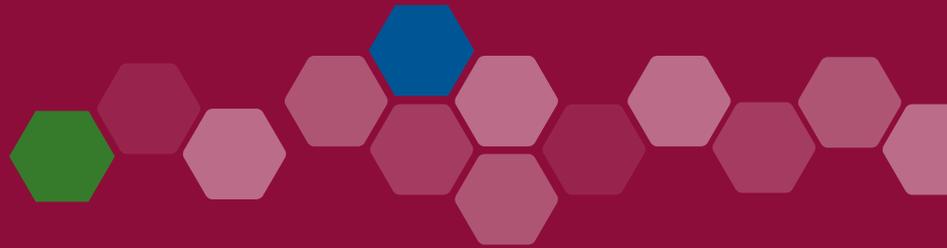




# Additional Support for Learning: Research on the experience of children and young people and those that support them



**CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS**

**Additional Support for Learning:  
Research on the experience of  
children and young people  
and those that support them**

**Scottish Government**

**March 2019**

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# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the children and young people, teachers and support workers, parents and local authority officers who took part in our research. The research would not have been possible without your support.

We understand that your time is extremely valuable and are very grateful for all of the help received.

# Executive Summary

## About this research

This qualitative research explored the experiences of children and young people of additional support for learning, and the experiences of those who support them.

The research took place in 18 schools in six local authority areas across Scotland, in 2018. The schools were a mix of:

- primary and secondary schools;
- types of school – including mainstream schools (with and without additional support needs bases or enhanced support) and special schools; and
- varied geographies and levels of deprivation.

It involved 100 face to face interviews with pupils ranging from P2 to S6. It also involved 54 school staff members (leadership teams, class teachers and support workers) and 39 parents.

The research was qualitative. Qualitative research is particularly useful in exploring complex areas, providing an in-depth understanding of particular experiences, views, choices and behaviours. However, it is important to note that while this report gives an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of those who were involved in the research, its findings cannot be extrapolated to the wider population.

## Additional support for learning provision

All local authority officers involved in the research said their authority had a clear ethos around meeting the needs of children with additional support needs (ASN), which was in line with the presumption of mainstreaming.

Overall, most local authority officers felt that the balance of additional support for learning provision was improving in their area, becoming more flexible and individualised. However, most felt that there was still more to do to improve the balance of provision, including developing the resources available in mainstream schools in terms of money, staff and facilities, and being able to recruit skilled teachers and support staff. In some areas, there was a clear feeling from local authority officers and school staff that there were not enough resources to meet needs – particularly in mainstream schools.

## School experiences of children and young people

Many pupils at mainstream primary schools liked their friends and teachers. A few said they liked everything and would not change anything.

Many secondary school pupils said that they liked the range of subjects and the support they received at school. However, some secondary school pupils said they did not like anything about their school at all. Some said they hated school and did not want to be there, and some said they did not like their teachers.

Pupils at special schools said they liked playing outside, learning life skills, and topics such as sport, music and art. Many said that there was nothing they did not like, and their dislikes were very diverse and included noise, school work, friends, safety and not being allowed to be independent.

Pupils at mainstream and special schools, generally felt positive about their experience, and were positive across SHANARRI indicators. However:

- In terms of **safety**, some mainstream school pupils said that they felt – or had previously felt – very unsafe due to bullying. Half of all secondary school girls involved in the research had experienced bullying, with two moving schools due to bullying. A few pupils at special schools said that pupils were violent or aggressive towards them and wanted more help with feeling safe.
- In terms of **achieving**, a few pupils at mainstream schools felt they could achieve better in small group or ASN base activity, rather than in the whole class. A few pupils at special schools said they were covering work they had already done, and were ready to be more challenged.
- In terms of **inclusion**, most pupils at mainstream schools felt they had lots of friends and that it was easy to make friends, and they were included in the life of the school. However, a few pupils in ASN bases in mainstream schools said they did not always feel involved in the life of the school beyond the base. Around half of pupils at special schools said they had lots of friends, but some (at two schools in particular) found it quite hard to make friends.

Overall, almost all pupils at mainstream schools and special schools felt their needs were well met.

A few primary pupils said that they wanted more help, and a few didn't like going out of the class to get support as they felt they missed things. Secondary pupils often enjoyed going to a targeted support session, and

enjoyed the quiet space. However, two secondary pupils felt they did not get the help they needed.

## **Parental views on school experiences**

Parents and carers were broadly positive about their child's experience of school across all of the SHANARRI indicators. Overall, most parents felt that their child's school was doing well in terms of meeting the needs of their child. Parents and carers valued when communication with the school was good; enhanced support was available; and their children were comfortable at the school.

Most parents of children at mainstream schools had something they would like to improve about the school – including some concerns about resources, staff and buildings and high staff turnover. A few secondary school parents had concerns about the busy school environment, the challenges ensuring all teachers had the information they needed about their child, and ongoing concerns about bullying.

Parents with children at special schools liked the small size of the school and classes, the good ratio of adults to children and the access to physical space both indoors and outdoors. While a few felt their child was achieving more than at mainstream school, a few had concerns about academic challenge. A few on split placements felt that their child's needs were better met in the special school than the mainstream school.

Almost all parents were very positive about the relationship and level of communication with teachers and support staff at their child's school. However, a few felt that they had to push to improve communication.

For many parents it had taken a long time to get their child to the right environment. The challenges included a lack of understanding from staff in mainstream schools; experiences of bullying; long assessment and diagnosis periods; having to push for extra support or spaces at special schools or ASN units; and being moved between schools with little notice.

## **Involving young people and families in decision making**

Pupils at primary mainstream schools and special schools generally felt well listened to by teachers, and gave examples of being able to learn in a way that suited them.

While most pupils at mainstream secondary school did feel listened to, a few did not. A few felt that teachers didn't make the adjustments they needed.

Almost all parents felt that they were involved in decision making relating to their child's education. However, some did not feel involved in choices about which school their child went to, or what support their child received at school.

Almost all school staff felt that children were able to express their views and have these heard at school. Involvement was felt to work best if it was ongoing and genuine, with flexibility in engaging young people and parents, and meeting their needs.

## **Meeting the needs of children and young people**

Local authority officers and school staff highlighted similar themes in relation to meeting the needs of children and young people with ASN. Overall, most local authority officers and school staff felt that they were meeting the needs of children with ASN reasonably and that most children would be having a positive and inclusive experience. However, most highlighted that this was in the context of having very limited resources. Almost all felt there was room for improvement.

Many said that the number, range and complexity of needs of children with ASN were increasing at a time when teachers, support workers, senior leadership and central support within the local authority were under pressure or decreasing in number. Some felt experiences could be very mixed dependent on the school. Some felt there may be gaps around meeting the needs of children with social, emotional and behavioural needs and autism.

Teachers highlighted particular challenges around balancing their time between the whole class and the pupils in need of individual support. A few teachers felt that the inclusion of children with ASN, particularly behavioural needs, was having a negative impact on learning within mainstream classes. This was a particular concern when some felt there was pressure to ensure all children were improving their attainment.

# 1. Introduction

## Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out findings from qualitative research to explore the experiences of children and young people of additional support for learning, as well as the experiences of those who support them.

## Research aims

- 1.2 The research aims to inform policy decisions on additional support for learning through delivering an understanding of the experiences of additional support for learning for:
- children and young people;
  - parents;
  - teachers, support staff and school leadership; and
  - education authorities and educational psychologists.
- 1.3 The main focus of the research was on exploring the views of children and young people, to ensure young people's experiences are understood and can inform policy decisions. It aimed to:
- gather in depth information about how children with additional support needs (ASN) are finding the system and whether their families feel their needs are being met;
  - identify what works well in relation to inclusion and what gets in the way;
  - provide an indication of whether the correct balance is being struck between placing children in mainstream schools, special schools and mainstream schools with specialist units – including exploring how included children and families are in that decision making process; and
  - look across all provision and find out whether children are having good, inclusive experiences that support their learning and sense of wellbeing.

## Context

### Policy context

- 1.4 Excellence and equity in education are core national priorities for the Scottish Government. Over the past 15 years, the Scottish Government has facilitated a move towards more child centred approaches, worked to reform services to deliver better outcomes for children and young

people and placed a strong focus on addressing inequalities in educational outcomes.

- 1.5 In Scotland, all children have the right to education which is directed to the development of their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. This principle was adopted by the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act, and reinforced by the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004 and Curriculum for Excellence, which reflects the way different learners progress.
- 1.6 Every child of school age has the right to:
  - have any additional support needs identified, met and reviewed in order for them to benefit from school education – within reasonable public expenditure; and
  - be educated alongside their peers in a mainstream school, unless there is a good reason for not doing so, determined by the exceptions defined in legislation.
- 1.7 Overall, consideration must be given to the child's education needs, ASN and wider wellbeing.
- 1.8 Education authorities must have due regard, so far as is reasonably practical of the views of the child or young person in decisions that affect them. This is set out in the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004, amended in 2009 and 2016. This Act focused strongly on empowering parents, carers and young people, and the most recent amendments through the Education Scotland Act 2016 further extend the rights available to children aged 12 and over, who are able to use them. This is to ensure that children and young people's voices are heard.

### **Defining additional support needs**

- 1.9 The term 'additional support needs' was introduced into law by the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Act 2004. It used the term 'additional support needs' to apply to children or young people who need additional support to help them make the most of their school education and be fully involved in their learning. This support could be long or short term. Additional support falls broadly into three overlapping headings:
  - approaches to learning and teaching;
  - support from personnel; and
  - provision of resources.

1.10 The factors leading to requirements for additional support are varied, but fall broadly into four key areas:

- the learning environment;
- family circumstances;
- disability or health need; and
- social and emotional factors.

1.11 The Act states that all looked after children are deemed to have additional support needs until they are assessed otherwise. The term additional support needs therefore covers a broad, wide ranging definition.

### **Children in Scotland with additional support needs**

1.12 The Scottish Government gathers statistics on the number of children and young people with ASN and publishes these annually. Figures from 2017<sup>1</sup> highlight that there are approximately 184,000 children and young people in Scotland with ASN. This is more than a quarter of pupils (26.6%). Most (60%) are boys. Around 35,000 have an Individualised Education Programme; around 32,000 have a Child's Plan; and around 17,000 are assessed or declared as disabled. Many have 'other' ASN which could include temporary or short term support needs.

1.13 There has been a substantial increase in the number of children with recorded ASN in Scotland. Between 2010 and 2016 there was an increase of 153 per cent – in some part due to changes in recording practices, with the range of young people recorded as having ASN becoming broader. The rates of needs recorded also vary substantially between different local authorities, with each using different approaches to record and define ASN, with different factors influencing how they are recorded<sup>2</sup>.

### **Education options**

1.14 Almost all children with ASN learn, at least some of the time, in mainstream schools. There are a number of different education options. Approaches vary by local authority and school, but the main options include:

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<sup>1</sup> Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland No 8: 2017 Edition, Scottish Government, Chart 4.5

<sup>2</sup> Strategic Commissioning of Services for Children with Complex ASN, Qualitative Research, Scottish Government, 2015

- **Education in a mainstream school** – There are approximately 2,300 mainstream schools in Scotland. Children with ASN at mainstream schools may attend mainstream classes and receive targeted support in the classroom or enhanced support when extracted from the classroom – in individual or group settings. Children at mainstream schools may also attend ASN classes, ASN rooms or specialist units within the school, specialist units at other mainstream schools, or special schools for part of their school week.
- **Education in a special school** – These are schools wholly or mainly for children with ASN. This could be a local authority special school, a unit within a mainstream school which is wholly for children with ASN, an independent special school or a grant aided special school. There are approximately 149 local authority special schools in Scotland, 40 independent schools and 7 grant aided special schools. However, the way in which local authorities define ‘special school’ varies – and there is no national list of all mainstream schools which contain units specifically for children with ASN.
- **Flexible provision** – In some cases, children are offered the option of a mixed approach, involving some time in a special school and some time in a mainstream school. For older children, this can also involve time at college or in vocational settings.

1.15 The education options offered in the local authority areas and schools which participated in this research are explored in detail in Chapter Two.

### **Evidence about outcomes for children with additional support needs**

1.16 Evidence gathered by the Scottish Government shows that outcomes for children with ASN are improving. For example:

- From 2011 to 2016, there has been a rise in qualifications achieved, positive destinations and attendance of pupils with ASN.
- A national review by Education Scotland<sup>3</sup> found that teachers were getting better at identifying children in need of additional support, and the type and level of support required. It found that children with ASN were performing well at certain levels.
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission’s five year review of inequalities in Scotland<sup>4</sup> found that the gap in attainment of both

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<sup>3</sup> Quality and Improvement in Scottish Education 2012 - 2016, Education Scotland

<sup>4</sup> Is Scotland Fairer? EHRC Scotland, 2015

children with ASN and looked after children narrowed between 2010 and 2015.

- 1.17 However, a lower percentage of children with ASN achieve the expected Curriculum for Excellence level compared to children with no ASN<sup>5</sup>. Education Scotland's review<sup>6</sup> found that there remained much scope for improvement, and the EHRC review found that attainment of children with ASN, particularly looked after children, remained below that of other pupils.
- 1.18 A national conversation facilitated by ENABLE Scotland<sup>7</sup> explored the reality of education experiences for children and young people with learning disabilities. The national conversation involved feedback from 116 young people who have learning disabilities, as well as a wider group of parents, carers and education staff. It found that only 49 per cent of children and young people involved in the research felt that they were achieving their full potential at school. Most (60%) said they felt lonely at school. And parents indicated that they felt they did not receive enough information, and felt the experience was stressful.

### **Background to this research**

- 1.19 The Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Parliament explored how additional support for learning was working in practice, reporting in May 2017. This review found that evidence suggested that more children are in mainstream schools than are currently best served there. It recommended action to explore experiences of children with ASN in mainstream education, and to understand the impact of resource issues on the ability to meet needs effectively. It also highlighted the link between supporting young people with ASN to achieve and attain, and closing the attainment gap.
- 1.20 In July 2017, the Cabinet Secretary responded outlining a commitment to researching the experiences of children with ASN in mainstream education. The research would explore the experiences of children and young people with ASN, as well as experiences of parents, teachers, support staff, educational psychologists, the school leadership, education authorities and their partners in relation to additional support for learning. This report sets out findings of this research, which was commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2017/18.

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<sup>5</sup> Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels, Scottish Government, 2016

<sup>6</sup> Quality and Improvement in Scottish Education 2012 - 2016, Education Scotland

<sup>7</sup> Included in the Main?!, ENABLE Scotland

1.21 The research took place at the same time as a Scottish Government consultation about new guidance on the presumption of mainstreaming, which ran from November 2017 to February 2018. The consultation explored the vision for inclusive education in Scotland; the key features of inclusion; the entitlements and options available; and the ways to deliver inclusion in practice.

