

## **Fife Education and Children's Services Response to the Education and Skills Committee Report**

### **How is Additional Support for Learning working in practice?**

1. The Committee wants to thank all those who shared their perspective on additional support needs, particularly those parents who shared personal and sensitive information on caring for their children and the challenge of ensuring their children receive the support they need in school. This information has been very valuable to the Committee, helping it to produce recommendations that reflect these practical experiences. This report highlights some of the themes raised in evidence, but anyone with an interest in this issue should also look at the original submissions to get a sense of the concerns raised.
2. 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, to a level beyond many people's expectations (153% increase since 2010).

*CR 2 – The 'exponential' increase in recorded incidence of additional support needs may be partly due to an actual increase in children with asn, partially due to better diagnosis and wider identification of need and partly due to the data recording and collection itself.*

*It should also be acknowledged that an increase in recording of asn does not in itself require an increase in resourcing, given the wide definition of asn; it requires effective and efficient identification of how needs will best be met, which may be through more effective deployment of existing staff skills.*

3. The Scottish Parliament passed the legislation that brought in the mainstreaming policy and the Parliament continues to support the inclusive ethos behind it. However, the success of mainstreaming, and more broadly the policy of inclusion, is dependent on how it is implemented. The Committee received lots of evidence suggesting that, due to a lack of resources, some children feel more excluded in a mainstream school setting than they may have done in a special school. In other words the policy to include is having the opposite effect in some circumstances due to a lack of resources. An analysis of the evidence, taking available resources to support Additional Support for Learning (ASL) in mainstream schools into account, suggests that more children than are actually best served by mainstream education are currently in mainstream primary and secondary schools.

*CR 3 – In Fife the overall resources to support those with additional support needs have not been reduced during the period from 2010, although there is a recognition that our numbers of pupils have increased. Through development of pedagogical practice within the mainstream settings we have seen Secondary Headteachers reduce their in-school Support for Learning staff, whilst maintaining the overall number of teaching and support staff.*

*Importantly, the impact of mainstreaming is not solely correlated to resource allocation.*

*In order to support this suggestion there would need to be a wider explanation of what was meant by inclusion in the responses – is this about social inclusion and/or educational inclusion. Without seeing all the evidence presented this suggestion is difficult to support – it is a very subjective statement.*

*It is agreed that any policy is only effective if it is implemented effectively; in relation to how asn are supported within educational establishments this is also the case. However, implementation does not rely on resourcing alone – it requires effective leadership of the establishment, appropriate support and training of staff, opportunities to practice new skills and problem solve in a collaborative way as well as advice and support from specialist staff where required.*

*The perceptual evidence quoted does not support the statement ‘An analysis of the evidence, taking available resources to support Additional Support for Learning (ASL) in mainstream schools into account, suggests that more children than are actually best served by mainstream education are currently in mainstream primary and secondary schools’. However, it does support the requirement for all schools and local authorities to have rigorous self-evaluation processes in place, which take into account hard evidence (attainment, attendance, exclusion, achievement) as well as parent, pupil and partners feedback. This will enable clarity about to what extent all learners needs are being met, including those with asn, and most importantly, the plan for improvement. HGIOS 4 outlines effective processes for taking this forward.*

4. Looking more broadly at additional support for learning, the evidence points at a number of ways in which resources are not currently sufficient to support those with additional support needs in mainstream schools. The most notable factors are the reduction in the number of specialist staff in classrooms, the reduction in specialist support services and the reduction in special school places.

***CR 4** – There will always be a desire for more / additional resources. How much is sufficient is subjective. Reduction in specialist staff may be seen as a positive or negative indicator. If specialist services – EPs and SLS – are developing staff and building capacity then class teachers should be more confident and enabled to support children and young people with additional support needs. There could therefore be a reduction in ‘specialist staff’.*

*Additionally, ‘Specialist staff’ has not been defined.*

*Locally we have not seen a reduction in special school numbers – we have seen a steady increase in both special schools and departments.*

*However, as long as there are requirements for local authorities to demonstrate significant budget savings, there will be the requirement for support services in general to continue to shrink. It is important for local authorities and the SG to ensure that this shrinkage is not disproportionate to other services and is accompanied with a commitment to deliver services in other ways to compensate – for example through the provision of training, advice and consultation for teaching and PSA staff rather than providing direct support to children. As above, this change*

*in practice must be evaluated through both hard evidence and stakeholder feedback in order to report on the effectiveness of this approach.*

5. Nevertheless, the Committee is encouraged by the figures provided by the Cabinet Secretary on positive outcomes for those with additional support needs (ASN). It is also encouraged to have heard from a number of parents what a massive difference effective support from a particular person, school or education authority, in mainstream education, has made to the lives of their children. These achievements are particularly welcome when set against a backdrop of limited resources and a massive increase in the recorded incidence of additional support needs.

