

# Education, Children and Young People Committee

## Supplementary information from Sylvia Haughney, UNISON Scotland

**We are responding to the request after the Committee meeting for Sylvia to provide some further information - on how often support staff are having to work with pupils out of class, i.e. in corridors, secluded rooms etc. And on the fact that there are more children in society with ASN, for various reasons.**

We do not have statistics on how often support staff are working with pupils out of class, i.e. in corridors, secluded rooms. However, from our experience, this is happening far too often in settings that are clearly not fit for purpose. This is unfair on the pupils and the staff involved and is detrimental to learning. It relates to staffing levels and increased numbers of ASN pupils and to the practical need, when a pupil either removes themselves from class or is instructed to leave by a teacher, for the support member of staff to accompany them.

We would request that the Committee asks the Scottish Government to commission some research - potentially as part of a wider ASN study looking at other issues raised with the Committee. This would be to ascertain, at a minimum, the scale of the problem and, ideally, recommendations for ensuring that pupils are educated in safe learning environments. The latter would require some evidence-based evaluations on what actual learning is taking place for ASN children, including assessing levels of staffing and learning resources.

In terms of requesting some research, we did also note in our response to the Committee's inquiry that Education Secretary Jenny Gilruth told the Scottish Parliament in December that there is a record number of additional learning support assistants in schools. We said that "the Committee should interrogate this statement, particularly against the increase in numbers of pupils with ASN highlighted above, as well as increased needs across education. Also, many staff are not full time, so we need an accurate picture and it is not clear whether the figures she quotes are fit for purpose."<sup>1</sup>

The Committee may wish to consider as well whether the design of modern schools takes enough account of the needs of ASN pupils. How suitable are they in providing proper spaces for a quality learning environment for all pupils – with separate purpose-built spaces as appropriate, fully compliant with health and safety requirements?

As we said in our response to the Committee's inquiry, we believe "the school estate is no longer fit for purpose to support pupils who require to be

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<sup>1</sup> <https://unison-scotland.org/wp-content/uploads/ASL-Consultation-Response-FINAL-Dec-23.pdf>

educationally supported in secluded areas, as the buildings don't have the appropriate space.”

Research last year into provision for children with complex additional support needs highlighted that purpose built spaces can make an immense difference.<sup>2</sup>

We believe the schools should be designed with all pupils' needs in mind. We note that the 2023 Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR) report not only highlighted under-resourcing of ASN provision but said this and “lack of specialist facilities and services” were also observed in the most recent previous BISSR report from 2016.<sup>3</sup>

One in three children in primary schools are classified as requiring ASN. An increasing number of these display dysregulated and distressed behaviour, often creating difficulties for them to remain in classroom settings. Behaviour support plans often fail to encompass strategies to address the frequent movement of children outside the classroom into corridors, other classrooms and even into areas at the periphery of the school grounds.

The BISSR Report (2023) acknowledges that this roaming behaviour presents an ongoing challenge, beyond that of low-level disruption, primarily because it is in this context that most assaults take place. Behaviour Support Plans and risk assessments may highlight ongoing risks, and these are shared freely with teachers. However, pupil support staff rarely have direct access to these. Most often it is not the class teacher, but the pupil support staff who, unsupported, are tasked with following roaming pupils, mediating with them and attempting to coax them back into the classroom and or spend long periods of time in isolating areas.

Any attempt to restrict freedom of movement to ASN pupils presents a potentially violent consequence. It is in these situations that long experience and expert training is most required. Often this level of expertise remains within the classroom, while less well-trained staff are tasked with an expectation that they should routinely have to deal with the most challenging behaviours, unsupported, in corridors, on a day-to-day basis. We must acknowledge a different style of teaching/environment is required.

While the reasons for the big increase in ASN pupils are unclear and likely to encompass a wide range of factors, our argument is that regardless of the reasons, the education provided must be high quality for all, taking account of diverse needs.

Some issues relating to the pandemic, lockdowns etc., have been speculated on as being relevant and there may be changes if suitable work is done to address pandemic-related increases, but overall, the education system clearly has to address the significant increase (to 34.2% overall), with the necessary

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/research-provision-pupils-complex-additional-support-needs-scotland/documents/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/behaviour-scottish-schools-research-report-2023/documents/>

training and investment in resources – including in other areas, such as children’s mental health services. The Committee has heard panel members discuss questions about what education is/should be in taking account of the impact of a high proportion of pupils with ASN.

We believe the general public do not realise the scale of the increase and the overall impact – on learning for all, and on the pupils’ and the staff and the other pupils’ experiences. We hope the Committee can make strong recommendations for increased resources in particular, something highlighted by most submissions.