## **Method**

1.22 The research involved research in 18 schools in six areas across Scotland. It involved the following key stages.

### **Identification of focus local authority areas**

1.23 The research aimed to involve local authority officers and schools in six focus areas. These areas were identified independently by Research Scotland, and selected to ensure a mix of:

- geographical type – with two predominately urban, two predominately rural and two mixed authorities;
- level of deprivation – with two with high levels of socio-economic deprivation; two with middling levels; and two with low levels; and
- level of recorded ASN – with two with average levels of recorded ASN, two above and two below.

1.24 A matrix was set up including each local authority, and they were sorted into a band to reflect these characteristics. Research Scotland identified six local authorities which provided a mix of these factors, while also being in a range of locations across the country.

1.25 Permission to undertake the research was then sought from the Director of Education or equivalent in each area. All six focus local authority areas granted permission for the research to be undertaken.

### **Identification of focus schools**

1.26 The research aimed to involved three schools in each of the six focus local authority areas, a total of 18 schools. A matrix was developed setting out the profile of the schools to be involved. This included:

- an equal split of primary and secondary schools;
- a mix of types of schools – with around half being mainstream schools identified by the authority as having an ASN base or enhanced support for children with ASN; a quarter being mainstream schools and a quarter being special schools; and
- a mix of levels of deprivation.

1.27 Schools were then approached to seek permission from the head teacher to undertake the research. All 18 schools provided permission. However, one school later pulled out due to staffing and capacity issues. An alternative school of a similar type within the same local authority area was identified as a replacement.

1.28 The final profile of schools involved was:

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Deprivation*</b>	<b>Geography</b>
8 Primary	5 Mainstream	6 with less than 25% of pupils in the 20% most deprived datazones	6 in large urban areas
7 Secondary	9 Mainstream with enhanced support	5 with between 25 and 50% of pupils in the most deprived datazones	7 in other urban areas
3 Schools for both primary and secondary	4 Special schools	4 with 50 to 75% of pupils in the most deprived datazones	3 in accessible small towns or rural areas
		2 with 75% or more of pupils in the most deprived datazones	2 in remote small towns or rural areas

\*Level of deprivation in one mainstream primary was unknown

1.29 It is worth noting that in the six focus local authority areas, often schools with specialist services for children with ASN were in more urban areas, when compared with the overall geographical profile of the area.

1.30 The schools ranged in size from 24 pupils to over 1,100. The four special schools included:

- two schools which catered for a range of ASN;
- one school which catered for complex social, emotional and behavioural needs; and
- one school which catered for a range of complex ASN.

1.31 The nine mainstream schools with specialist or enhanced support for children with ASN included:

- five schools with enhanced provision to meet a range of ASN;
- one school with specialist support around visual impairment;
- one school with specialist support around hearing impairment;
- one school with specialist support for autism; and
- one school with specialist support for communication and wider learning needs.

- 1.32 Some of the mainstream schools not identified by the local authority as having specialist or enhanced support for children with ASN did include support such as nurture rooms, ASN support bases, pupil support bases and ASN classes.

### **Interviews with local authority officers**

- 1.33 The research involved two local authority officers in each of the six local authority areas. Local authority education contacts were invited to identify suitable officers, with a suggestion that this should involve education officers responsible for ASN, and educational psychologists. Each area identified two contacts, and a total of 12 telephone interviews were undertaken. This included seven education officers and five educational psychologists.

### **Interviews with pupils**

- 1.34 The research involved 100 face to face interviews with pupils. It was agreed that the research would involve children and young people from p1 to S6, with a range of ASN. Targets were not set for the specific type or nature of ASN. The aim was to achieve a broad mix, without being too prescriptive.
- 1.35 Each school was asked to identify six pupils to participate in face to face discussions, and gain parental consent for this discussion. Schools were given clear guidance about the mix of pupils who should be involved. Each researcher had an in-depth discussion with teachers at the school about the profile of pupils, and how to achieve a broadly representative mix. While most schools were able to identify six pupils and gain parental consent, a small number of pupils were unable to participate on the days the researcher was present in the school due to illness or other absence, issues with schools receiving parental consent, or pupils changing their mind about participation on the day based on how they were feeling that day.
- 1.36 Because of data protection laws, schools were required to take the lead in identifying potential pupils and contacting parents to gain consent. Schools were extremely helpful and dedicated significant time to this process, which often involved a lot of follow up and reminders.
- 1.37 The interviews with pupils lasted between 15 minutes and an hour. The length, format and structure of interview was amended to suit the needs of each pupil. The researchers liaised closely with schools to identify appropriate communication methods, styles of question and length of discussion.
- 1.38 The profile of the 100 pupils who took part in the research included:

<b>Age</b>	<b>Type of provision</b>
49 primary age pupils – from p2 to p7	27 pupils at mainstream schools
51 secondary age pupils – from S1 to S6	52 pupils at mainstream schools with enhanced provision or bases
	21 pupils at special schools

- 1.39 Despite encouraging schools to identify a range of ages, none of the schools identified a primary one pupil to participate in the research. The youngest children to participate in the research were primary two.
- 1.40 The pupils involved in the research had a range of ASN. The broad needs are summarised below. However, it is important to recognise that often pupils had multiple needs, and needs were not always clearly assessed and defined. This information is provided simply as an overview of the range of young people involved in the research. The range of needs involved included:
- social, emotional and behavioural needs – often linked to childhood trauma, broken school experiences or wider anxiety, depression, bereavement or mental health issues;
  - autistic spectrum disorder;
  - developmental delay, learning delays or learning difficulties;
  - communication and language needs – including dyslexia and English as an additional language;
  - visual impairment;
  - hearing impairment;
  - health issues or physical disabilities requiring additional support;
  - looked after children or children in kinship care;
  - attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; and
  - gender transition.
- 1.41 These needs all overlapped, with children involved in the research having multiple needs across these categories.
- 1.42 Sixty-four pupils were boys or young men and 36 were girls or young women. While across Scotland more boys and young men have recorded ASN than girls or young women, the research sought to ensure that all perspectives were included. It is worth noting that some of the schools or bases included in the research had either very few or no young women at the school or support base.

## **Interviews with school staff**

1.43 A total of 54 school staff members were involved in the research. This included:

- 19 members of school leadership teams;
- 17 class teachers; and
- 18 support workers.

## **Interviews with parents and carers**

1.44 A total of 39 parents or carers were involved in the research. This included 23 parents or carers of primary age pupils and 16 parents or carers of secondary age pupils. Nine had children at mainstream schools; 22 had children at mainstream schools with some form of enhanced support or base; and 8 had children at special schools.

1.45 Parents or carers were identified by schools, as part of the process for gaining consent for children and young people to participate in the research. Parents or carers were asked whether they would also be prepared to take part in a telephone discussion. Parents were offered £20 to recognise the value of their time and as a contribution to meet any childcare costs incurred as a result.

## **Analysis and reporting**

1.46 After the fieldwork stage, all of the information gathered was pulled together and analysed using a process of manual thematic coding. This involves researchers carefully collating responses, reading these and organising them based on emerging themes.

1.47 Copies of the discussion guides used with local authority officers, pupils, parents and school staff are available as Annex One.

## **Interpreting the results**

1.48 This report sets out findings from a qualitative research project. Qualitative research can provide an in-depth understanding of particular experiences, views, choices and behaviours. It allows probing of key issues as they emerge, and discussion in a semi-structured way to enable a focus on what matters to the participant. It can be very valuable in helping to understand a range of perspectives, opinions, experiences, feelings or behaviours, particularly when topics are complex.

1.49 However, it is important to note that while this report gives an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of those who were involved in the research, its findings cannot be extrapolated to the wider population. The key limitations of the method include:

- **Range** – The range of ASN and types of additional support for learning provision in Scotland is extensive. While the method was designed to provide a reasonable mix of authorities, schools, pupils, parents and school staff, it cannot cover all scenarios. **Everyone with ASN is an individual, and has their own individual story to tell.**
- **Volume** – While 100 young people with ASN were involved in this research, there are more than 184,000 young people with ASN in Scotland. The research therefore provides an insight into a relatively small number of experiences.
- **Relationships** – The research involved one-off in-depth discussions with young people with ASN. The researchers are trained and experienced in engaging with young people with a wide range of ASN and worked hard to establish a relationship. However, it is clear that young people may not feel comfortable talking about all aspects of their experiences within a one-off discussion, with someone they have met for the first time.
- **Selection of young people** – The researchers worked hard with schools to make clear that the research should not only involve those who have positive experiences at school, or those who are particularly articulate or communicative. The schools involved demonstrated a good understanding of the reasons for the research being undertaken, and committed to identifying a range of young people and parents for involvement in the research. From the discussions, it appears that a real mix of pupils and parents were identified by schools. However, the researchers did not have access to any database of needs and experience against which to compare the sample of young people identified, and so relied on teacher judgement and knowledge for pupil and parent selection.

1.50 To help with interpreting the findings from the research, a consistent scale has been used to present the findings. This scale is provided as a guide.

- One – Used where just one person mentioned an issue.
- A few – Used where two or three participants mentioned an issue.
- Some – Used where more than a few participants mentioned an issue, but less than half.

- Most or many – Used where more than half of participants mentioned an issue.

1.51 However, it is worth noting that qualitative research explores key themes in a semi-structured way, and some participants naturally brought up issues in response to questions which others were not specifically probed on. This should therefore not be used to extrapolate findings to a wider group.

## 2. Additional support for learning provision

### Chapter summary

All local authorities involved in the research said their authority had a clear ethos around meeting the needs of children with ASN, which was in line with the presumption of mainstreaming. School staff also said that they worked to these local authority strategies, and a few secondary schools said they had their own strategies around inclusion or ASN.

Overall, local authorities aimed to support children in mainstream school, within their local area, where possible. Although some local authority officers felt that decision making processes around education for children with ASN worked well, some felt there were challenges – including lack of resources and budget constraints. School staff generally felt the decision making process worked reasonably well, but staff in one area felt that the decision making process was unclear and lacked resources.

Overall, most local authority officers felt that the balance of additional support for learning provision in their area was improving, becoming more flexible and focusing on individual pathways. However, most also felt there was still more to do to improve the balance of provision, including developing resources including money, staff and facilities available in mainstream schools; recruiting skilled staff; understanding outcomes; meeting specific needs; and focusing on early intervention.

Staff at special schools felt that their role was changing – with more focus on complex needs, and some focus on transitions back to mainstream. Mainstream school staff often felt that they were seeing more pupils with more complex needs attending the school.

In some areas, there was a clear feeling that there were not enough resources to meet needs – particularly in mainstream schools. Some, both local authority officers and school staff, felt that special schools were often well resourced, but there was a lot of pressure on mainstream schools and a lot of demand for places in enhanced bases.

## Introduction

- 2.1 This chapter explores findings relating to the nature of education provision for children with ASN in the six local authorities and 18 schools involved in this research. It explores:
- ethos and approaches to meeting needs;
  - types of provision available;
  - decision making processes;
  - views on the balance of provision across different types; and
  - success factors and challenges around this provision.
- 2.2 It is worth noting that this research is qualitative. While this chapter gives an in-depth understanding of the experiences, feelings and perspectives of those who were involved in the research, its findings cannot be extrapolated to the wider population.

## Ethos and approach to meeting needs

- 2.3 All of the local authority officers involved in this research said that their local authority had a clear ethos in relation to meeting the needs of children with ASN. All said that it was in line with the presumption of mainstreaming.

“We’re in tune with the national ethos of the presumption of mainstreaming.”

Educational psychologist

- 2.4 The key principles underpinning local approaches included resilience, independence, inclusion, wellbeing, children’s rights, treating children as individuals, community connections, needs based support, local support and raising attainment. These approaches focused on making sure that meeting ASN was everyone’s responsibility.

“We look at the needs of the child first and we make the service meet the needs of the child.”

Education officer

“The ethos would be that we work inclusively. We work with people close to their home and community, and that we work collaboratively with rather than on or to people.”

Educational psychologist

- 2.5 Each local authority area confirmed that its approach to meeting the needs of children with ASN was formalised in a plan or strategy. Local authority officers mentioned plans, strategies, briefing papers,

frameworks, codes of practice and practice models. In some cases, strategies or plans were produced for meeting particular types of need.

**Example:**

In one area, the local authority was working with mental health colleagues to develop an autism strategy, as this appeared to be an area of growth in need in schools locally.

- 2.6 Leadership teams within schools were also asked about the ethos that their school worked towards in relation to children with ASN. Most said that they worked towards the wider local authority strategy, and focused on inclusion, nurture, mainstreaming and meeting the needs of the individual child. A few secondary schools pointed to their own school strategies, relating to inclusion or specific types of ASN such as autism.

“Inclusion is our ultimate goal, if appropriate. We always start with mainstreaming and work from this.”

Head teacher

**Example:**

In one school, there was a clear focus on nurture across the school. The whole school has received presentations on the approach, and it is regularly revisited. There has been slow cultural change, with a shift towards every teacher taking a nurturing role.

## Types of provision available

- 2.7 Local authorities had different types of additional support for learning provision.
- 2.8 Local authority officers highlighted that a wide range of needs could be met in mainstream schools – including support with communication, speech and language therapy, English as an Additional Language (EAL), vision support, hearing support, dyslexia services, nurture, access to specialist services, Pupil Support Assistants, Support for Learning staff, guidance staff, outreach staff, and community support workers.

“We want to have the same opportunity of access to mainstream for all young people.”

Education officer

“We are always trying to get as close to mainstream as we possibly can.”

Educational psychologist

**Example:**

In one area, there was an autism outreach team supporting schools across the area. It supports pupils in mainstream environments, and supports staff through providing advice and guidance.

2.9 Local authorities had different approaches to ASN bases or enhanced provision in mainstream schools. For example:

- some authorities had enhanced provision centres in some schools which supported pupils with a range of ASN;
- some authorities had bases within mainstream schools which focused on meeting specific needs from across the authority – such as autism, communication or social, emotional and behavioural needs;
- some authorities had departments or bases which focused strongly on transitions out of school and into work or further learning; and
- some authorities had centralised support services for behaviour support and social, emotional and behavioural needs which supported mainstream schools as needed – and in some cases mainstream schools with enhanced bases received additional support from these services.

**Example:**

Two areas had bases within secondary schools which focused on transitions out of school for pupils with ASN. One local authority offered nurture supported college placements, and other programmes linking to work or post school opportunities.

