

## **A24 Scotland**

**13 November 2020**

### **Submission for consideration by the Education and Skills Committee with respect to the Additional Support for Learning Review**

**A24 wants to propel Scotland on its journey to a fully inclusive education system, where all children enjoy their right to learn together in their own communities. In our view the recent review of Additional Support for Learning Report and Action Plan take us no further on our journey towards inclusive education.**

- The need for systemic change in Scottish education has to start with recognising the human right of children with disabilities to inclusive education.
- Building an inclusive, diverse and fair society is not possible while we continue to segregate based on disability / impairment in our schools.

A24 is a group of disabled people, parents of disabled children, practitioners and researchers who aim to achieve inclusive education for all children and young people in Scotland's schools. Inclusive education is a human rights issue and a pragmatic choice: all children and young people learn better in inclusive schools, schools that take full account of difference.

Scotland has many examples of good inclusive practice in schools. However, it can do better. Almost all disabled children and disabled young people attend their local school with their peers but (1) there are some that do not, and these children are currently being failed and (2) we are concerned that now there are plans to reduce that very high level by failing to plan for inclusive education and looking to increase the uptake of segregated special schooling.

We want to build on the successes of Scottish education, not turn back the clock and institutionalise our disabled children and young people. We have concerns that at legislative, strategic and policy level Scotland's laws are not compliant with human rights and international law. (Our more detailed opinion is available to read on the A24 blog <https://a24scotland.wordpress.com/2020/10/30/additional-support-for-learning-review/>)

Since 1992 all children have had a right to education under the UNCRC and in 2006 the UNCRPD added that disabled children have the right to be educated in an inclusive education system. (Our more detailed opinion is available to read on the A24 blog <https://a24scotland.wordpress.com/2020/11/04/inclusive-education-a-human-right/>)

The Scottish Report gives no attention to the rights of disabled children to inclusive education as set out in UNCRPD (2006) or UNCRPD General Comment no. 4 on inclusive education (2016) or even the Human Rights Council (January 2019) report on "Empowering children with disabilities for the enjoyment of their human rights, including through inclusive education".

In June this year UNESCO launched the [Global Education Monitoring Report 2020](#). The theme of this report was Inclusion and Education. The foreword to the GEM report views the broad definition of inclusive education not as an access to mainstream but recognition of wider barriers like mechanisms of exclusion.

*"Discrimination, stereotypes and alienation do exclude many. These mechanisms of exclusion are essentially the same, regardless of gender, location, wealth, disability,*

*ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, sexual orientation, incarceration, religion, and other beliefs and attitudes.*" (Our more detailed opinion is available to read on the A24 blog <https://a24scotland.wordpress.com/2020/07/15/the-gem-report/>)

In Scotland we have had three debates in the Scottish Parliament over the past three years. The debates mainly feature questions about presumption of mainstreaming, level of resources and access to segregated special schools. MSPs rarely spoke up for the benefits of inclusive education, and support for the presumption of mainstreaming lacked the ideas of injustice and inequality that UNESCO discusses.

*"A key barrier to inclusion in education is the lack of belief that it is possible and desirable"*

Such debates can hardly be an indication of wide and strong support as suggested in Angela's report. Indeed two of Scotland's political parties voted for a motion that stated "the presumption to mainstream has laudable intentions", the motion talked about "special educational needs" and that the government will work "to review the presumption to mainstream policy to ensure there can be more uptake of the provision of places in special schools."

Furthermore recently numbers attending special schools in Scotland have increased. We tend to agree with the United Nations that Scotland should:

*"Adopt and implement a coherent strategy, financed with concrete timelines and measurable goals, on increasing and improving inclusive education"*

The [What Next for Scotland report](#) on the review of the UK's response to the UN recommended that the Scottish Government develop laws and policies to support inclusive education in line with UN recommendations.

The wording of the UNCRPD is clear. Segregation based on impairment or disability is not in the best interest of anyone.

Through our members' lived experience we have seen first hand how inclusive education can work but we can also see that the current system has its problems.

