

# Education, Children and Young People Committee

## Additional Support for Learning - informal participation session with teachers

Monday 4 March 2024

### Note of discussion

#### Committee member attendees

Sue Webber MSP (Convener)  
Ruth Maguire MSP (Deputy Convener)  
Stephanie Callaghan MSP  
Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP  
Ross Greer MSP  
Liam Kerr MSP  
Ben Macpherson MSP  
Michelle Thomson MSP

#### Discussion on ASL with teachers.

The Committee spoke with teachers from a range of primary, secondary and special schools on additional support for learning. The session was organised by PACT and EIS. The following summary is intended to provide an overview of the main themes that emerged from those discussions.

#### **Implementation of the presumption of mainstreaming**

**The presumption in favour of ‘mainstream education’ strengthened the rights of pupils to be included alongside their peers, with the four key features of inclusion identified as: present, participating, achieving and supported.**

## **To what degree do you feel the presumption of mainstreaming successfully delivers on inclusive education for those pupils requiring additional support?**

- Teachers spoke about their experiences of teaching children with additional support needs (ASN) since the presumption of mainstreaming was established. They said that they had noticed a significant decline in support resources for pupils with ASN over the past 10-15 years.
- Dedicated ASN schools and bases had been closed and there has been a huge increase in the number of pupils with ASN in mainstream classes since the presumption of mainstreaming was introduced.
- Teachers agreed with the presumption of mainstreaming in principle however the lack of resources – in particular specialist teachers and pupil support assistants - has meant that it is not being implemented properly to be successful.
- Class sizes of up to 33 are too large for teachers to plan for the range of specific needs within the available time and school buildings increasingly lack quiet spaces for pupils to go for individual support when they are struggling.
- Some pupils with ASN struggle to cope in the mainstream classroom setting due to the excessive sensory stimulation in busy classrooms with up to 33 pupils.
- Nurture rooms have been introduced in some schools as a relaxed place where pupils can go to for pastoral and learning support when they are not coping emotionally in the classroom but these create pressure on staffing.

- Many schools, however, lack the physical capacity, therefore nurture areas are being created within existing spaces and schools have to be creative regarding the use of spaces such as dining halls etc as dysregulated young people need somewhere to go to be supported.
- Teachers spoke of a lack of time available to them regarding ASN pupils whose learning had to be differentiated within the mainstream class according to their needs Teachers need more time to plan, to adapt resources, to interact with and to tailor supportive feedback for these pupils. They said they needed time to discuss risk assessments and potential triggers prior to some pupils transitioning into the class.
- In practice, staff are forced to give up their lunchtimes and their in-school planning and correction time to overtake the essential tasks above. A lack of time and resources is resulting in teachers feeling burnout.
- One teacher said they were not told about potential triggers for pupils with ASN. This can lead to abusive behaviour towards teachers and children.
- Teachers warned that less pupil support and fewer additional support services is resulting in a perfect storm.
- There is a direct relationship between distressed behaviour of pupils and a lack of appropriate support for those pupils.
- There is an assumption that exclusion should not happen where significant verbal and physical violence occurs; however, following such incidents, there is often nowhere for a pupil to go, or no additional staff on hand, which leads to teachers, pupil support assistants and other pupils feeling unsafe.

- The burden of supporting pupils in the aftermath of violent incidents often falls on Support for Learning teachers and Pupil Support Assistants, making it more difficult for them to provide appropriate support to pupils with ASN.
- One teacher said there was not always a suitable place for pupils who need time away from the classroom and sometimes the headteacher's room is the only available place to go to.
- Increased reliance on teacher temporary contracts creates difficulty as there is less consistency of staffing and there is no time to explain to temporary staff joining a school about all the differing needs of pupils in classes of over thirty pupils, a third of whom have ASN.

Pupil support assistants play a vital role in supporting individual pupils' positive behaviour in class, and they provide invaluable support for class teachers who have to manage acute cases of distressed behaviour. Where they are assigned to particular children, they often build up strong relationships and good knowledge of their particular needs.

- Teachers stated that in their experience, coordinated support plans (CSPs) in place for pupils with ASN were rare; nevertheless, where a CSP was in place, it was felt to be beneficial as the support is much more co-ordinated and a range of support providers are put in place.
- CSPs are sometimes thought of as a temporary fix as support is provided for a limited period of time and then removed. The "team around the child" runs for a period, but too often the "scaffolding" is removed before its aims are achieved.

