

**Inquiry into the Health and Wellbeing of Children and  
Young People  
7 December 2021**

**NASUWT evidence to the Health, Social Care and Sport  
Committee**

The NASUWT's submission to the Scottish Parliament Health, Social Care and Sport Committee sets out the Union's views on the key issues which should be explored by the Committee in its inquiry into the health and wellbeing of children and young people. The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

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## **A. What are the key issues around health and wellbeing for children and young people in Scotland?**

1. An NASUWT survey earlier this year found 79% of teachers reporting an increase in adverse emotional, personal or social issues in the past year in their pupils. A key issue is recognising the scale of the problem around the health and wellbeing of all children and young people in Scotland, whilst at the same time understanding the severity of the impact on particular groups of children and young people.

### **Financial Pressures: benefits/school meals**

2. The pandemic has compounded the financial pressures on many households. A study of families on low incomes undertaken by the Child Poverty Action Group in November 2020 found that nearly nine in ten families had experienced a significant deterioration in their living standards compared to before the pandemic. The same study found that almost six in ten families were experiencing difficulties covering the cost of three or more essentials, including food, utilities, rent, travel or child-related costs. These concerns are compounded by evidence that the economic prospects for many economically disadvantaged households are likely to deteriorate in the absence of meaningful action to address these risks.
3. The NASUWT is pleased to note the Scottish Child Payment will be doubled to £20 per week per child from April 2022, having vociferously campaigned for this outcome. The Government must now also look to enhance other child-related benefits and remove current arbitrary benefits caps.
4. The ability of all children to access universal free school meals would also have a positive impact on addressing the food insecurity that many households with children continue to face.

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5. There is no population-wide monitoring of food insecurity in Scotland. Food insecurity has physical and psychological consequences for children. Children who have experienced hunger are more likely to have poorer physical health; they are more likely to have diminished academic, behavioural and social functioning, and negative mental health outcomes. Research shows that children are aware of food insecurity in their families and internalise responsibility for managing food resources to alleviate pressure on their carers<sup>1</sup>. In the UK, it is estimated that food insecurity affects 19.5% of children below the age of 15.

### **Care Experienced Children**

6. In 2018 the Scottish Government published its Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan (2018-2022), recognising that the risk of child poverty varies between different groups and identified a number of 'priority groups' from their statistics:

- Lone parents: 36% of children in relative poverty.
- Disabled: 30% of children in relative poverty.
- 3+ Children: 30% of children in relative poverty.
- Minority Ethnic: 37% of children in relative poverty.
- Youngest Child Aged <1: 32% of children in relative poverty.
- Mothers Aged <25: 44% of children in relative poverty<sup>2</sup>.

Today, children who are in care are among some of the most vulnerable to poverty in Scotland<sup>3</sup> but the Scottish Government does not currently

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<sup>1</sup> Fram, M.S., Frongillo, E.A., Jones, S.J., Williams, R.C., Burke, M.P., DeLoach, K.P., ... Blake, C.E. (2011). Children are Aware of Food Insecurity and Take Responsibility for Managing Food Resources. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 141(6), 1114-1119.

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government. (2018, March). Every Child, Every Chance: The Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, 2018-22.

<sup>3</sup> <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2021/12/1/a53b6c2d-0d6a-445e-8bd3-413ee081f41b-1>

include children in care as one of the six priority groups at a higher than average risk of poverty<sup>4</sup>.

## **ASN**

7. There has been a year-on-year increase in the number of children across Scotland with identified additional support needs. Many class teachers are increasingly expected to teach children and young people with such high levels of needs that they require almost one-to-one support throughout the school day, leaving little or no time to support the learning of other pupils within their classes; thus creating a very heavy workload which is impossible to manage.
8. The NASUWT is gravely concerned at the unacceptable additional workload burden being placed on class teachers as a result of inadequate provision of staffing and resources for inclusion support and the requirement to meet the specific needs of all learners. Across Scotland there is great variability of ASN provision, a variety of approaches to cost saving at local authority budget level which have affected ASN provision, including reductions to support staff, and an absence of openness and transparency from local authorities and the Scottish Government on spending allocated for Additional Support for Learning (ASL).
9. The NASUWT concurs with the evidence from the additional support for learning (ASL) Review, led by Angela Morgan, that ASL is not visible or equally valued within Scotland's education system. In 2018, 30.9% of children and young people in Scotland's schools had an identified ASN: additional support provision cannot continue to be viewed as a minority area of interest, nor can it continue to be considered separately within the framework of Scottish education.

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<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government. (2021, June 23). Tackling Child Poverty: Third Year Progress Report 2020-2021. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/tackling-child-poverty-third-year-progress-report-2020-2021/>

10. The pandemic has further entrenched system-level tensions: ASN specialists have had to be in schools more often; ASN teachers have provided support to the most vulnerable young people throughout the pandemic without the provision of adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) or access to specialist equipment and scant national attention has been given to children with complex needs or autism, with erroneous assumptions being made about the support required to facilitate learning from home.
11. There were also increased workload challenges in preparing online differentiation in support of ASN students which have been overlooked. Teachers were rarely given sufficient time or access to appropriate resources to fully support their ASN pupils who were learning at home during lockdowns. This will have impacted on the skills and confidence of many ASN pupils.
12. Austerity has imposed significant pressure on resources in all parts of the public sector, and ASN support in particular has been disproportionately affected. Supporting children and young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN) requires urgent renewed investment in tailored service and education settings to ensure that there is equality of opportunity and choice for all.
13. ASN deserves to be prioritised by Scottish Government not only to highlight awareness of the significant issues faced but also as a vehicle for ensuring greater investment in the sector. Investment in, and collaboration between, wider children's services is key. The crisis has highlighted and deepened pre-pandemic concerns about the fragmented nature of children and young people's services in some parts, particularly in the areas of special and additional needs. The Government must support action in this area through significant investment in these services, particularly in-school and out-of-school services focused on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of

children and those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged. The real-terms cuts in spending in the children's services sector experienced over the past decade must be reversed, with additional resources made available to meet recovery-related priorities.

