to provide targeted training in relation to regional priorities. ASLO will progress this as a main agenda item at its next meeting.