

EIS Submission to the Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Parliament in relation to the Additional Support for Learning Review

The EIS, Scotland's largest education trade union, representing teachers across all sectors and at all career stages, welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Parliament in relation to the Additional Support for Learning ('ASL') Review.

Background

It was with some reluctance that the EIS supported the call for an independent review of ASL implementation in January 2019 - reluctance because we were of the view that a wealth of evidence already existed about the need for greater resourcing to deliver the ambitions of legislation in this area, including the presumption to mainstream the education of children with additional support needs. We were concerned that a review at that time would simply stall government action to address the issues that the EIS and others have been raising for some time. Disappointingly, having supported the call and engaged strongly in the process, our view is that the Recommendations fall short of identifying the resourcing barriers which are preventing an extensive array of educational policy, underpinned by comprehensive legislation, from being effectively implemented in practice.

Under-Investment and Resource Issues

The Recommendations are prefaced by a statement suggesting that what is needed is a 'feedback loop' that enables those with responsibility for implementation of the ASL legislations to receive feedback from the children and parents as a means of enhancing support to children with additional needs and thereby improving their outcomes.

It is strange that there is no reference in this preface to the fundamental relationship of resourcing to children's experiences of education and, of course, their outcomes, despite the fact that the EIS provided significant evidence to the Review around under-funding of ASL and lack of resources amidst a backdrop of rising levels of need.

The EIS has long cited the well-evidenced gap between theories of inclusion, the law and policy on children's rights, and the daily practice in our schools. This gap stems from the significant under resourcing of provision to allow well-intentioned policies to be implemented effectively in practice. Teachers across the country have raised serious concerns about the stretched nature of support for additional learning needs, both in terms of the ASN sector and for pupils with additional needs in mainstream settings. There are not enough staff in the Scottish education system to support these needs, and those who are there have too little time; often too many different additional support needs to meet within large classes; too little dedicated time for professional learning in this area; and too few resources to meet the array of needs before them.

Rather than address these issues directly, the Review recommends that Audit Scotland (accountants and statisticians, not educationalists) should consider this crucial element of ASL implementation. The Institute believes that this is an

opportunity missed to effect real and meaningful change. With more than 1 in 4 pupils identified as having additional needs, (those needs now are likely to have been compounded by the impact of COVID-19) we believe that the Review ought to have focused directly on the issues of underfunding and the key issue of the need for more support staff, more specialist teachers and greater dedicated resources.

Undervaluing

Worryingly, the Recommendations also appear to take conflicting views on the value of Pupil Support Assistants ('PSAs'), on the one hand implying that such staff should be better remunerated and provided with professional learning, and on the other implying that spending on PSAs does not provide best value for money.

In 2019, the EIS, in the publication, 'Additional Support for Learning in Scottish School Education: Exploring the Gap between Promise and Practice.' (embed link), highlighted that further attention should be given to the undervaluing of the roles of both ASL/ASN Teachers and ASL/ASN Assistants. It was highlighted at that time that this was in part linked to societal undervaluing of work which is predominantly carried out by women, and which is often (wrongly) perceived as something that 'anyone could do', with the skills involved not being fully understood or respected. It is disappointing, therefore, to see this approach apparently perpetuated in part in these Recommendations.

Failure to Acknowledge Challenges and Existing Good Practice

The Recommendations repeatedly highlight that there are issues with implementation, a principle which is accepted by all. However, rather than identify resource constraints as being key to this, the Report implies that attitudes and lack of understanding and/or will on the part of schools and teachers is the problem.

This approach takes little cognisance of the falling number of staff working in ASL. Teacher Census data demonstrates that the general trend over recent years has been a decline in the numbers of staff with specialist roles, e.g. Behaviour Support, ESL (English as a second language) or Learning Support. ASN teacher numbers have fallen by a staggering 19.5% in the last ten years. Data provided by the Scottish Government has shown that across Scotland, in 2010, there were 3,524¹ Full Time Equivalent Additional Support Needs (ASN) Teachers; by 2019 that figure was 2,836² – a decrease of 688 FTE ASN teachers.

This decline must be regarded in the context of increasing need. Statistics show the year on year increase in the number of children with additional support needs in primary and secondary schools in Scotland. In 2020, 226,838 children are recorded as having additional support needs; nearly a third of the pupils in our schools.³ And we know that the impact of the pandemic will only increase these numbers and the level of need in the years to come.

¹ [Motions, Questions and Answers Search - Parliamentary Business : Scottish Parliament](#)

² [Motions, Questions and Answers Search - Parliamentary Business : Scottish Parliament](#)

³ [Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland 2020 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

Despite these challenges, classroom teachers across Scotland and others who work with them, strive every day to ensure that children and young people enjoy and achieve at school, using a wide range of inclusive approaches.

The Recommendations fail to recognise the existing good practice ongoing in the Education system in relation to ASN provision, for example in taking an assets-based approach to Child Support Plans and joint working between schools, parents and other core agencies in the child planning process, instead implying a deficit model of provision across the board.

In order to deliver an education to all children that is inclusive and addresses learners' individual needs, the Institute had hoped that the Review would have recognised that schools must be sufficiently staffed and resourced in order to ensure that each child's needs are known to teachers. Each member of staff must have access to and protected time for professional learning, be afforded the time to plan how to meet the diverse needs of pupils and must be able to access the expertise of specialist colleagues when needed. Regard must also be taken of the fact that special schools and special units have a role to play in meeting the needs of pupils, where appropriate, and also require investment.

Wider Achievement

On a positive note, the Review Report recommends that the measurement frameworks which capture achievement, such as the National Improvement Framework ('NIF'), need to be more inclusive of children with additional support needs, capturing their progress which will often not be wither in full or in part, attainment-based.

The EIS welcomes this recommendation and has long advocated that evaluation of young people's progress should be much more inclusive in order to capture what progress in learning and achievement looks like for *all* children, including those with additional support needs.

Status of ASN Teaching

The EIS agrees the need for parity of career progression for teachers with ASN specialism though does not support the recommendation that there should be a first teaching qualification in ASN. We believe that this would too quickly narrow the career opportunities for student teachers who, on entry to ITE have, understandably, quite limited knowledge of teaching as a career and of additional support needs as a specialist field. Furthermore, we are of the view that specialism in ASN should stem from a firm foundation of knowledge, skills and experience in teaching more generally, acquired through completion of a teaching qualification and subsequent school experience. That said, we are of the view that greater focus on ASN within ITE is required for all student teachers. In terms of career pathways and progression, the EIS called for ASN specialism to be considered within the Career Pathways Review, the findings of which are now being deliberated by the SNCT. We see ASN teaching as an essential and valuable specialism which should be recognised within Scotland's career pathways for teachers.

Conclusion

The EIS had hoped that the ASL Review would provide the opportunity, which it has long sought, for all key actors in the Scottish education system to come together to develop a collective response to the barriers to effective implementation of the ambitious legislation and policy in ASL which we have in Scotland.

We hoped that the issues highlighted in ‘Additional Support for Learning in Scottish School Education: Exploring the Gap between Promise and Practice.’ (embed link) could be addressed and measures put in place to stop the detrimental impact which the climate of under-investment in ASL is having on the educational experience for many pupils; the wellbeing of children and young people; and the wellbeing of the teaching workforce.

Regrettably, this has been an opportunity missed and we would urge the Committee to reflect on the fact that it is not the refined guidance and focus contained in the Recommendations of the Report which schools require to meet the need of pupils; it is additional investment.

As we highlighted back in 2019, “Inclusion on the cheap” is not acceptable. Scotland’s children and young people, and their teachers, deserve better.’