2.10 In some areas, there was a shift from focusing on setting up units and bases specifically for certain types of need, to more general support for a range of children with ASN. This was often linked to a broader shift from expecting children to spend all of their time at that unit, to focusing on a gradual transition back to mainstream by the upper stages of primary school.

**Example:**

In one area, each locality had a primary school with an enhanced base. These bases provide support for pupils in small classes of no more than ten pupils. Pupils also often work one to one with a Pupil Support Assistant (PSA), and their day would be structured into a timetable that suited them. Because these bases are part of a mainstream school, pupils can join in any mainstream activity that is suitable – often activities like PE, shows and art. The aim is to provide smaller, more personalised settings than mainstream provision. These bases have more staff, and staff are trained in meeting ASN.

**Example:**

One rural authority felt it did not have the volume of children with ASN to set up special schools across the authority. In this area, the focus was on support at mainstream schools, and a network of enhanced provision at some primary and secondary schools.

- 2.11 Most of the local authorities also had special schools specifically for children with ASN. This could include standalone special schools or co-located bases. Most often, these provisions were used for children with relatively complex needs.
- 2.12 Overall, local authorities aimed to accommodate most pupils within their local provision. Very small numbers of children were referred to schools outwith the local authority area. Where children were referred to other schools outwith the area, this was largely due to social, emotional and behavioural needs and often due to home circumstances. Most local authorities were focusing on bringing these children back to local schools wherever possible.

## Decision making processes

### Local authority views

- 2.13 All of the local authorities involved in this research stated that they had a clear, formalised process for taking decisions about how to meet the needs of children with ASN. All used a phased approach using a clear framework for intervention. This was based on taking a holistic approach to meeting the individual needs of the child. Often authorities considered wellbeing, resilience and risk throughout this approach.
- 2.14 Generally, the phased approach involved:
- **Discussion with the class teacher** – Supporting the teacher to adapt their approach, try different methods, often with support from educational psychology or other services.
  - **Assessment and planning processes** – Involving a wide range of partners, and often resulting in the development of a formal plan such as a Child's Plan, Individualised Education Programme or other locally developed planning framework.
  - **Consideration of needs at local and/ or city wide forum** – In some areas, cases were referred to local partnerships at a locality level for discussion, and in some there was a central forum, inclusion group or admissions group which considered additional support provision. Some areas had both.

2.15 There was a strong focus on partnership, and involving the whole team around the child. The range of partners involved in the decision making process across the authorities included children, parents and guardians; teachers, specialist teachers, head teachers and early years heads; educational psychology, education officers and education leads for ASN; and social work, health visitors, GPs, school nurses, medical staff, community police and third sector organisations. School staff also stated that there was a range of partners involved in decision making.

“In the best case scenario, everyone is in agreement.”

Educational Psychologist

**Example:**

In one area, a team appoints two assessors to separately visit the young person in their environment. This helps the group to consider whether the child should be educated in a mainstream school, or in a school with more specialist provision.

2.16 The key factors taken into account when considering education options for children with ASN were:

- aiming for provision as close to mainstream as possible – including building independence for the future;
- community integration – including aiming for provision as close to home as possible;
- the complexity of the case – and whether children can cope in different environments or require specialist input;
- the capacity of different types of provision – and the training, specialisms and knowledge of the staff;
- the child’s progression to date – whether they are achieving, and how they are progressing in line with their age and stage;
- the home environment – including support at home, the needs of the child and family and any child protection issues;
- the views and expectations of parents and young people; and
- resources – including budget constraints and availability of spaces.

2.17 Some local authority officers indicated that there was pressure from the local authority to support certain educational options due to lack of resources and budget constraints.

2.18 Local authorities felt that the decision making process was helped by:

- good quality information – from schools and educational psychologists, particularly useful where this is focused on needs, progress and options already tried, and there is a consistent local planning process requiring good quality information;
- good relationships – with children, families and all the staff around the child; and
- specialist assessments and observations of the child in school.

2.19 The process was made more difficult if:

- there is a lack of background information or history about the child (for example due to challenges around information sharing);
- options require travel, across large rural areas;
- parents have already made up their minds about what they want and are not happy to consider options;
- schools or parents have unrealistic expectations about what is possible;
- the child is not meaningfully involved – particularly an issue if they have complex needs;
- head teachers don't have the confidence or resources (including money, staff or facilities) to try different approaches within the mainstream setting – with skills, confidence and expertise varying;
- pupils with social, emotional or behavioural needs are adversely affected by the reputation of their family in small communities; or
- the resources are not available to provide the preferred educational option.

2.20 While some local authorities involved in the research felt that there were significant challenges taking decisions about provision for children with ASN, some felt there were few challenges and the process worked well.

### **School views**

2.21 School staff generally indicated that the decision making process relating to the education options available to children worked reasonably well.

2.22 However, school staff in one local authority area felt that the decision making process was unclear and lacked resources. There was concern that key roles across the local authority had been lost and not replaced, resulting in a lack of clarity around the decision making process. There was concern that there were no clear criteria for accessing specialist provision and a lack of awareness about who was involved in the process and what the other options were.

“They are removing as many posts as possible. There is no education leadership...”

Deputy head teacher

“I have a little girl who has been referred here on a special placement and I don’t know why and I don’t know who was on the panel that made that decision.”

Head teacher

“A lot of the people who make decisions about this place have never been in it.”

Head teacher, special school

- 2.23 A few teachers were concerned that there was pressure on staffing of related services, which slowed down the assessment process. In one area, one teacher was concerned that late recognition of dyslexia appeared common across the authority, and was concerned that this was due to pressure on resources.

“The demise of staffing levels in other agencies, especially speech and language, has had a negative impact on the process of assessing need.”

Head teacher

- 2.24 Staff at the four special schools involved in the research largely felt that the process worked well, with children going through rigorous processes before they arrive at the school which ensure that their needs are met. However, at one school senior staff felt that children could just “arrive” with little advance information about their situation. This was at a school for social, emotional and behavioural needs, where the school population was relatively fluid between mainstream and specialist provision.

- 2.25 Staff at primary and secondary schools emphasised the importance of transitions between nursery, primary and secondary – and communication between schools at critical stages. Most were positive about the transitions processes, and the communication between schools.

**Example:**

In one area, there is a transition teacher who visits all of the feeder primary schools. She builds relationships with pupils with ASN and collates pupil information so that by the time pupils start in S1 the school understands the need for targeted support. Young people with ASN are also allocated a key teacher, who visits the primary schools before the summer holidays.

## Support available within schools

2.26 Internally, schools used a range of methods to identify ASN and plan effective support. In most cases, class teachers were responsible for identifying ASN, if they had not already been identified at nursery by health visitors or by health professionals from birth and early years. Schools had clear processes for teachers to refer concerns about ASN to relevant staff or internal decision making groups. Teachers were well aware of these approaches. Schools then used a range of methods to identify ASN, put in place relevant support and set reasonable targets for progression.

**Example:**

One school developed pupil friendly targets that staff discussed with each child. This allows children to self-evaluate using a traffic light system. They have also developed life skills planners to set appropriate and relevant targets, such as being able to fasten a seatbelt or get on a bus.

2.27 Support assistants felt that normally teachers or members of the leadership team led on assessing needs. However, support assistants did play an important role in undertaking specific assessments (such as for dyslexia or nurture support); in providing their opinions in an informal way to teachers; undertaking observations of pupils in class and reporting back; and developing appropriate targets for children and young people. Support assistants generally felt that their opinions were valued, but that teachers took the lead on this.

2.28 Within schools, a wide range of additional support was available. Schools emphasised that they provided individualised support, to meet each child's needs. However, the main types of additional support available in mainstream schools included:

- staff including personal support assistants, support for learning assistants, classroom assistants, key teachers, ASN link teachers, inclusion workers, home-school link workers, school counsellors and behaviour support staff;
- dedicated ASN classes or bases;
- targeted in class or out of class support with reading and maths, including dyslexia support programmes;
- support to help with health and wellbeing including nurture rooms, support with relaxation, chill zones and coping with bereavement or loss; and
- personal care, medical and hygiene care.

2.29 The four special schools involved in this research had a range of different additional support available including high staff to pupils ratios, small class sizes, in house specialists and facilities such as swimming pools, hydro pools, soft play areas and chill out zones.

## **Views on the balance of provision**

### **Local authority views**

2.30 Overall, most local authority officers felt that the balance of provision in their area was improving. Many pointed to increasing flexibility, and a focus on pathways – which can change and develop as needed – rather than placements. Many emphasised that there was now more movement between mainstream and specialist provision, and an ability to design arrangements which suited the needs of the child. One local authority officer described this as making sure that the service goes to the child, rather than the child going to the service.

“We never have young people stuck in a provision.”

Education officer

“We are trying to make provisions better integrated. We are aware that standalone provisions can be isolated and there is a risk of deskilling staff.”

Educational psychologist

2.31 However, most also felt that there was lots still to do to continue to improve the balance of provision. The main areas for development included:

- developing the resources available in mainstream schools and mainstream schools with enhanced bases – including money, staff and facilities;
- recruiting and retaining teaching and support staff with the specialist skills required – and ensuring that support staff can move with the child wherever possible;
- better understanding the outcomes achieved by children with ASN;
- meeting specific needs including social, emotional and behavioural needs, mental health needs and (in some areas) autism;
- focusing on early intervention and identifying issues before problems such as poor attendance manifest themselves;
- continuing to build flexibility in pathways; and.
- ensuring all geographies have appropriate options for provision, across large rural areas.

- 2.32 In some areas, there was a clear feeling that there were not enough resources to meet needs – particularly in mainstream schools, including schools with enhanced bases. Some felt that special schools were often well resourced, but that there was a lot of pressure on mainstream schools and a lot of demand for places in enhanced bases.
- 2.33 In one area, local authority officers felt that planning to meet the needs of children with ASN had been strongly influenced by unforeseen major issues with resourcing which had meant that the options for developing provision within the budget available had become very limited. In another area, officers felt that provision had developed in an opportunistic and unplanned way, based largely on the physical space available within school buildings. The authority was working to address this.

### **School views**

- 2.34 School staff also had comments on the balance of provision. Staff in special schools often felt that their role was changing. Some were seeing their role focus in on the children with the most severe and complex needs. And one school found it was becoming less like a school that pupils would attend full time, to more like a support service providing enhanced support with the aim of re-integrating pupils into mainstream provision.
- 2.35 However, at one special school leadership staff indicated concern that pupils end up staying at the school throughout their school life, without consideration of whether they could achieve in a mainstream environment.

“If they stay here for too long, they can become institutionalised. The longer they are away from mainstream, the harder it can be to get back in.”

Head teacher, special school

- 2.36 Mainstream school staff often felt that they were seeing pupil needs increase, with more pupils with more complex needs attending the school in recent years. To address this, some schools had used Pupil Equity Funding for support assistant roles, or for leadership roles around ASN.

“More and more people are coming to school who would previously have been in special units.”

Class teacher

“Schools are being left to support very vulnerable children.”

Deputy head teacher

“We have taken on board that kids should be in class as much as possible. But we’re doing them a disservice by trying to always keep them in mainstream.”

Principal teacher

- 2.37 Teachers at one secondary school echoed local authority staff concerns that special schools and support bases remained reasonably well resourced while mainstream schools – which were coping with increasing needs – saw their resources reduce.

“Special education is better resourced than mainstream, even though under mainstreaming we are accepting more pupils with more identified additional needs who would have accessed alternative provision in the past.”

ASN lead, secondary school

- 2.38 Finally, one teacher emphasised the importance of mixing children with different needs at school, for all children’s benefit.

“Being at school with children with additional support needs is a gift for children who do not have support needs. They learn how to appreciate and accept others.”

Head teacher, primary school

### 3. School experiences of children and young people

#### Chapter summary

Many pupils at mainstream primary schools liked their friends and teachers. A few said they liked everything and would not change anything. Many secondary school mainstream pupils liked the range of subjects and the support that they received. However, some secondary school pupils said they did not like anything about their school at all. Some said they hated school and did not want to be there. Some secondary pupils said they did not like their teachers and a few said they felt the teachers did not like them.

Pupils at special schools said they liked playing outside, life skills, sports, music and art. Many said there was nothing that they did not like, and the things that pupils did not like were diverse and very individual – mentioned by one or two pupils.

Pupils at mainstream schools and special schools largely felt positive about all SHANARRI indicators. However, some mainstream school pupils (particularly secondary school girls) said that they felt – or had previously felt – very unsafe due to bullying. A few pupils at special schools said that pupils were violent or aggressive towards them and wanted more help with feeling safe.

A few pupils at mainstream schools felt they could achieve better, and at their own pace, in small group or ASN base activity rather than in the whole class. A few pupils at special schools said they were covering work they had already done, and were ready to be more challenged.

Most pupils at mainstream schools felt they had lots of friends and that it was easy to make friends. They felt included in the life of the school. However, a few pupils in ASN bases within mainstream schools mentioned that they did not always feel involved in the life of the school beyond the base. A few said they felt left out, were bullied or were treated differently because of their additional support needs.

Around half of the pupils at special schools said that they had lots of friends. However, at two special schools pupils found it quite hard to make friends.

Overall, almost all pupils at mainstream schools and special schools felt their needs were well met. A few primary pupils (at mainstream schools that did not have ASN bases) said they wanted more help.

## Introduction

- 3.1 This chapter sets out young people's own experiences of school. It includes perspectives from 100 young people. Almost half (49) were primary age pupils and just over half (51) were secondary age pupils. The pupils were from a mix of mainstream schools (27); mainstream schools with enhanced provision or bases (52); and special schools (21).
- 3.2 It explores:
- likes and dislikes;
  - feelings about school;
  - views on friendship and inclusion;
  - views on ability of the school to meet their needs;
  - comparisons between different school experiences; and
  - young people's priorities for the future.
- 3.3 Throughout this chapter, care has been taken to present young people's views in their own words wherever possible.
- 3.4 It is worth noting that this research is qualitative. While this chapter gives an in-depth understanding of the experiences, feelings and perspectives of those who were involved in the research, its findings cannot be extrapolated to the wider population.

## Likes and dislikes

### Mainstream schools – with and without enhanced support or bases

- 3.5 Many pupils at mainstream primary schools indicated that they liked their friends and teachers, as well as art, music, sport, playing outside and learning interesting topics. A few said they liked everything, and would not change anything.
- “I like school because people are kind to each other.”  
Pupil, 8, mainstream primary
- “I get to see my friends and play with them.”  
Pupil, 7, mainstream primary
- 3.6 Secondary school pupils said that they liked the range of subjects, particularly including art, music, sports (in some instances) and cooking. Many mentioned that the main thing they liked about school was the support that they received – including support from personal assistants, classroom assistants, targeted support and support at ASN bases or

classes. Some also liked the range of opportunities to go on trips, do activities and try different topics. Some mentioned that they liked seeing their friends, and some mentioned that they liked the teachers, or certain teachers.