- One teacher spoke of the practical difficulties in putting a CSP, involving multiple agencies, in place; in one case, for example, the Educational Psychologist who came to assess the pupil observed good behaviour and decided there was no need for a CSP.
- On one occasion, counselling for a pupil with ASN was withdrawn and, because the teacher had a good relationship with the pupil, they were told to deal with it, despite having no expertise in counselling or in dealing with people with trauma.
- A lack of adequate human resources and time to understand the pupils' needs more fully – including opportunities for professionals to liaise in line with GIRFEC - can be a barrier in putting CSPs in place. One teacher described the barriers as a “brick wall.”
- Pupil-centred risk assessments can be used to help support dysregulated young people, however these take time which is often not identified and one to one support is not always available.
- There are many different types of plans across the country such as child's plans, individual learning plans, pupil centred risk assessments - with CSPs being the only statutory education plan for the specification of support for pupils with ASN.
- There is no mechanism for sharing best practice and knowledge across local authorities and training for teachers on ASL provides high level best practice information rather than practical examples of what works well.
- A lot of training in relation to ASL is performance-related and target-driven rather than learning best practice from

each other and acknowledging one approach does not necessarily fit all schools.

- Teachers highlighted problems with the school built environment and said that the design of new schools with large campuses and large open spaces are often not suitable for many pupils with ASN.
- There were inconsistencies across schools regarding violent incident reporting on SEEMIS where some schools only recorded pupil to pupil incidences and others also included teacher to pupil incidences. This meant that there was no clear picture across Scotland on the current level of violent incidents in schools.
- School should be a safe and rewarding place of learning for all and the presumption of mainstreaming should be revisited when transitioning from primary school to secondary school as you cannot assume that if mainstreaming worked well for a pupil in primary school then it will necessarily work well at secondary school.
- Pupil Equity Funding and working with the third sector and outside agencies can be a good source of support for schools in providing ASL. This can also give pupils the opportunity to learn in a different way and out of schools.
- One teacher, whilst commending the collaboration between schools and third sector partners in supporting learners with ASN, stated that the numbers of ASN are now “colossal”; and that PEF/SAC funding is insufficient.

Teachers highlighted the crucial role that pupil support assistants played in supporting learners with ASN and felt that they must be valued, supported and rewarded.

- Due to a number of factors, there is an increasing number of pupils with severe and complex additional support needs which schools may not be equipped to accommodate.
- One teacher who worked in special schools and units stated that the class size regulations for ASN had been written in 1985, and as such were misaligned with today's context. He stated that the relationship a child has with their teacher is the key dynamic in education, particularly in ASN, and that it must be resourced.
- Use of counsellors in schools is extremely useful and can support individual pupils who face the long waiting lists for CAMHS referrals.
- Social media is having an impact on the number of pupils with mental health issues and ASN.

**What impact, if any, does the presumption of mainstreaming have on the education of pupils who do not require additional support?**

- Despite the best efforts of teachers, pupils without ASN often do not get the support they are entitled to due to the time pressures on the class teacher in terms of preparation, interaction and feedback.
- One teacher said it felt unfair on those pupils, who are often ignored, and this can make teachers feel frustrated.
- There can be a feeling among pupils who witness other displaying challenging behaviour that you can get what was perceived to be nicer things, such as ipads and time outside the classroom, if you behave in a certain way.

- There was a negative impact on those pupils' emotional health and wellbeing as a result of frequent disruptions to learning and teaching, and incidents in the classroom, which could be distressing for them.
- Teachers often feel guilty as they do not have time to focus on pupils who work well independently.
- Daily evacuations can be traumatising for all pupils and some are anxious and scared to come into the classroom.
- One teacher highlighted a thematic review of behaviours of concern which showed that, both in primary and secondary schools, a small number of dysregulated pupils caused most of the disruption.
- Another teacher highlighted that generally the experience for these pupils is poorer. Staff have insufficient time to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of the range of ASN in a mainstream class. There may also have been changes to pedagogy which impact learners without ASN.. There is more disruption generally, such as in-school truancy being frequent.

## **Impact of COVID-19 on additional support for learning**

**In what ways has the pandemic impacted on the needs of pupils with additional support needs and the meeting of those needs, both positively and negatively? How successfully have local authorities and schools adjusted to meet these needs?**

- There were increased numbers of pupils with mental health issues and a number of pupils were not ready for learning post-pandemic.



- One teacher highlighted that initiatives adopted during the pandemic have continued providing beneficial contacts and partnerships for the school. These included links with food banks, uniform banks and links with the Cyrenians - all of which developed and are still in place now.
- Pupil behaviour changed post covid and a number of pupils who transitioned to secondary school during the pandemic are now struggling. Double periods and prolonged periods of time in the classroom can be difficult for some pupils.
- One teacher said the recovery phase was particularly difficult as schools were quickly asked to raise performance figures while still dealing with the effects of the pandemic. At the same time, it was felt that some partner agencies and services which had been in place prior to 2019 had fallen away somewhat and, for whatever reason, were not providing the same service levels as prior to the pandemic.
- Teachers were having to deal with suicidal children and some staff were not aware of counselling and employee assistance provision which were available to them to help them cope with such situations.