*CR 5 – We would agree and be able to describe many cases where mainstream education has been very beneficial and has been supported and welcomed by parents.*

*We would also support the need to continue to gather evidence of outcomes, to evaluate impact at an individual, establishment, local authority and national level, in order to corroborate parental feedback.*

6. The Committee acknowledges that it only heard from those who wanted to respond to its call for views, and so naturally comments centred on what needs to improve. However, the Committee places real value on the amount of evidence it received, the depth of the detail, and the consistency of the issues raised with the implementation of the mainstreaming legislation, and more generally the insufficient resources for additional support for learning in mainstream education. More has to be done to establish the extent to which the experiences conveyed in evidence are happening across Scotland.

*CR 6 – This acknowledgement is welcomed. It is important that these views are seen as only one perspective. We refer to our response to CR5 above regarding the need to gather outcome evidence alongside stakeholder feedback.*

7. The Scottish Government must assess the extent to which the policy to mainstream and the associated communications to education authorities are leading to mainstreaming in practice. The Scottish Government must also assess the extent to which a lack of resources is impacting on mainstreaming in practice and more generally on the provision of additional support for learning in mainstream education.

*CR 7 – This would be welcomed but with an open-minded, balanced approach from SG.*

*It would be helpful if the Scottish Government could indicate a methodology for this, for example, based on the triangulation of quantitative data and stakeholder views outlined in HGIOS 4.*

8. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government should undertake a quality assurance review of the implementation of the presumption to mainstream policy, and more broadly of the availability of additional support for learning in mainstream schools. This review should place emphasis on the direct experiences of parents (and by extension the children themselves), teachers and support staff in

schools. The evidence received by this Committee should be context for the Government's work. Having children in mainstream education who would 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.

9. The Committee recommends that this quality assurance review should feed into the terms of the revised guidance planned by the Government. The revised guidance must ensure the impact of a lack of resources is reflected in the form the additional support for learning policy takes in the future.

*CR 8 and 9 – This would be a very significant undertaking and it would be vital that this was done to reflect the experiences of children in terms of their involvement and participation, their achievement and attainment, their social and emotional inclusion. It cannot be simply an analysis of resourcing. Therefore, we would recommend that any review should place equal emphasis on quantitative data and feedback from stakeholders on their direct experience.*

10. Given the evidence received, and the fact that the mainstreaming policy is a "cornerstone" of inclusivity in mainstream schools, the Committee considers that parliamentary oversight of the progress of the implementation of mainstreaming, and more broadly additional support for learning, is required. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government, having established a process of quality assurance as part of the review recommended above, reports to Parliament on an annual basis providing qualitative as well as quantitative evidence on additional support for learning in mainstream education.

*CR 10 – The Advisory Group for Additional Support for Learning currently has an oversight of this area. It has for the last five years provided a report to parliament. The legal obligation to do so has now expired but this could be requested of AGASL. Any review should be across all educational contexts, not just mainstream schools. The quality assurance of learning and teaching of pupils with ASN is equally important in the wide spectrum of provision which is available across Scotland, including special schools.*

11. The Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's review of the guidance on mainstreaming and recommends that the review includes a systematic assessment of the processes outlined in paragraphs 69 to 88, including an assessment of the extent to which resources are impacting on each process. Resource limitations that are impacting on these processes include:

- the number of trained ASN teachers and ASN assistants,
- the availability of specialists including mental health specialists and educational psychologists,
- the level of resources supporting the ASN Tribunal process and other appeal processes, and
- the availability of spaces in special schools.