Jordan is an advocate, a valued member of the workforce who often speaks at events and conferences in support of other learning disabled adults. He has gone from being supported at mainstream school to providing support in his work opportunities today. (Jordan's full education story is available to read on the A24 blog <https://a24scotland.wordpress.com/2020/03/11/jordans-story/>)

Parents are having to make difficult choices, choosing between having their child's educational/ medical/ therapy needs met in a special school, or having social/peer needs met and building a future in their communities in their local school. A member whose son has recently started Primary 1 in a mainstream school commented

*"We are embarking on a journey...through an education system that doesn't necessarily fit as well as it could. I feel sure that we've made the right choice but surely there must be a way to build an inclusive education system which enables full recognition of everyone's rights and ensures that children with disabilities are included in their communities from the very beginning?"* (Read more about this story on the A24 blog <https://a24scotland.wordpress.com/2019/11/26/the-start-of-a-journey/>)

Parents need to be assured that there is not only a presumption of mainstream but that support provided in special schools can also be provided in mainstream. Our children should not need to compromise.

The answer doesn't necessarily lie with the current mainstream and special school set up.

*"I do not have the answers to the perfect classroom. The right of all children to attend their local school is only realised when all aspects of school life are allowed to be scrutinised and adapted according to the needs of all the children."* (Read more about this story on the A24 blog <https://a24scotland.wordpress.com/2019/11/15/harrys-story/>)

We need to reconsider the complete picture.

*"When we look at education for all we have to adjust our expectations of what a successful school day and school experience looks like. Once we accept that not everyone's school day has to look the same to be successful it's easier to imagine a truly inclusive education system."* (Read more about this story on the A24 blog <https://a24scotland.wordpress.com/2020/04/21/lylas-story/>)

When looking at the bigger picture and why children attend school it's important that all children get the opportunity to know each other through the shared experience of school.

*"the wider school community benefits greatly from her presence as much as she benefits from being included"*

Children with disabilities who experience mainstream education are healthier, happier and will be more likely to participate in their communities. They have an improved outcome in terms of employment and independent living after school which ultimately saves money. They learn academics plus develop socially and emotionally.

All the students in mainstream settings have daily opportunities to practice social skills like acceptance, patience and empathy when disabled children are present. All the children experience how to live, learn and play together. Growing up you learn who you are from the influences around you. School education systems can help set your expectations for life.

*"I want to ensure that my son is as welcomed and valued as my daughter is in a mainstream setting and he is not regarded as a guest who can be uninvited at any time. He deserves equity in his experience of education. Most importantly he has the right to be in the same school as his sister and his friends and he wants to be included with them."* (Read more about this story on the A24 blog <https://a24scotland.wordpress.com/2019/12/06/two-children-one-school/>)

And finally for parents who decide that special education suits the needs of their child better:

*"We are so fortunate that my boy gets to experience inclusion in his school community – many children do not have this right met. But having seen how simple it is, I wish he were included in the same school community as his sisters, as is also his right; I wish he were part of the town where he will grow up, live, play and work through his school years and beyond."*

(Read more about this story on the A24 blog  
<https://a24scotland.wordpress.com/2019/12/16/spirit-of-inclusion/>)

Education, for all children, is for life. We cannot expect to build diverse, inclusive, fair societies and communities if all children are not exposed to the full range of human diversity from a young age, if they are taught that disability is 'other' from a young age.

Let's not allow Scottish children to fall off the cliff edge when they leave school like was suggested in the BBC program 'A special school' *"once the children leave the protection of the school they often fall off a cliff edge. They are not known in their own communities. They don't have friends there. They can't get jobs."* This is not only disadvantageous to the child, but unnecessarily puts extra demands on government and society. (Read more about this story on the A24 blog  
<https://a24scotland.wordpress.com/2020/11/11/a-special-school/>)

In the end the fundamental misunderstanding and ignorance of inclusive education, the lack of attention to international law and its policy guidance together with the experience of parents and self advocates continues to justify the need for A24 Scotland.

Systemic change in Scottish education starts with recognising the human right of children with disabilities to inclusive education. It's not just about their feelings it's about changing systems for all our children.

Inclusion isn't easy, but it is right.