“They (art and drama teachers) really understand how I learn, and they don’t single me out and make me feel stupid.”

Pupil, 16, mainstream secondary (with targeted support)

3.7 However, some secondary school pupils said that they did not like anything about their school at all. Some said that they hated school and did not want to be there. A few found that secondary school was quite a contrast to primary school, which had more focus on play, and found it hard to adapt to the routine and volume of work at secondary school. A few were anxious because they had so many different teachers, and there was a lot of pressure as they progressed up through secondary school. One girl had experienced racism related violence multiple times<sup>8</sup> and another girl had experienced bullying related to homophobia.

3.8 Some secondary pupils indicated that they did not like their teachers – with some describing teachers as scary, angry, shouty, unapproachable and too strict. A few said that they felt the teachers did not like them. For example, one girl said her that one of her teachers was very unapproachable and she was worried about asking her for help, and she had a bad experience with another class teacher in the past.

“I had to leave a class because of how horrible a teacher was being to me. He would make fun of me in front of the class, and then everyone would laugh.”

Pupil, 16, mainstream secondary

3.9 Pupils at both mainstream primary and secondary schools also indicated that they did not like a range of things, including maths, writing and spelling. A few said other pupils were annoying, naughty or it was hard to concentrate if the class or common area was too loud. A few felt that when pupils did not behave in class it was not fair, because it took time away from the other pupils as teachers spend time managing them. Some felt it would be better to have smaller class sizes.

“Everyone is really naughty, but I’m always sensible. I used to be naughty before, I used to be out of control. But now I’m always sensible.”

Pupil, 10, mainstream primary (part time in ASN class)

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<sup>8</sup> Our researcher reported this to the senior management team, with consent from the pupil, as the pupil had not reported it to the school.

- 3.10 A few said that they did not feel that teachers were trained to deal with people who have behavioural needs.

“I didn’t know I had ADD or ADHD until S2. All the symptoms of it were what I had been getting into trouble for. I think that teachers aren’t really taught how to deal with people like this... I had been getting kicked out of school for being distracted and I had really bad anger. The teachers were shouting and getting angry with me for things that I couldn’t help.”

Pupil, 15, mainstream secondary (part time in ASN base)

- 3.11 Some secondary school girls specifically said they did not like PE. A few said they didn’t like learning, because it was too hard. And a few secondary school pupils said that they would prefer to spend more of their time at the ASN base and less time in mainstream classes.

### **Special schools**

- 3.12 Pupils at special schools indicated that they liked a range of different things about their school:

- playing outside – in the playground, in the park;
- life skills – going shopping, cooking, gardening, travel
- sports and PE – swimming, football, walking, dancing, cycling and soft play in the school;
- music and art – which relaxed some pupils;
- story time and talk time;
- going on trips, to assemblies and to after school activity;
- having friends; and
- school work – when it was not too hard and there was an opportunity to learn in a quiet and calm environment; and
- support – which two pupils stated they particularly liked, and felt was more than would be available in a mainstream school.

“I like sunny days and playing outside.”

Pupil, 13, special school

“This school is better than mainstream. Mainstream doesn’t have soft play or bikes or trikes. In mainstream they don’t have computers in the class, they have ICT.”

Pupil, 6, special school

3.13 Many pupils at special schools indicated that there was nothing they did not like about their school. The dislikes that were mentioned were very diverse, and included:

- noise – from classmates, which could make pupils worried and anxious;
- school work - not being challenged enough or being challenged too much;
- friends – not having friends the same age, not getting along with people, being teased or getting annoyed by others;
- safety – hearing swearing and getting hurt at school, or being restrained; and
- not being allowed to be independent – for example take time out alone, or go out of the school grounds at lunchtime.

“I don’t like when people swear. It doesn’t happen in mainstream school.”  
Pupil, 6, special school

“Sometimes I feel too mature and independent for this place.”  
Pupil, 16, special school

“Here, they hold you. I don’t really like getting held. It kinda makes me worse.”  
Pupil, 7, special school

3.14 Pupils were asked what would make the school better. Many pupils at special schools were not able to answer this question or did not understand it. The pupils who did answer gave a range of different responses – including having more outside time; less annoying pupils; less hard work; being able to bring Pokemon; and having more time to fidget, be alone and listen to music.

3.15 Two pupils felt restricted during lunchtime, with one older pupil feeling young people should be allowed to go out of the school grounds for lunch, and a primary pupil not liking that all pupils had to wait in the dining hall until they were all finished lunch and then all go out and play together.

3.16 One pupil would have liked more people with same abilities at the school, feeling that there were few pupils he could communicate with or socialise with. One pupil would like more teachers, and one would like larger class sizes.

“I would have more people in the one class, so that you can do more group work.”  
Pupil, 11, special school

## Feelings about the school

### Mainstream schools – with and without enhanced support or bases

3.17 Pupils at mainstream primary and secondary school largely felt positive about all SHANARRI indicators.

- **Safe** – Almost all pupils felt safe, mentioning that the teachers helped them.

“All the teachers are helpful and taking care of us.”

Pupil, 8, mainstream primary (targeted support)

However, some said that they felt – or had previously felt - very unsafe due to bullying. Half of the secondary school girls involved in the research reported experiences of bullying. For example, one pupil said that she was bullied, people try to beat her up and she felt very unsafe even in class. She said she had death threats and pupils spread rumours that it was her fault her parent died.<sup>9</sup> Many secondary school boys said that there were some people they did not like at school, or said that they got angry or annoyed by other people. However, a lower proportion of boys (around a fifth) reported experiences of bullying.

“I don’t feel that safe because of everyone that bullies me. Even pupils in higher years bully me. People try to beat me up.”

Pupil, 13, mainstream secondary (with support in class)

- **Healthy** – Almost all pupils felt healthy, talking about access to healthy food, water and fresh air. A few felt unhealthy because of too much junk food or too much noise at school. A few said that they had mental health issues, and that school played a part in this around anxiety. A few felt unhealthy because they weren’t able to choose where they sat in class. One pupil mentioned that the school had helped him to change his unhealthy choices around drug misuse.

“They always want to keep you active and help you study in a healthy way.”

Pupil, 18, mainstream secondary (one to one support)

- **Achieving** – Almost all pupils felt they were achieving, talking about good, positive feedback from teachers. A few pupils felt that they

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<sup>9</sup> Our researcher reported this to the school leadership, with the pupil’s permission.

could achieve better, and at their own pace, in small group or ASN base activity rather than in the whole class. While some pupils said that their achievements were well recognised at assemblies, with awards and through teacher praise, a few pupils wanted more feedback or certificates for learning. A few pupils – mainly secondary pupils - said the work was too hard.

“They tell me I’m a superb learner... it makes me feel happy.”

Pupil, 12, mainstream secondary school

“I feel like my test marks are going right up.”

Pupil, 15, mainstream secondary (part time at ASN base)

- **Nurtured** – All primary pupils felt nurtured, and most secondary pupils. Some secondary pupils did not feel nurtured or were unsure, because the teachers were too busy or strict.

“I am really well cared for in school. I get lots of support.”

Pupil, 12, mainstream primary (with PSA support)

“If I worry about something, they ask me what’s the matter with me and give me time out of the classroom.”

Pupil, 12, mainstream secondary school

“Teachers are too strict, they don’t look out for you.”

Pupil, 13, mainstream secondary school

“They are so nice at the base. They know me really well. They’re really caring and supportive if I have a problem.”

Pupil, 16, mainstream secondary (at ASN base)

- **Active** – Almost all pupils felt active. A few primary pupils said they chose not to be active or that access to facilities was limited, and a few secondary pupils said there was not much PE or that they did not like taking part in PE.

“I have asthma and struggle with PE. I also get bullied a lot when I do PE.”

Pupil, 12, mainstream secondary (part time at ASN base)

- **Respected** – Almost all pupils felt respected. Some primary pupils said they were unsure, because sometimes pupils were not nice to them, and some secondary pupils said no or that they were unsure because teachers were too busy to listen, or pupils were mean to them. Secondary school pupils often said they felt respected when they were treated like an adult.

“When I ask teachers questions they answer... We can choose what we want to do.”

Pupil, 8, mainstream primary school (with targeted support)

“Some of the teachers I think see me as a demon. They always yell at me and it’s not nice.”

Pupil, 13, mainstream secondary school

“I feel like a lot of the time the teachers don’t know who I am. They don’t have the time to get to know you... I had to leave class because of how horrible a teacher was being to me.”

Pupil, 16, mainstream secondary

- **Responsible** – All primary pupils felt responsible, talking about helping others, helping the teacher and helping at events. Most secondary pupils felt responsible, and helped out with school events, attended school committees, helped younger pupils both in and out of class, helped with primary transitions, participated in assemblies and volunteered to help with school activities. However, a few secondary pupils said that responsibilities were more for the older pupils.

“We all get jobs like tidying, ‘tooth fairies’ in charge of teeth cleaning after lunch...”

Pupil, 9, mainstream primary (with small group support)

“I get to do lots of jobs in school. It makes me feel important.”

Pupil, 12, mainstream primary (with PSA support)

“I get to do in class support for pupils with autism.”

Pupil, 16, mainstream secondary school

- **Included** – Almost all pupils felt included, and friends played a big part in this. But some felt that not all pupils included them. A few pupils in ASN bases mentioned that they did not always feel involved in the life of the school beyond the base. A few, particularly secondary girls, felt less included in PE than they wanted to be.

## Special schools

3.18 Most pupils at special schools were positive about their feelings about the school. Those who were able to understand the questions were asked about their feelings in relation to SHANARRI indicators.

- **Safe** – Almost all felt safe. However, a few said that they got attacked or that pupils were violent or aggressive towards them. For example, one boy – the youngest boy at a school supporting pupils with extreme social, emotional and behavioural needs - felt quite unsafe.

“Sometimes I get sad because people try to hurt me or run over me with the bikes. They try to make me die. I sometimes hide. Big boys always bully me. They try to hurt me by swearing. I just say it back to them.”

Pupil, 6, special school

- **Healthy** – All felt healthy. A few felt they were learning how to manage their needs more effectively.

“I learn that I can control my problems.”

Pupil, 7, special school

- **Active** – Almost all felt active. A few said they just didn’t want to be active or didn’t want to be at school.
- **Nurtured** – Almost all felt nurtured. They felt teachers took care of them, looked after them and were supportive. However, a few wanted more help with feeling safe.
- **Achieving** – Almost all felt that they were achieving. Pupils mentioned learning about numbers and letters, and a few said they liked learning. However, a few said they were covering work they had already done and were ready to be more challenged.

“I like it here. I like that there are small classes and nice teachers. Big classes with a lot of people stresses me out.”

Pupil, 14, special school

- **Respected** – Almost all said that they were respected by both pupils and teachers. However, a few said some of the pupils did not respect them and a few said teachers did not listen.
- **Responsible** – Almost all felt responsible. Pupils gave lots of examples of helping the younger ones (in and out of class); helping people deal with their needs (for example putting their ear defenders on); helping the teachers; and being on the pupil council. Just one pupil said they didn’t want to be responsible.

- **Included** – Almost all felt included, mentioning friends, trips and clubs. However, one said that they weren't included if they were bad, and another said it was hard as they were on a split placement so could miss out on things at each school.

## Friendships and inclusion

### Mainstream schools – with and without enhanced support or bases

- 3.19 Most primary and secondary pupils at mainstream schools felt that they had lots of friends, and that it was easy to make friends. They felt included in the life of the school.

“I feel really connected with everyone in class and the teachers.”

Pupil, 10, mainstream primary (in mainstream class with support)

“When I want to, it's easy to make friends.”

Pupil, 11, mainstream primary (in separate ASN unit)

- 3.20 However, a few said that they felt left out, or that they only had one good friend. A few said this was because they got bullied, or in two cases because people treated them differently because of their additional support needs.

“They say mean things to me and treat me like garbage and they know I have a mental disorder.”

Pupil, 11, mainstream primary

“I feel dumb because I don't know everything that the others know, and then I get bullied for it.”

Pupil, 13, mainstream secondary

“I don't have many friends, they get annoyed with me.”

Pupil, 7, mainstream primary

- 3.21 Some secondary school pupils said that it could be harder to make friends if you did not come from one of the feeder primaries, where pupils already knew one another, or if you have moved a lot between different schools.

- 3.22 One pupil found that the arrangements for outdoor play did not help him to feel included or to make friends.

**Example:**

One pupil in a mainstream class with support from a PSA was not able to play in the main playground. He had to play in the small courtyard playground along with a few other pupils with additional support needs, for his own safety, and because it is easier to monitor. One day a week he plays in the big playground. He has asked teachers if he can do this, but he feels they haven't done anything about it. He gets upset because he is allowed to take a friend from his class into the courtyard with him, but nobody wants to come because they want to play in the big playground.

**Special schools**

- 3.23 Around half of the pupils at special schools said that they had lots of friends. These pupils found it easy to talk to people and make friends, and were confident that their friends liked them. Some didn't like it when pupils hit them, but they often understood that this didn't mean they did not like them and they didn't mean to do it.
- 3.24 However, at two schools, pupils found it quite hard to make friends. One school was a very small transitional school, intended to provide intense support back into mainstream. Another was a slightly larger special school dealing with a range of needs including complex and profound needs. At one of these schools, all three pupils interviewed said they found it hard to make friends because of the high number of pupils with complex communication difficulties. At another school, a few pupils felt that there were no peers their own age and it was hard transitioning in from mainstream school.
- “It's not easy... I find it difficult because I don't understand everyone else.”  
Pupil, 16, special school
- “It was easy to make friends when there were lots of older people before, but the wee ones don't really understand.”  
Pupil, 12, special school
- “I sometimes feel a wee bit shy.”  
Pupil, 7, special school
- 3.25 Almost all pupils felt very included in the life of the school, and enjoyed going on trips and being part of school clubs.
- 3.26 The experiences of children and young people in relation to inclusion in decision making about their education more widely are explored in Chapter Five.

## Ability of the school to meet needs

### Mainstream schools

3.27 Overall, almost all pupils at primary and secondary mainstream schools felt that their needs were well met at the school. Few wanted more support. Most felt that their needs were well met, and teachers made adjustments to suit their learning style.

“I get help when I get stuck with sums, spelling and writing. It helps me to catch up and understand what I should be doing.”

Pupil, 10, mainstream primary

“They treat me like an ordinary guy, not a wee boy. And they take me seriously, so when you need help you get it straight away.”