**CR 11** – *This conclusion/recommendation is extremely broad. The concept of an ASN requires to be defined in this specific analysis – does this include Learning Support Services, Visual Impairment, Special school etc.?*

*There is a link being made between ASN Specialist and outcomes for children, which should be challenged. The responsibility lies with the class teacher, with the specialist providing advice – and not necessarily in the classroom.*

*That being said, it is a fact that the decrease in Educational Psychologists nationally has a potential impact on children. It is also a fact that there are long waiting times for CAMHS.*

*The need for additional resources for the ASN Tribunal System can be challenged. Issues should be resolved at authority level or by mediation. There would be concern that resourcing ASNTS would raise expectations of that route being used to resolve such concerns.*

*In Fife – Special school places are available but depending on locality this will become increasingly challenging. We have not refused a place.*

*Therefore, again we would welcome the recommendation of an open-minded systematic assessment of the processes identified, including to what extent resources are impacting on them. It is concerning that the outcome of this systematic assessment appears to be pre-determined by the sentence ‘Resource limitations that are impacting include...’*

*It would be a more helpful focus for this review to consider how these processes can work most effectively in the context of shrinking resources at local authority level, due to the need to make budget savings. In this context systems must focus on how needs can be effectively and efficiently identified; how the assessment of the kind of support necessary to meet the needs is undertaken; how support planning is implemented and evaluated; based on advisory and consultative support from specialist staff rather than the more direct input previously enjoyed.*

12. Since approaching 1 in 4 children have a recognised additional support need, the successful provision of additional support for learning is integral to the success of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). The Committee is concerned that parents from areas of deprivation may have lower chances at present to receive advice and support to ensure additional support needs of their children are recognised and the necessary support for learning provided. Given the emphasis in evidence on the importance of the parent pushing for support for their child, the Committee is concerned that this issue will disproportionately impact upon disadvantaged families and potentially have an adverse effect, namely widening the attainment gap between children with ASN in deprived and more affluent families.

**CR 12** – *While there is a genuine concern that some families are more able to voice their concerns and push for these, this should be addressed at school and LA level through parental engagement processes.*

*This is an important aspect which should be audited and addressed by local authorities as part of their data gathering in relation to quality assurance, and commitment to closing the attainment gap for those most vulnerable learners.*

13. The Committee welcomes the undertaking from the Cabinet Secretary to set out the criteria that the attainment gap will be assessed against by "the middle of this year [2017]". As supporting children with ASN is integral to closing the attainment gap, the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government analyses the extent to which a process that relies largely on parental involvement to have their child's ASN recognised and supported, could potentially widen the gap.

*CR 13 –The scope of this report does not provide evidence to support the statement that this is a process which ‘relies largely on parental involvement to have their child’s ASN recognised and supported’. While it appears that there are discrepancies among local authorities on the proportions of asns identified in different categories, this may relate to a number of issues, including lack of clarity about definitions, inconsistency in how recording is done, lack of clarity about how to record when there are multiple asns etc. This should be addressed.*

*Schools should – and do – identify children’s additional support needs. The work the Education Authority is doing is in support of schools to identify the gap and implement effective strategies.*

*Parental involvement in its widest sense is a priority for all education authorities, as engagement of parents in their child’s learning his highly correlated with good outcomes.*

*Local authorities are focused on providing support to those most at risk of poor educational outcomes, in order to address the poverty related attainment gap. Addressing the leadership, teaching and learning, training and support requirements to do this should also ensure that outcomes for children with asn also improve; however, work needs done on a more effective way to identify what is meant by asn in order to then gather and use data on this group to be able to identify their outcomes and therefore improve them.*

14. The Committee also recommends 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.
15. The Committee welcomes the undertaking from the Cabinet Secretary and recommends that the Scottish Government establishes whether there are deep-seated factors that are influencing the variation in these figures. Specifically, the Committee is concerned that additional support needs are going unrecognised in some education authorities more than others and that, in addition to parental involvement and resource limitations, the culture of the education authority, and some particular schools within authorities, is also a factor.