Pupil, 18, mainstream secondary

“We all have a list of things we have that help us, to make things easier. For me, its things like taking five minutes out of class, chewing gum, wearing headphones, my seating position in class... and all the teachers have a note of this.”

Pupil, 16, mainstream secondary (most of the time in ASN base)

“In S1 I didn’t know what to do in certain classes, and they figured out a way to change the curriculum to make it easier for me, so I could learn in a different way.”

Pupil, 15, mainstream secondary

#### **Example:**

One pupil had gone from not attending school for 18 months, to attending an ASN base part time, and then moving to full time provision split between the ASN base and mainstream school.

3.28 However a few primary pupils in mainstream classes at schools that did not have enhanced support bases wanted more help.

“It would be better if I could get more support from my teacher and my friends. When I ask my friends for help they say I have to do it myself.”

Pupil, 10, mainstream primary

“Sometimes I would like more help. I don’t like working on my own, it’s quite hard. Maybe if the teacher could be close by, not right next to me but near, so I can get help whenever I need it.”

Pupil, 7, mainstream primary

**Example:**

One pupil at a mainstream primary school felt that his needs were well met and he was well listened to because he was allowed to do play activities in between his work. The teacher will ask him to do one sentence and then he can go and do a play activity. He likes working this way – a mix of play and work.

**Example:**

One pupil at a mainstream secondary school felt his needs were well met and he was well listened to because he asked for a computer to help with taking notes in class and he got it. He felt good about this because he now didn't feel he was holding up the class.

**Example:**

One pupil in a mainstream class said that she got help from her class teacher and from her "bestie" who sits next to her. She helps her with reading. They do this because they are friends, not because the teacher asked her to.

"She says half the words and I say the rest."

- 3.29 A few primary school pupils said they did not like going out of the class to get support, if it meant they missed things (making it hard to catch up) or were separate from the others. In contrast, one primary pupil did not like being in the whole class environment.

"I don't know why I don't like it in class. I like it when I get extra help but I don't like it in class."

Pupil, 10, mainstream primary (with one to one or small group support)

- 3.30 Pupils at secondary schools often enjoyed going to a targeted support room for extra support. A few secondary school pupils felt school would be better if it was more tranquil, there was more quiet space, there were shorter periods and there were more teachers. One secondary pupil said he did not want the additional support he was offered in class, because he did not want any extra attention. Another secondary pupil was embarrassed to use her laptop in class, because it drew attention.

"I don't like having to go in and out of class to get support."

Pupil, 8, mainstream primary (with targeted support)

"I sometimes get overwhelmed with things. When I go to LBD department it helps to make me calm and I can catch up with things that I have not completed in class."

Pupil, 16, mainstream secondary (with targeted support)

- 3.31 However, one secondary pupil with dyslexia felt that most of her class teachers did not make the adjustments she needed to be able to take

part. Another felt she did not get the extra help she needed, and didn't get extra time to do her exams which she was supposed to receive.

"In English I think they don't know how to help me. They keep giving me bits of paper with stuff on it."

Pupil, 16, mainstream secondary (with dyslexia)

### **Special schools**

3.32 Overall, pupils at special schools mainly felt that the school met their needs.

3.33 Pupils felt that the school work was not too hard, they were well supported by teachers and support staff, and covered appealing and interesting topics. A few said it was good that the work was flexible and you could have a break or take five minutes to clear your head. One mentioned that the environment was quieter, which helped with anxiety. One pupil said that the level of support was much more than he would get at a mainstream school.

"I do like work, as long as its not too hard."

Pupil, 10, special school

"When you do work, you get to have help. At the other school you just copy off the board."

Pupil, 7, special school

3.34 However, one pupil was keen to go back to mainstream school.

"But I want to go back to mainstream. You do more work and a lot more learning."

Pupil, 12, special school

### **Comparison between different school experiences**

3.35 Some pupils were able to compare their experiences at different schools. Young people at special schools often had previous experience of other schools, or had split placements and so could compare current schools.

3.36 Pupils had different views. Some said that they preferred their special school. This was for a range of reasons. A few had been bullied in their other school and found this happened less at their current school. For example, one girl said she tended not to get on with girls and liked being at a special school with mainly boys. Another had missed school for 5 months before coming to the special school because she was bullied and stressed in mainstream secondary. She also felt the teachers at the mainstream secondary were mean. A few had felt isolated at their

previous school. And one younger pupil felt there was more to play with at the special school.

“I was quite isolated because of the way I am. I couldn’t manage my emotions and I used to kick off.”

Pupil, 16, special school

“I liked it from the first time I saw it. It seemed totally fun.”

Pupil, 13, special school

“This has been my dream school. When I heard I had a place here I was really, really happy.”

Pupil, 14, special school

3.37 However, some pupils on split placements liked both schools. Often pupils had friends in both places. One pupil was very sad to be moved away from his mainstream school, and didn’t know why he moved. A few were keen to move to mainstream primary as there were more pupils to be friends with there, or there was less detailed supervision by adults. One pupil felt discouraged from going to mainstream school by his dad, who said teachers weren’t trained to deal with pupils like him.

“I really wish I was back there. I really liked it. Everything felt normal. My little sister goes there... I miss the playground and the slide and I miss the teachers.”

Pupil, 9, special school

“I like the mainstream, its nice and pretty and does lots of nice things. I don’t like people being loud and noisy. Its louder at mainstream.”

Pupil, 6, special school

3.38 Many pupils at mainstream schools had only attended that school. However, some had moved schools. Many of the primary pupils could not remember being at other schools, or could only remember a little. Some were unclear why they moved, although some thought it was because of their behaviour.

“I was a terrible person there.”

Pupil, 11, mainstream primary (full time in separate ASN unit)

“I felt bad and I wasn’t learning anything.”

Pupil, 11, mainstream primary (part time in ASN unit)

3.39 One girl said she was told to move schools part way through primary school and was a bit sad, but found the move easier in the end.

“I felt relaxed and happy in the end. It is more easier here for autistic children.”

Pupil, 11, mainstream primary (full time in separate ASN unit)

- 3.40 A few who could remember said they preferred their current school due to the quieter, calmer environment with more support (often through enhanced bases).
- 3.41 For secondary pupils, two girls talked about moving school part way through secondary school due to bullying. One girl asked her mum if she could change schools because she was getting bullied, and was pleased to have a place in a school with a support base. She did not want to go to a special school. Another girl had a very bad experience of bullying at a mainstream secondary school, resulting in her stopping attending school for a long period and becoming suicidal. Eventually, her mum found out about the enhanced support base within a mainstream school, and she started there part time, building to full time.
- 3.42 Another boy moved schools part way through secondary school because he wasn't getting much support and it was too busy. He didn't find it hard to change and made new friends easily.

### **Priorities for the future**

- 3.43 Secondary school pupils often had clear priorities for the future, particularly in their senior years. Young people had plans for further learning (at college or university) and careers. Many had been supported towards these at school through work experience placements, practical modules, tasters and talking to careers, guidance and subject teachers. Some had support with interview skills, CVs and applications. One boy was able to build his skills around childcare through mentoring younger pupils on a weekly basis.
- 3.44 For primary pupils, many had aspirations to be lots of different things, and hadn't quite decided yet. Some wanted to help people, because people had been kind to them. Some older primary pupils were excited to move on to secondary school, to learn more. Most were informed about their transition, and had visited the school.

## 4. Parental views on school experiences

### Chapter summary

Parents and carers were broadly positive about their child's experience of school across all of the SHANARRI indicators.

Parents and carers with children at mainstream primary and secondary schools highlighted that they liked that communication with the school was good; enhanced support which was available; and children were comfortable at the school. Most parents of children at mainstream schools had something they would like to improve about the school – including some concerns about resources, staff and buildings; high staff turnover and lack of continuity. In secondary schools, a few parents highlighted concerns about ensuring information about children's needs is provided to all teachers; schools being big and noisy; a lack of physical space; a lack of specialist support; and concerns about bullying.

Parents with children at special schools liked the small size of the school and classes, the good ratio of children to adults and the access to physical space both indoors and outdoors. A few felt that their child was now achieving more than at mainstream school, while a few had concerns about academic challenge.

Most parents whose children received homework said that they felt well equipped to support their child, and they knew they could ask the school for help if needed. However, a few felt they would like more support.

Almost all parents were very positive about the relationship and level of communication with teachers and support staff at their child's school. However, a few felt that they had to push to improve communication. Many parents had little contact with education managers, officers and educational psychologists – and those who had contact reported a mixed experience.

Overall, most parents felt that their child's school was doing well in terms of meeting the needs of their child. However, for many it had taken a long time to get their child to the right environment. The challenges included a lack of understanding from staff in mainstream schools; experiences of bullying; assessment and diagnosis periods being long and complicated; having to push for extra support or spaces at special schools or ASN units; and being moved between schools with little notice.

A few parents of children with dyslexia in mainstream schools felt their needs were not being met. A few on split placements felt that their child's needs were better met in the special school than the mainstream school.

## Introduction

- 4.1 Parents and carers were asked their views on their child's experience at school. This chapter explores parental views on:
- successes and challenges relating to school experiences;
  - children's feelings about school;
  - homework;
  - communication;
  - overall ability of the school to meet needs; and
  - other schooling options.
- 4.2 It is worth noting that this research is qualitative, and is based on the experiences of 39 parents and carers. This includes 23 parents or carers of primary age pupils, and 16 parents or carers of secondary age pupils. Nine had children at mainstream schools, 22 had children at mainstream schools with some form of enhanced support or base, and eight had children at special schools.
- 4.3 While this chapter gives an in-depth understanding of the experiences, feelings and perspectives of those who were involved in the research, its findings cannot be extrapolated to the wider population.

## Successes and challenges

- 4.4 Parents and carers were asked about what worked well about their child's school experience at the moment, and what did not.
- 4.5 Parents and carers with children at mainstream primary and secondary schools (both with and without support bases) highlighted the same types of things that they liked about their child's school. The main themes emerging were that:
- **Communication with the school was good** – This was the most commonly mentioned positive aspect, with parents valuing regular communication, good relationships with school leaders and school approaches which were supportive of the whole family. A few parents also liked that they could be involved in the school when they wanted to be.
  - **Enhanced support was available** – Children were supported by trained and skilled staff who understood the needs of the child. A few were particularly positive about the techniques the children were taught to manage their needs, and the school's willingness to try new approaches.

- **Children were comfortable at school** – A few parents with children at mainstream schools without ASN bases highlighted the environment was friendly and welcoming, and a few at schools with enhanced support mentioned that their child was comfortable, and that their child was with children with similar needs.

“He gets the support he needs, and he can take his time to learn when he is ready.”

Parent, mainstream primary

- 4.6 Parents of children at special schools highlighted that they liked the school being small, class sizes being small, the good ratio of children to adults and the access to physical space both indoors and outdoors.

“They have the facilities. They can do outdoor learning, smaller classes, and the staff have a massive understanding.”

Parent, pupil at special school (primary)

- 4.7 About three quarters of parents had something that they would like to improve about the school. The others said that there was nothing that didn't work about their child's education at that school. Those who had nothing negative to say were parents of children across all types of school.

- 4.8 Parents and carers with children at mainstream primary schools (both with and without ASN bases) had some concerns about resources – including availability of pupil support assistants, concerns in class support may be withdrawn and concerns that the buildings were quite run down. Some highlighted high staff turnover and lack of continuity among pupil support assistants. One parent was concerned that enhanced provision was only available for part of the day, and another was concerned that the school was quite far away which impacted on her child's sense of community. One parent said his child felt embarrassed going out of the mainstream class for additional support.

- 4.9 Parents and carers with children at secondary schools had varied concerns, with one or two parents highlighting each of the following issues:

- challenges filtering information about their child's needs (health and educational) to all teachers;
- lack of physical space;
- schools being too big and noisy;
- lack of specialist support such as dyslexia support; and
- concerns about bullying.

“Not all of the teachers know him and so sometimes they will question why he has a locker or a hall pass. They can be quite rude. And he doesn’t understand enough to explain it to them.”

Parent, mainstream secondary school

- 4.10 A few parents and carers of children at special schools had concerns about academic challenge, feeling that their child was not progressing or being challenged as they should.

**Example:**

One parent challenged the special school about the level of academic work her son was being given. She felt they had him on a much lower level than he was capable of. She had her son assessed privately and was told he was particularly gifted at maths. She challenged the school about the level of his work and they listened and apologised.

- 4.11 A few parents of children at special schools were concerned about the mix of needs within the school, meaning that pupils were often exposed to extreme behavioural needs. For example, this was a particular concern for one carer of a very young primary boy in a SEBN special school, who was in a small school with no peer group.

“Sometimes, I’m wary he sees too much for his age. He is a loveable wee boy, and he is with much older boys.”

Carer, special school (primary)

## Feelings about the school

- 4.12 Parents and carers were broadly positive about their child’s experience at school across all of the SHANARRI indicators. Some said they were well aware of the indicators, and worked through these at regular review sessions. A few said that as long as their child felt happy about going to school that was all they wanted.

- **Safe** – While almost all felt their child was safe at school, some parents (at secondary schools) were concerned about bullying. This was raised equally often by parents of young women and young men – although one parent of a young woman raised very serious issues around bullying causing her daughter to become suicidal and have mental health needs, and being unable to return to the school.
- **Healthy** – Almost all felt their child was healthy at school. A few parents (at mainstream primary and secondary schools) felt that their child was anxious about school, or felt ill while at school.
- **Achieving** – Almost all parents felt that their child was achieving at school, or was doing their best. A few parents of children at special schools indicated that they now felt that their child was achieving

more than at mainstream school – often because their social, emotional or behavioural needs had been well supported, which enabled them to focus on their learning. However, a few had concerns about academic challenge at special schools and within ASN bases.

- **Nurtured** – Almost all parents felt that their child was nurtured, or a few said that they did not know.
- **Active** – Almost all parents felt that their child was active at school. However a few said that their child chose not to be active. One parent said their child (who is at secondary school) had been bullied in PE, and now would not take part.
- **Respected** – Almost all parents felt their child was respected, or a few said that they did not know.
- **Responsible** – Almost all said that their child was responsible, at least to some degree, at school.
- **Included** – While most parents felt that their child was included, one said that their child had not been invited on the school trip. A few parents with children with SEBN on split placements said that while their children were included in the special school, they were not included in their mainstream school.

## Homework

4.13 Parents had different experiences of homework. Some said that their child did not receive homework, because they were too tired, because it was too difficult or stressful or because they preferred to have a clear separation between school and home. A few pupils did their homework in school. However a few said that they would like their child to have homework, to stretch and challenge them or so they were treated the same as others.

### Example:

One parent said their child was upset because her brother received homework but she didn't. The child talked to the school, and the school supported her to receive homework.

4.14 Most parents whose children received homework said that they felt well equipped to support their child if needed, and that they knew they could ask the school for help if needed. However a few said that they would like more help to know what to initiate at home, and how to support children who may be falling behind in the classroom.

4.15 One parent said that she had felt unsupported until P4, when a teacher recognised she needed more support. Another parent said that they felt homework didn't match their child's level, but the school did not respond

well to this. One parent paid for a tutor because she felt the mainstream primary school wasn't doing enough for her child's learning.

**Example:**

One parent with a child at a mainstream primary school said that she received information at the beginning of each term about topics that would be covered in class. However, she would welcome more week to week feedback about what to focus on and how to help her son. She felt she would then be able to provide more support at home.

## **Communication with the school and authority**

- 4.16 Almost all parents were very positive about the relationship and level of communication with teachers and support staff at their child's school. Parents often described communication as excellent, open and honest, and based on good relationships. Communication took place by phone, email, social media, and apps. Parents particularly valued regular communication and the ability to contact teachers at any time.

"I can pick up the phone any day and they make me feel like I'm not being daft."

Carer, special school, primary

- 4.17 A few parents mentioned the value of apps which allow schools to provide a daily journal, including pictures of what pupils are doing.

"The 'seesaw' app helps you to feel more connected with the school on a daily basis."

Parent, mainstream primary school

- 4.18 However, a few parents felt less positive. A few felt that they had to push to improve communication, or that parent's meetings were not particularly useful. A few parents said that there was a strong focus on feedback about problems or negative messages, which could make them feel like they were failing.

"Sometimes I feel that the school only contacts me about the negative things, or things that he's done – not about what other people have done to him."

Parent, mainstream secondary school

- 4.19 One parent at a mainstream secondary found that school didn't always tell her things – for example that her son was being bullied. Another parent at the same school said that communication was a battle, and said that parents were not allowed to make direct contact with teachers and had to go through pastoral care.

- 4.20 Almost all parents felt that school leaders and head teachers were very good, approachable and visible, but most did not deal with them on a regular basis.

“If I ask to speak with the head teacher I always get time with her.”

Parent, mainstream primary school

- 4.21 Feedback on relationships and communication with education managers, officers and educational psychologists was very mixed. Some parents felt that support from educational psychology or educational social work was very useful. However, many said that they had little contact, limited communication, their views were not always listened to and decisions about their child’s education could be last minute.

“They do come to meetings but I don’t have much to do with them. The school deals with them more than me.”

Parent, mainstream secondary school

**Example:**

One parent said her son had an assessment when he started his current mainstream secondary school which has an autism base. This was to determine the level of work he should be at. However, the parent has never heard the outcome of this assessment.

## **Ability of the school to meet needs**

- 4.22 Overall, most parents felt that their child’s school was doing well in terms of meeting the needs of their child. Parents largely felt that schools were supportive, flexible and tried very hard to meet individual needs.

“The boys really enjoy the support they get at school.”

Parent, mainstream primary school

“I have 100 per cent trust in the school. If there is a problem, I know it can be fixed.”

Parent, special school

- 4.23 However, three parents of children with dyslexia (and associated needs) in mainstream primary and secondary schools felt that their needs were not being met. This was due to lack of resources and lack of dedicated dyslexia support.

- 4.24 Two parents of children who had split placements felt that their children’s needs were well met in the special school but not in the

mainstream school. One parent was concerned about planned phased return to previous mainstream school, due to previous negative experiences. One parent felt that there could be a lot of 'crisis management' in meeting needs – but felt that overall needs were well met within the resources available. Finally, one parent felt that needs were very well met but that this was largely dependent on one very good teacher.

## Other schooling options

4.25 Almost all parents felt that their children were now at the right school for them. However, one carer was still exploring options and found it very hard to know what the best option would be.

“We are all at a complete loss with [x] and how to manage him in education... I don't know if we are doing the right thing.”

Carer, special school

4.26 Two parents felt that their children would be better in smaller units or special schools. In one case this was because the mainstream secondary school was too large and noisy. In another, it was because mainstream primary did not include anyone at a developmentally similar stage, with similar interests. In this case, the pupil had to play outdoors in the nursery playground because the school playground was open, and he was considered (by his parent) to be a flight risk.

4.27 One parent felt that their child spent a lot of time in an ASN base within a mainstream school, and wondered if they would be better served at a special school.

4.28 However, for many it had taken a long time to get to the right environment. Key challenges included:

- lack of understanding from staff in mainstream schools;
- experiences of bullying in mainstream schools;
- assessment and diagnosis periods being long and complicated;
- exclusions from school due to violence and behaviour;
- having to push for funding to support pupils in mainstream schools;
- having to push for spaces at special schools, ASN units or more appropriate mainstream schools;
- being moved between schools with little notice; and
- experiences of physical restraining, which one parent wished to move away from.

“At his previous school, [x] was seen as a naughty child and his behaviour was a real issue.”

Parent, mainstream primary

- 4.29 A few parents highlighted negative experiences at nursery and in early primary, and would have welcomed earlier discussion around options of how to meet their child’s needs.
- 4.30 A few initially had joint placements between mainstream schools and special schools or ASN bases, but found that it could be quite challenging. A few felt their children did not understand the need to go to two different schools, and a few had seen more positive learning and social skills develop within the ASN bases meaning they wished their child to attend there full time.
- 4.31 Conversely, one parent had moved their child from a special school to a mainstream school with an ASN base, and preferred this mixed environment which challenged her learning.

## 5. Involving children, young people and families in decision making

### Chapter summary

Pupils at primary mainstream schools and special schools generally felt well listened to by teachers, and gave examples of being able to learn in a way that suited them.

While most pupils at mainstream secondary school did feel listened to, a few did not. A few felt that teachers didn't make the adjustments they needed. Conversely, some pupils in ASN bases within mainstream secondary schools felt strongly that their opinion was asked for and valued.

Almost all parents felt that they were involved in decision making relating to their child's education. However, some did not feel involved in choices about which school their child went to, or what support their child received at school.

Local authority officers indicated that the views of children and young people were reflected in Child's Plans and Individualised Learning Programmes.

Almost all school staff felt that children were able to express their views and have these heard at school. However, at one primary school staff felt that young people's needs were largely identified by adults.

Local authority officers and school staff agreed that involvement worked best if it was ongoing and planned, with support for the child to engage in a flexible way. However, they felt that meetings could be daunting; it could be hard to evidence and undertake meaningful engagement; and that the school culture needed to recognise the importance of hearing children's voices.

Local authority officers and school staff said that parents and carers were involved through attending relevant meetings and having their views reflected in plans. School staff indicated that engagement with parents and carers was very important in supporting pupils to thrive at school. Again, involvement was felt to work best if it was ongoing and genuine, the school and local authority could be flexible in meeting needs and if parents were seen as equal partners (with support provided as needed). However, it could be hard to balance the views of children and parents, and support parents to understand the range of options available.

## Introduction

- 5.1 This chapter explores how children, young people and families are involved in making decisions around meeting additional support needs. It draws on the opinions of children and young people, families, teachers and local authority officers.
- 5.2 It is worth noting that this research is qualitative. While this chapter gives an in-depth understanding of the experiences, feelings and perspectives of those who were involved in the research, its findings cannot be extrapolated to the wider population.

## Children's views on involvement in decision making

- 5.3 Pupils at primary mainstream schools generally felt well listened to by teachers, and gave examples of being able to learn in a way that suits them; choose their activities in the class; discuss and influence the behaviour management system; take part in show and tell; and talk to teachers informally as they check in on how they are doing.

“In class we get lots of chances to say what we think should happen.”

Pupil, 9, mainstream primary (in mainstream class with support)

- 5.4 While most pupils at secondary school did feel listened to, a few did not. A few felt that there were not many chances to talk to teachers about their needs, and that things did not change when they raised issues. Some felt that they couldn't work with teachers to make small changes, like to where they sit in the class. A few felt that teachers didn't make the adjustments that they needed.

“I feel like I'm not listened to when I say that things aren't working.”

Pupil, 16, mainstream secondary

“Sometimes things have to reach crisis stage before some teachers will listen.”

Pupil, 16, mainstream secondary (with one to one support at all times)

- 5.5 Conversely, some pupils in ASN bases within a mainstream secondary school strongly felt that their opinion was asked for and valued.

“We're treated as adults, as equals... its more of an independent style of learning.”

Pupil, 16, mainstream secondary (in ASN base)

- 5.6 Pupils generally felt well listened to at special schools. In class, pupils felt able to ask if they could change the classroom environment (for example to make it quieter) and to ask to play with their favourite toys. A few pupils were involved in the pupil council, which they felt could change some of the things that happened at the school. However, a few pupils felt that teachers did not listen and said they were too busy.
- 5.7 Most parents also felt that their children had been involved, to some extent, in the decisions made about their education.

## **Parents' views on involvement in decision making**

- 5.8 Almost all parents felt that they were involved in decision making relating to their child's education. Only a few did not feel involved. Almost all felt involved in reviews and updates relating to their child's progress.
- 5.9 When asked if they felt involved in choices about which school their child went to, most parents did feel involved. However, some (just under a quarter) did not feel involved. These parents indicated that they were not aware of any other options, were not consulted about what school options would be suitable, and were often just told by the local authority that their child would be attending or moving to a particular school. A few were quite upset about the need for their child to move schools. Some were unsure how the system worked.
- 5.10 Some (about a quarter) also did not feel involved in decisions about which support their child received at school. Some of these parents felt that their child was adequately supported, they just weren't involved in the decision making process. A few said there wasn't much choice, or they just took the maximum support the school could offer. One parent said they hadn't seen their child's individual learning plan, and another said they constantly had to push for the support that had been agreed. A few parents said they needed to trust that the school would do the best for their child.

"To a certain extent you need to put your trust in the school."

Parent, primary school

## **Reflecting the views of children and young people**

### **Local authority views**

- 5.11 Local authority officers indicated that the views of children and young people were reflected in Child's Plans and Individualised Learning Programmes.

5.12 Local authority officers felt that involvement of children and young people worked well if it was:

- ongoing and planned – thinking about transitions at an early stage;
- supported – with advocacy, support from peers or families, and with someone to challenge if there is no evidence of the child’s opinion in the decision making process;
- flexible – with space for pre-meetings, written responses or other ways to be involved.

**Example:**

In one area, the local authority randomly identifies a selection of schools each year. A check of a sample of Child’s Plans is done, to ensure that children have been consulted. They then talk to the school about making sure that children are involved and that it is evidenced clearly. A paper is also produced each year about the quality of Child’s Plans.

“Children would be involved as long as it wouldn’t be distressing for them. And we would make an effort to capture their voice if they couldn’t come to the meeting.”

Education officer

5.13 The challenges included:

- meetings – which could be daunting, full of adults, using jargon;
- evidence – consistently recording children’s views and evidencing involvement, particularly where needs are complex;
- meaningful engagement – which does not put an adult interpretation on children’s views;
- school culture – schools need to buy in to hearing children’s voices and recognise the importance of this – which most felt was improving.

“It’s about respecting the views of young people, not imposing our views unnecessarily.”

Education officer

**Example:**

In one area, a young person with cerebral palsy was being educated in specialist primary school provision. At transition to secondary school she wanted to go to mainstream school. Most of the adults in the team did not understand this or think it was feasible. The young person spoke up at a planning meeting and said that she would not expect a university to build a special campus just for her, so why should she have to go to a specialist secondary school. The local authority took her views into account, and identified a mainstream secondary school which

was suitable and “she is now thriving.”

## School views

- 5.14 Almost all school staff felt that children were able to express their views and have these heard at school. However, at one primary school staff felt that young people didn’t really have a voice and that their needs were largely identified by adults.
- 5.15 School staff highlighted that they gathered the views of children and young people through regular review processes, which fed into formal plans. Informally, schools also gathered views through discussing each day how pupils felt in class (most often in primary school), and through pupil surveys, pupil voice, pupil councils or world café events.
- 5.16 Teachers also involved young people in regular, ongoing communication about their progress towards targets, and – in some cases – what topics and activities they wished to focus on.

“They take the learning in amazing different directions, and we go with what they are interested in.”

Teacher, special school

- 5.17 Overall, school staff felt that approaches worked well where:
- engagement was on a regular, ongoing basis;
  - teachers were able to be flexible in meeting needs;
  - teachers were open, non-judgemental and had a positive mindset; and
  - schools followed the rights of the child model.

### **Example:**

In one ASN base, pupils can complete a short evaluation sheet at the end of every period they have at the base. It is meant to be a quick, simple way to get immediate feedback on how they feel that lesson went. It can be challenging to get them to complete it, but it does provide useful feedback to teachers.

- 5.18 Approaches worked less well where children struggled to identify and communicate their own needs, and where pupil and parent views are different.

“Pupil views can be lost in overbearing, oversensitive parental views. So we don’t always explore pupil views if we feel it might rock the relationship with parents.”

Head teacher, special school

“Even the pupils who are verbal struggle to reflect and express their views and opinions on things.”

ASN teacher, secondary school

5.19 One school found it hard to access independent interpreters to allow deaf pupils to express their views.

## **Reflecting the views of parents and carers**

### **Local authority views**

5.20 Local authority officers indicated that parents and carers were involved through attending relevant meetings and having their views reflected in plans. Involvement of parents and carers worked well if:

- the local authority was flexible and willing to listen;
- skilled facilitators were involved in the discussions;
- involvement is ongoing, open, pragmatic and genuine;
- parents are seen as equal partners; and
- parents receive support.

“We pride ourselves on the way we work with parents. We try to be as flexible as possible with people around the placement. We do a lot of work to mediate concerns and to avoid tribunals or disputes.”

Education officer

5.21 The challenges included:

- everyone recognising the importance of parental involvement;
- supporting parents to understand the range of options available;
- the use of jargon and the complexity of discussions; and
- getting a range of parent views at a strategic level.

### **School views**

5.22 School staff indicated that engagement with parents and carers was very important.

“The ones that thrive best are the ones that we work more with the parents.”

Deputy head teacher, special school

- 5.23 School staff gathered the views of parents and carers through a range of methods, including attendance at learning reviews and planning meetings; parents' nights; daily communication through diaries, emails, phone calls and social media; events to increase engagement with the school such as open days and learning walks; and parents' focus groups and surveys. A few schools mentioned that they had a dedicated post to engage families.

"We have close relationships with our families as we are problem solving on a daily basis."

Head teacher, special school

"I often phone people at 8am when I know they will be in, as I prefer to have close contact with parents or carers."