*CR 15 – As identified in CR13 above, there is an issue about the quality of data. Without very clear definitions – and moderation – it is difficult to ensure all schools record the data and do so in a way that is equitable. Are we comparing like with like? We do not accept the assertion that LAs/schools are allowing needs to go unrecognised in order to save money.*

16. The Committee recommends that, once the raw data has been improved as a result of the Scottish Government working group's efforts, anomalies in these figures

should be used as a basis to explore with individual authorities the basis for any inexplicably low percentages of ASN in their area. Information from the quality assurance review recommended above could also be analysed on an education authority by education authority basis to establish whether the patterns in parent, child and school staff experiences in these areas, specifically on cultural barriers to recognition, support the figures. The Committee would ask that, when the Scottish Government has established which education authorities are cause for concern, that the Government shares this information with the Committee so that the Committee can also seek to hold these authorities to account.

*CR 16 – At the point where we are confident that the data is robust it would be reasonable to reflect on pupil, parent and staff experiences, triangulating this with quantitative data available at that time, through the appropriate mechanism in place.*

17. The Committee also recommends that the Scottish Government should undertake a financial review to ascertain the extent to which education authorities are spending in line with the level of need in their area, and identify any education authorities that have spends lower than their recognition rates might require. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government undertakes this review in collaboration with education authorities as the Committee appreciates that authorities will have some valid explanations in relation to the disparities in recognition rates and in levels of spend per pupil with ASN. The financial review should be the starting point for Scottish Government discussions with education authorities on their funding allocations.

*CR 17 – This would be a very complicated and subjective process. How much is spent on a child with asn? There would be the danger that the spend is averaged out or budgets are based on the lowest common figure.*

*Given the inconsistencies in how asn categories are recorded, there is currently no systematic way to quantify 'need'. If and when this is the case, this may be a reasonable action to take, but would need to take into account other confounding factors such as geography, rural distribution, transport costs, proportion of very small vs very large schools, and also attainment outcomes for young people.*

18. Inclusive education for those with additional support needs is "based on the premise that there is benefit to all children when the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs is properly prepared, well supported and takes place in mainstream schools within a positive ethos". The Committee would therefore welcome further analysis from the Scottish Government on how the education and ultimately the attainment of pupils in general is being impacted upon by insufficient resources being provided to support children with additional support needs. This should include any correlation between the reduction in specialist ASN staff in certain education authorities and overall attainment.

*CR 18 – There is available research to support the benefits of inclusion for those with additional support needs and the other pupils.*

*This summary is again a simplified correlation between financial resources and asn.*

*It may be a more effective exercise for the Scottish Government to examine the factors which enable learners with asn to have a successful educational experience, taking into account attainment, achievement, social, community and post school outcome data, alongside perceptual data from all stakeholders.*

19. The Committee recommends that education authorities seek to collaborate more, including in respect of designing and delivering training in order to remove duplication of effort. The Committee will seek a response from Cosla and SLGP on this and other relevant recommendations, and will also highlight this report to all education authorities.

*CR 19 – This recommendation is sensible. Working across authorities to ensure good quality CPD is beneficial especially in areas – geographical and thematic – where there are fewer staff or less experience.*

20. In relation to initial teacher training, the Committee welcomes the undertaking from the Cabinet Secretary to highlight to the GTCS the Committee's concerns that combining post-graduate training with the probationary year, which is one proposal for change, will limit further the time available for trainee teachers to train in additional support needs. The Committee recommends that the GTCS takes this into account when assessing proposals from the colleges of education, produced in line with the Government's intention to "encourage more teachers to come into the classroom and get them there quicker".

*CR 20 – This recommendation should be considered however it should also cover the quality of ITE in relation to the teaching of children and young people with additional support needs.*

## **General**

- There is undoubtedly a need for LAs to work with SG to develop a more robust data system to support schools.
- It is correct that we need to ensure there is not a steady erosion of staff with a specialism / expertise. Fewer EPs, LSS etc. will impact on our ability to support class teachers. However there is a danger that we equate this with particular qualifications.
- It would appear, on the basis of this report, that the authors do not accept the basic premise that class teachers should deliver their teaching to support children with additional support needs. It would appear that ASN specialists are being seen as the main deliverers of the experience of these children.
- It is too simplistic to develop an equation that suggests that asn pupil numbers going up against staff specialism and numbers going down, equals poorer outcomes.
- It would be helpful to have an indication from the Scottish Government about how references made to funding allocations to education authorities and quality assurance processes link to potential changes which may be made as a result of the Governance Review.