Principal teacher, secondary school

**Example:**

In one primary school, there are weekly learning together sessions between 9am and 11am, where parents and carers are encouraged to come into school and learn with their child. Parents are also encouraged to come to the reading recovery group, and four out of the eight parents have attended.

- 5.24 School staff felt that parental engagement worked best if it was regular and ongoing. A few mentioned that parents may expect only negative feedback, and that it was important to give feedback in a non-judgemental way and to give positive feedback too.

"I call parents regularly to share good news about their children. This gives the children a wee boost."

ASN teacher, primary school

- 5.25 School staff found it hard to involve parents if their views were overbearing, or did not recognise the views of the child. Schools also had to work hard to managed expectations, in line with the available resources. Schools worked hard to overcome parents' own experiences of school, which could often be negative. And many mentioned that formal meetings could be daunting and intimidating for parents.

"A lot of our parents had negative experiences at school and therefore don't want to come to school. Others feel too embarrassed to come."

ASN teacher, secondary school

## 6. Meeting the needs of children and young people

### Chapter summary

Overall, most local authority officers and school staff felt that they were meeting the needs of children with ASN reasonably – in the context of having very limited resources. The key factors which school staff felt helped with meeting needs included enhanced support or bases; bespoke and targeted approaches; empowered and skilled staff; support within the classroom; and the flexibility and physical space to meet individual needs.

Almost all local authority officers and school staff felt there was room for improvement in meeting needs. Schools across all local authorities involved in the research highlighted pressures on resources. Many said that the number, range and complexity of needs of children with ASN were increasing at a time when teachers, support workers, senior leadership and central support within the local authority were all under pressure or decreasing in number. Other challenges included:

- consistency – with some feeling experiences could be very mixed, dependent on the school; and
- balancing time – many teachers in mainstreams schools highlighted particular challenges around balancing their time between the whole class and pupils needing individual support – particularly when some felt pressure to ensure all children were improving their attainment.

A few teachers mentioned that they felt the inclusion of children with ASN, particularly behavioural needs, was having a negative impact on learning within mainstream classes.

Overall, local authority officers and school staff felt that children would largely be having a positive and inclusive experience at school – but that it did depend on the school. Some schools found there could be a clear boundary between ASN bases and mainstream schools, even though they were within the one school or building.

Some felt there may be gaps around meeting the needs of children with social, emotional and behavioural needs and autism (in some instances). Most school staff said that there were one or two pupils at their school that they felt may benefit from other environments – most often relating to SEBN.

## Introduction

- 6.1 This chapter explores local authority and school staff views on how effectively the needs of children and young people with ASN are being met in education. The views of young people are explored in detail in Chapter Three, and the views of parents are explored in detail in Chapter Four.
- 6.2 It is worth noting that this research is qualitative. While this chapter gives an in-depth understanding of the experiences, feelings and perspectives of those who were involved in the research, its findings cannot be extrapolated to the wider population.

### Overall views on meeting needs – local authorities

- 6.3 Overall, most local authority officers felt that they were meeting the needs of children with ASN reasonably – with recent improvements around having a clear ethos which is shared across partners, clear expectations, using creative approaches, upskilling staff and engaging parents and children. But almost all felt there was room for improvement.
- 6.4 Some felt that experiences could be very mixed, dependent on the school. Clear leadership from head teachers and training for staff in schools was felt to make a big difference in how well schools could meet needs. Where there had been an investment in training, this was felt to be beneficial. However, some local authority officers had concerns that teacher training generally didn't cover complex ASN, and that it could be hard to access training.

#### **Example:**

In one area, young people and parents co-delivered training on ASN for staff. They have done this for dyslexia and dyscalculia and are working on doing this for mental health as well.

“The cost of training can be outwith the scope of a school's budget.”

Education officer

- 6.5 In one area, there was concern that the attainment agenda had given more power to head teachers, which did not necessarily foster inclusion. This area had seen a shift coming from some schools to try to get more children with ASN into specialist provision. It was felt that the increasing focus on attainment has meant that some schools may now be more concerned about supporting children with ASN in a mainstream environment. There was some concern that head teachers may try to

convince parents to take their children out of mainstream environments as a result.

“We are extremely worried about the future of inclusion in Scotland.”

Educational psychologist

6.6 In two areas, local authority officers felt concerned that they were not meeting the needs of children with ASN and their families. This was linked to the level of resources, with cuts in support for learning posts, and authorities not filling vacant posts in schools or centrally and not getting maternity cover.

6.7 These issues around resources were also raised in other areas, although local authority officers in these areas felt that they were still largely able to meet needs. Some were concerned that their area had lost lots of experienced staff recently, and some were concerned about pressure on staff as teams became smaller. A few were also concerned that the buildings and space available constrained their ability to meet needs.

“The reality is that we can’t offer something if we can’t recruit the staff.”

Education officer

“Local authorities are feeling the impact of budgetary constraints. In an ideal world, we could be doing a whole lot more.”

Educational psychologist

“(the area) has swung too far towards integration, without provision for specialist support within schools.”

Educational psychologist

## **Overall views on meeting needs – schools**

6.8 Overall leaders, teachers and support workers in mainstream primary and secondary schools (with and without enhanced support) felt that they were doing a reasonably good job at meeting children’s needs, but in the context of having very limited resources.

“Do we get it right for every child, probably not. But we do the best we can with what we’ve got.”

Deputy head, secondary school

“We get it right most of the time. We use the resources we have to the best ability.”

Head teacher, primary school

“I think there are young people here that are surviving. But should they just be surviving or coping? I want them to be succeeding and thriving.”  
Teacher, secondary school

- 6.9 Overall, staff in special schools felt that they were effectively meeting the needs of children with ASN. However, one school found that it was hard to meet the needs of children with social, emotional and behavioural needs, due to the pressures and extreme problems experienced at home every day. One special school felt it was over capacity and had issues around space in the building. A few special schools mentioned that staff were pressured, and it could be hard to recruit skilled staff to special schools.
- 6.10 Some, particularly primary schools, felt that they were doing well at identifying needs, but were not always doing so well at supporting pupils with ASN to attain – largely due to pressures on resources.

### **What helps**

- 6.11 The key factors which leaders and teachers within schools felt helped with effectively meeting needs were:
- availability of enhanced support or bases within the school – with small class sizes;
  - ability to create bespoke places and bases for children with particular needs;
  - targeted approaches with small groups;
  - having empowered, motivated, skilled and experienced staff who are confident to try new things;
  - having support– classroom assistants, Personal Support Assistants and Support for Learning teachers;
  - flexibility to create an individualised curriculum;
  - ability to resource targeted approaches (for example through Pupil Equity Fund);
  - physical space – flexible space in the classroom to allow group and individual work, and space within the school to create dens, low sensory input areas and other facilities;
  - good transitions between year groups, and between primary and secondary stages; and
  - partnership working with children, parents, other schools and partners.
- 6.12 Leaders within special schools highlighted the benefits of access to high quality facilities, small class sizes, high pupil to support staff ratios and a focus on early intervention. A few teachers at special schools also stressed the importance of choice and individualisation of learning.

“Giving pupils the experience of choice can reduce their stress levels, as often life for pupils is very restrictive and there are too many boundaries.”

Teacher, special school

- 6.13 Teachers across all schools felt that having a supportive head teacher and wider management team was critical.

“There is a caring, honest, open management team. It is a safe and secure environment for staff and pupils.”

ASN teacher, primary school

- 6.14 Teachers, particularly at special schools, also emphasised the importance of building relationships with pupils.

“It is all about building relationships. What makes them tick? What are their anxieties and worries?”

Teacher, special school

**Example:**

In one area, a secondary school used PEF funding to fund a primary teacher to work two days a week in the English department. The teacher works with pupils in the mainstream school (although the school does also have a base for pupils with specific needs). The teacher works with pupils who need support with early level literacy work. The teacher brings expertise, and has taught other teachers in the school a lot about how to approach this type of learning. One year, the school created an extra English class that the primary teacher, ASL lead and faculty head taught as a team teaching experience. Ten of the children developed enough “survival skills” to cope in the mainstream classroom, while five continue to receive group support outwith the class.

- 6.15 While one school highlighted that it was very helpful to have a supportive and engaging local authority, schools in another area had significant concerns about their ability to meet needs due to perceived reductions in pupil support, other specialist services and strategic support within the local authority.

**What hinders**

- 6.16 Schools across all local authorities involved in the research highlighted pressures on resources. Many said that the number, range and complexity of needs of children with ASN were increasing, at a time when teachers, support workers, senior leadership and central support

within the local authority were all under pressure or decreasing in number.

“I wish we had more hours in the working day. I wish we had more money. I wish we had a better environment.”

Deputy head, secondary school

“Schools are in a really hard place. Support for learning staff have been badly cut, so we really need to look at upskilling staff.”

Head teacher, primary school

- 6.17 Ability to support pupils with ASN in a mainstream environment, in the context of limited resources was a particular concern for three schools within one local authority.

“If we can’t meet pupil’s needs with the resources in the school, there is nothing else to do... We’re aware that we’re not meeting all pupil’s needs and that pupils are missing out.”

Principal teacher, secondary school

“We’re not meeting everybody’s needs. There’s no question that we’re failing young people.”

Targeted support teacher, secondary school

- 6.18 Many teachers in mainstream schools highlighted particular challenges around balancing their time between the whole class and pupils needing individual support. Some felt that a small number of pupils with a high level of need took up most of their time. A few teachers were concerned that the other pupils were therefore not challenged enough in their learning. Teachers also highlighted wider time pressures, with concern about not having time to research new approaches or needs, or to support classroom assistants properly or liaise with support for learning workers.

“There are maybe about five children in my class who take up about 80 per cent of my time. I’ve got to meet these five children’s needs, but I’ve also got to meet the needs of all the pupils in my class.”

Teacher, primary school

“We are less able to do intensive group work, as we don’t have the resources.”

ASN teacher, secondary school

- 6.19 A few support workers highlighted that it was important that teachers recognised that supporting children with ASN was their job, not just the responsibility of support staff.

6.20 Some school leaders and teachers also felt that waiting lists and referral times for specialist services like speech and language therapy or CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) were a challenge.

6.21 Some school leaders also highlighted a clash between the attainment agenda and the focus on mainstreaming for children with ASN. Many found it hard to balance learning and teaching for the whole class, with the additional support required.

“There are very strong pressures to attain, and be nurturing, and put people through their exams. There can be a clash.”

ASN lead, secondary school

6.22 Many teachers felt very well supported, but some indicated that access to training was a barrier.

“I feel very well supported, both personally and professionally, by the senior management team.”

ASN class teacher, secondary school

“We try our best, but we don’t have a lot of specialist training or knowledge... sometimes I feel like I’m out of my depth.”

Class teacher, primary school

6.23 In one special school, a teacher felt that high achieving deaf pupils could be held back from achieving due to the skills and subject expertise of their sign support teacher.

6.24 A few also felt that it was a challenge to demonstrate progress and achievement of children with ASN.

“I don’t think we’re as robust in evidencing progress for ASN pupils.”

Head teacher, primary school

6.25 A few highlighted that while they worked to keep children safe, healthy and included at school, this was a challenge for many of their pupils when they returned home.

“They are safe, valued and healthy at school, but at home it can just be a vicious cycle.”

Deputy head teacher, special school

6.26 Finally, a few school leaders also felt that school buildings (both old and new) were not suitable for catering for the needs of children with ASN,

with spaces in high demand and limited quiet space available for children to take some time out or do work separately for a time.

“The environment and space is really important, and our space is under pressure.”

ASL lead, primary school

- 6.27 Teachers also highlighted that facilities for pupils with ASN could be better – to include quiet spaces, secure outdoor spaces or sensory areas. A few highlighted that schools had not been designed to accommodate the range of needs that they are now having to support.

“We have seen many changes in society in recent times, but the education system has not really changed much since Victorian times.”

ASN teacher, secondary school

## **Access to professional learning**

- 6.28 Overall, most teachers felt that they had good access to training and professional learning. This was facilitated by supportive, committed and inclusive leadership teams and head teachers.
- 6.29 Teachers enjoyed accessing training courses, hearing about both theory and practice, sharing their knowledge, and having opportunities to challenge themselves.
- 6.30 The main restriction that teachers highlighted was the ability to take time away from class. In particular, a few mentioned that it can be hard for teachers of pupils who need a clear routine to take time away from their pupils. A few also felt it could be hard to share learning from training and events, due to time pressures on staff across the school.
- 6.31 Teachers in two rural areas felt that it could be hard to access quality training due to the need to travel large distances, and budget constraints making it difficult for teachers to attend events outwith their local authority area. One teacher felt there was a gap in training aimed specifically at supporting pupils with hearing impairment.
- 6.32 Most support workers highlighted that they had many opportunities to develop their skills, in relation to themes like nurture, communication, safeguarding, mental health, behaviour management, literacy, restorative practice, first aid and wider medical training. Support workers often highlighted that they were well supported by leaders in the school in relation to training. Some said that PEF had helped them to access training. However, some support workers were interested in more training, and felt restricted in terms of training availability and

ability to take time out of class to go to training. In one local authority, support workers felt they did not have access to adequate training opportunities.

## Views on inclusion

6.33 Overall, local authority officers felt that children would largely be having a positive and inclusive experience at school. However, it was felt that there would be differences in experience between schools and local authorities were working on creating consistency. Many emphasised that experiences varied depending on the leadership, skills and attitudes of staff in schools.

“There are some excellent and very inclusive schools. Some schools have managed to create a more inclusive environment.”

Educational psychologist

“It depends on the skills, experience and attitude of the head teacher and senior management, on them setting an inclusive agenda.”

Education officer

6.34 Most schools felt that overall, children would have positive and inclusive experiences at school. Most felt that children were well included in the curriculum, and well included in whole school events such as shows, celebrations and trips.

6.35 However, some found that there could be a clear boundary between bases for pupils with ASN and mainstream pupils, within the one school or building. While some schools were trying to bring these closer together, a few secondary school staff mentioned that at times pupils did not want to attend specialist bases due to the stigma and negative perceptions of the base. However, some staff at primary schools highlighted that children often very much enjoyed being in ASN bases and nurture rooms, felt comfortable and it could be hard to encourage some pupils to integrate into the mainstream school provision.

6.36 Staff at a few secondary schools were concerned about pupils with ASN turning up to school, but then either truanting from class within the school, or not actively participating in the class and the learning within it.

6.37 Staff at two special schools highlighted that it could be hard to support children to feel included if there was a limited peer group – for example in terms of age or gender. This was a particular issue in very small schools or in schools where most of the pupils were male.

“Sometimes it’s not easy to include kids if there isn’t a peer group. For example, M has no peers that are girls her age that are interested in fashion the way she is. So, she’s not really included and within the school there’s no replication of society for her.”

Head teacher, special school

6.38 Overall, school staff felt that it was easier to build inclusion if:

- children and parents were involved in the process;
- staff within the school worked as a team;
- there was a strong culture of inclusion within the school;
- the resources were available to provide support in mainstream schools; and
- staff could be trained in specialist approaches.

6.39 School staff felt it was more challenging if:

- children and young people were affected by poverty or challenging home circumstances;
- parents and children had previous negative experiences of school or wider services;
- schools were unable to respond to needs quickly due to workloads and limited resources;
- school were unable to provide support staff due to limited staffing and resources; and
- there were conflicts between pupils (mentioned in a few small, specialist schools).

6.40 A few teachers mentioned that they felt that the inclusion of children with ASN, and particularly behavioural needs, was having a negative impact on learning within mainstream classes.

“The better behaved ones are really missing out.”

Subject teacher, secondary school

“I sometimes wonder if a child needs one to one support to be able to be in a mainstream class setting, whether this is the best thing for the child and the rest of the pupils in the class.”

Teacher, primary school

## **Variances in meeting needs and gaps in provision**

6.41 Local authority officers were most positive about meeting the needs of young people with complex needs in special schools; with mild to moderate learning difficulties in mainstream schools due to established

teaching methods; and with dyslexia which had been a recent area of focus for many.

- 6.42 Local authority officers felt that the main gaps in meeting needs related to social, emotional and behavioural needs, autism and mental health needs. These gaps meant that a few children with social, emotional and behavioural needs had to go outwith the authority for their education. Local authority officers stressed that meeting these needs required highly skilled staff, but some felt that the increased focus on understanding adverse childhood experiences was helping with this.
- 6.43 A few also highlighted gaps in meeting the needs of children affected by poverty and family breakdown; young carers; migrant families; and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people experiencing bullying.
- 6.44 In two areas, there was serious concern about suicide and attempted suicide among children with ASN and their parents which made a few officers extremely concerned about whether they were effectively meeting needs.
- 6.45 Many school staff indicated that everyone was an individual, and it could be hard to identify groups or characteristics of pupils whose needs were well met. Many felt that it was right that children's experiences should vary at school, and everyone should have their own individual experience. However, there were particular concerns around ability to meet the needs of:
- pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs – due to the challenges around managing behaviour issues within a mainstream classroom; the long process needed to build relationships; and the wider challenges around attachment and home lives often associated with these needs;
  - pupils with autistic spectrum disorders – while some school staff with a base focusing on autism felt that these pupils' needs were well met, those in schools without specific support indicated that meeting these needs could be a challenge – particularly due to the wide range in ways these needs manifest themselves and particular challenges when linked with wider mental health issues; and
  - pupils with complex needs – while some school staff felt that pupils may have their needs well met, because their needs are clear and their resources are prioritised in this way, some staff felt that they needed more support and guidance for staff to be able to meet these needs.

6.46 Some schools indicated that ASN could be easier to meet when there was positive joint working with parents, a good home to school link, and a stable home environment. A few felt that in some cases, pupils with vocal parents could have their needs met more effectively than others.

## **Evidence about meeting needs**

6.47 School leaders highlighted that they gathered evidence about whether they were meeting the needs of pupils with ASN through:

- assessing against targets – reflecting on these jointly with pupils, families and other partners at progress meetings;
- tailor made tracking systems – recording baselines and measuring progress against these;
- pupil behaviour and observations – for example noting changes in how long pupils are able to concentrate for, noting whether children are anxious or coping in the school environment;
- reviews from professionals such as Educational Psychology;
- teacher judgement data;
- family meetings – gathering feedback from pupils and parents; and
- evaluations – reviewing the impact of specific initiatives and approaches.

**Example:**

In one area, a special school bought in the Q Skills programme, to help them to record small milestones in progression. They felt that this was missing from the Curriculum for Excellence model, as children were always marked as not achieving what they should according to age and stage.

**Example:**

In one area, a primary school found it hard to measure progress for children in the ASN base within the school. The standard school planner used to measure progress against Curriculum for Excellence levels was not felt to be appropriate, as many of the pupils were below the early level. They are now using a planner developed by a special school in another local authority area, which was designed to measure progress for ASN pupils, and focusing on key skills and progress.

6.48 Teachers also indicated that they used evidence from:

- observations – staff often knew pupils very well, and could note improvements in length of concentration, behaviour and engagement in the class;

- daily interaction – allowing teachers to understand how pupils feel on a daily basis;
- feedback from parents;
- learning conversations with children; and
- monitoring attendance both at school and within each class.

“I think attendance rates are a good indication. They’re doing well because they are turning up every day and attending class.”

Teacher, secondary school (in ASN base)

“We do have assessment folders for each child. But the main thing is seeing them in the class. It is the little changes along the way, the steps forward that you notice.”

Teacher, special school

- 6.49 However, one secondary school leader indicated that it was very pressured and took a reactive approach – if the ASN department was not contacted by pupils, teachers or parents looking for more support then they had to assume that everything was okay for the pupil.

## **Views on alternative options**

- 6.50 School leaders were asked whether they felt any pupils at their school would be better supported in other environments. While some said that there were no pupils that would be better supported elsewhere, most said that they had one or two pupils who may benefit from other environments.

- 6.51 The most common instance was in relation to pupils with challenging social, emotional and behavioural needs and exhibiting violent behaviour. School leaders felt concerned when pupils may be a risk to themselves (for example putting themselves in unsafe situations) and to others in the school. It was felt that for these pupils, there needed to be a dedicated focus on nurture and developing a safe place. However, two school leaders (in different authorities) were not sure what the options for these children were.

“If the child has more severe SEBN and mental health needs, I don’t think we’re set up for that. And I don’t think there is anywhere in the authority that is.”

Head teacher, special school

- 6.52 A few school leaders at mainstream schools mentioned other pupils who may need a smaller setting, a calmer environment and one to one or two to one support – which could often not be provided in mainstream schools. A few mentioned the challenges of meeting these needs

without enough Personal Support Assistants, due to budget cuts. However, pupils remained in mainstream schools because:

- it took time to explore alternative options, and gain agreement between the child, parents and other stakeholders;
- in a few cases, the school did not know what alternative options were available for meeting their pupils' needs;
- in a few cases, schools felt discouraged from applying for places at special schools by their local authority;
- in a few cases, schools felt that they would not be able to access a place based on previous experience; and
- in a few cases, they were unable to get a full time space in a special school.

6.53 Leaders and teachers at two mainstream secondary schools in different local authority areas felt that they had a large number of pupils in their school who should be in other settings. These were pupils who would previously have been placed in a special school, and they had significant learning needs and social, emotional and behavioural needs. Both schools felt that the local authority was reducing availability of spaces at special schools, and felt under pressure not to apply for these spaces.

“Mainstreaming with resources is fine. It is mainstreaming without the resources that is the problem.”

ASL lead, secondary school

6.54 A few school leaders at primary level felt that their pupils were coping well, but had some concern about a small number of pupils as they transitioned into secondary school.

6.55 In contrast, the school leader and teacher at one special school identified a few primary pupils on shared placements who may be better full time in their mainstream schools. And two special schools were proactively working to support pupils back into mainstream provision, wherever possible.

6.56 Teachers largely felt that most pupils were in the correct provision. A few felt if there was more support within the classroom, more pupils could cope in mainstream classes. However, some felt that it could be hard to manage when pupils were not able to access dedicated support in an ASN base or classroom.

“In the afternoons we have no ASN room open and some of our ASN children find it very challenging to cope in a mainstream setting. It is

then very difficult for the pupil and their peers. We have children who scream, run out of class, lie on the floor, throw objects and swear.”

Teacher, primary school

- 6.57 Teachers indicated that pupils with complex ASN could take up a lot of time, which could be challenging in a large classroom environment. Sometimes teachers had to use PSAs to support children to do work separately out of the class, so the other pupils in the class could be supported to learn.

## 7. Key findings

### Introduction

- 7.1 This chapter sets out key findings from the research.
- 7.2 It is worth noting that this research is qualitative. While this chapter gives an in-depth understanding of the experiences, feelings and perspectives of those who were involved in the research, its findings cannot be extrapolated to the wider population.

### Additional support for learning provision

- 7.3 All local authority officers involved in the research said their authority had a clear ethos around meeting the needs of children with ASN, which was in line with the presumption of mainstreaming.
- 7.4 Overall, most local authority officers felt that the balance of additional support for learning provision was improving in their area, becoming more flexible and individualised. However, most felt that there was still more to do to improve the balance of provision, including developing the resources available in mainstream schools, and being able to recruit skilled teachers and support staff. In some areas, there was a clear feeling from local authority officers and school staff that there were not enough resources to meet needs – particularly in mainstream schools.

### School experiences of children and young people

- 7.5 Many pupils at mainstream primary schools liked their friends and teachers. A few said they liked everything and would not change anything.
- 7.6 Many secondary school pupils said that they liked the range of subjects and the support they received at school. However, some secondary school pupils said they did not like anything about their school at all. Some said they hated school and did not want to be there, and some said they did not like their teachers.
- 7.7 Pupils at special schools said they liked playing outside, learning life skills, and topics such as sport, music and art. Many said that there was nothing they did not like, and their dislikes were very diverse and included noise, school work, friends, safety and not being allowed to be independent.

7.8 Pupils at mainstream and special schools, generally felt positive about their experience, and were positive across SHANARRI indicators. However:

- In terms of **safety**, some mainstream school pupils said that they felt – or had previously felt – very unsafe due to bullying. Half of all secondary school girls had experienced bullying, with two having moved schools due to bullying. A few pupils at special schools said that pupils were violent or aggressive towards them and wanted more help with feeling safe.
- In terms of **achieving**, a few pupils at mainstream schools felt they could achieve better in small group or ASN base activity, rather than in the whole class. A few pupils at special schools said they were covering work they had already done and were ready to be more challenged.
- In terms of **inclusion**, most pupils at mainstream schools felt they had lots of friends and that it was easy to make friends, and they were included in the life of the school. However, a few pupils in ASN bases in mainstream schools said they did not always feel involved in the life of the school beyond the base. Around half of pupils at special schools said they had lots of friends, but some (at two schools in particular) found it quite hard to make friends.

7.9 Overall, almost all pupils at mainstream schools and special schools felt their needs were well met.

7.10 A few primary pupils said that they wanted more help, and a few didn't like going out of the class to get support as they felt they missed things. Secondary pupils often enjoyed going to a targeted support session and enjoyed the quiet space. However, two secondary pupils felt they did not get the help they needed.

## **Parental views on school experiences**

7.11 Parents and carers were broadly positive about their child's experience of school across all of the SHANARRI indicators. Overall, most parents felt that their child's school was doing well in terms of meeting the needs of their child. Parents and carers valued when communication with the school was good; enhanced support was available; and their children were comfortable at the school.

7.12 Most parents of children at mainstream schools had something they would like to improve about the school – including some concerns about resources, staff and buildings and high staff turnover. A few secondary

school parents had concerns about the busy school environment, the challenges ensuring all teachers had the information they needed about their child, and ongoing concerns about bullying.

- 7.13 Parents with children at special schools liked the small size of the school and classes, the good ratio of adults to children and the access to physical space both indoors and outdoors. While a few felt their child was achieving more than at mainstream school, a few had concerns about academic challenge. A few on split placements felt that their child's needs were better met in the special school than the mainstream school.
- 7.14 Almost all parents were very positive about the relationship and level of communication with teachers and support staff at their child's school. However, a few felt that they had to push to improve communication.
- 7.15 For many parents it had taken a long time to get their child to the right environment. The challenges included a lack of understanding from staff in mainstream schools; experiences of bullying; long assessment and diagnosis periods; having to push for extra support or spaces at special schools or ASN units; and being moved between schools with little notice.

### **Involving young people and families in decision making**

- 7.16 Pupils at primary mainstream schools and special schools generally felt well listened to by teachers, and gave examples of being able to learn in a way that suited them.
- 7.17 While most pupils at mainstream secondary school did feel listened to, a few did not. A few felt that teachers didn't make the adjustments they needed.
- 7.18 Almost all parents felt that they were involved in decision making relating to their child's education. However, some did not feel involved in choices about which school their child went to, or what support their child received at school.
- 7.19 Almost all school staff felt that children were able to express their views and have these heard at school. Involvement was felt to work best if it was ongoing and genuine, with flexibility in engaging young people and parents, and meeting their needs.

## **Meeting the needs of children and young people**

- 7.20 Local authority officers and school staff highlighted similar themes in relation to meeting the needs of children and young people with additional support needs. Overall, most local authority officers and school staff felt that they were meeting the needs of children with ASN reasonably and that most children would be having a positive and inclusive experience. However, most highlighted that this was in the context of having very limited resources. Almost all felt there was room for improvement.
- 7.21 Many said that the number, range and complexity of needs of children with ASN were increasing at a time when teachers, support workers, senior leadership and central support within the local authority were under pressure or decreasing in number. Some felt experiences could be very mixed dependent on the school. Some felt there may be gaps around meeting the needs of children with social, emotional and behavioural needs and autism.
- 7.22 Teachers highlighted challenges around balancing their time between the whole class and the pupils in need of individual support. A few teachers felt that the inclusion of children with ASN, particularly behavioural needs, was having a negative impact on learning within mainstream classes. This was a particular concern when some felt there was pressure to ensure all children were improving their attainment.



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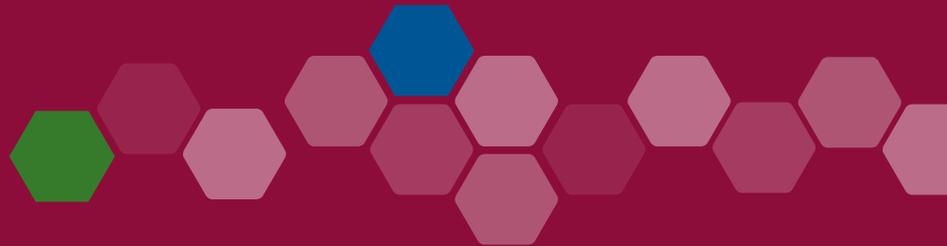
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This document is also available from our website at [www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot).  
ISBN: 978-1-78781-268-0

The Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

Produced for  
the Scottish Government  
by APS Group Scotland  
PPDAS476306 (03/19)  
Published by  
the Scottish Government,  
March 2019



Social Research series  
ISSN 2045-6964  
ISBN 978-1-78781-268-0

Web and Print Publication  
[www.gov.scot/socialresearch](http://www.gov.scot/socialresearch)

PPDAS476306 (03/19)