14. Without investing in appropriate provision, it is to be anticipated that ASN children's mental health and wellbeing will suffer.

### **Domestic Abuse Support**

15. The National Domestic Abuse Hotline reported an increase of 25% in calls during the coronavirus lockdown. Domestic violence and abuse is predominately experienced by women. Self-isolation confines many women and children in homes with their abusers threatening their emotional and physical health and putting them in danger of further abuse. Access to specialist support services for women has become further limited as a result of the social distancing rules and rapidly reduced funding.

16. The NASUWT condemns the growing trend of domestic abuse perpetrated predominantly against women during the COVID-19 lockdown period and is appalled at the surge of women needing help from the Domestic Abuse Helpline during the pandemic. Police figures have also revealed an alarming rise of domestic abuse cases across Scotland. The BBC's Panorama and Women's Aid England investigation revealed that two-thirds of women in abusive relationships have suffered more violence from their partners during this time and clearly lockdown rules have made it harder for victims to escape their abusers.

17. A 2015 survey by Opinium for the Co-Op and Refuge<sup>5</sup> found that as many as 1 in 5 women had experienced financial abuse at some point in their lives. Financial abuse can leave women and children with no money for food or clothing. These findings may undermine the Scottish Government's current definition of poverty that, as it is based on income, by implication assumes all individuals benefit equally from the combined household income.

18. The NASUWT supports the call of the UK Women's Budget Group for an increase in funding for women's organisations such as refuges to respond to this increasing demand for safety from violence and abuse.

The Union has in addition to campaigning for the Scottish Government to provide more resources and money for women's welfare groups and helplines, also been calling for greater enforcement and compliance with International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 190.

**B. What are the current challenges with improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people over the next 5 years**

**C. What offers the best opportunity for improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people over the next 5 years**

The challenges and opportunities over the next 5 years are closely linked and, therefore, both are dealt with in the next series of sections:

### **Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing**

19. An NASUWT survey found that almost three in ten (29%) teachers have needed to see a doctor or medical professional to help with the

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<sup>5</sup> Sharp-Jeffs, N. (2015). Money Matters: Research into the Extent and Nature of Financial Abuse within Intimate Relationships in the UK.

detrimental impact on their mental and physical health caused by their job during the Covid-19 pandemic.

20. 25% of teachers say they have taken medication to help them cope, while 11% have undergone counselling to give them extra support.

21. These findings come as more than eight in ten (86%) teachers feel their job has adversely affected their mental health in the last 12 months with 11% of teachers reporting an increased use of antidepressants due to their work.

22. 87% of teachers responding to the survey reported that they have experienced an increase in workplace stress over the past year and half (50%) said the job had affected their physical health.

23. The survey also found that in the last 12 months as a result of their job:

- 87% have experienced anxiety;
- 84% have suffered from loss of sleep;
- 23% have increased their use of alcohol;
- 7% have suffered a relationship breakdown;
- 2% have self-harmed.

24. These figures are truly shocking and starkly illustrate the significant impact of the pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and school staff.

25. It has led to a huge increase in workload and while the profession has responded with remarkable agility and professionalism, Covid-19 and the impacts on working have had a detrimental effect on teachers' physical and mental health.

26. Scottish Government and employers must recognise that to deliver the best support for pupil wellbeing and encourage the mental health



necessary for recovery, teacher wellbeing must also be recognised and prioritised.

### **Cost of the School Day**

27. The NASUWT suggests that the Scottish Government specifically addresses the cost of education and makes provision for regulations which will secure poverty-proofing of the school day.
28. The NASUWT 2016 survey of teachers in Scotland shows that 71% of teachers have seen pupils coming to school hungry; 81% of teachers have seen pupils who do not have the correct equipment for lessons; and 79% of teachers have seen pupils who are lacking in energy/concentration due to eating poorly. In addition, the research shows that teachers' are now regularly giving increasing numbers of children money, food, clothes and equipment, at their own expense.
29. In addition, the NASUWT has been conducting regular surveys of parents and carers on the cost of education. The results provide evidence of the increasing cost of education through school uniform, stationery and educational visit costs. One of the most disturbing aspects, however, is that, increasingly, parents are saying that they are being forced to pay for educational visits which are an essential or integral part of the curriculum, such as field trips required for qualifications; 16% have had to pay for a trip linked to an exam.
30. Furthermore, there is now more and more evidence emerging that some young people are being forced to reject the subject options they would prefer because their parents would be unable to afford the books, equipment or field trips necessary for the course; 3% of parents say their child had to choose subjects based on equipment costs.
31. The NASUWT believes that there should be clear statutory guidance on school charging policies and curriculum access.

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## **Coronavirus Impact**

32. PSE and mental health awareness will need to play an important role in supporting children and staff who will have been affected as a result of the current coronavirus crisis. Ready access to child and adolescent mental health support and other health and social care practitioners within/available to schools could enable the transition back into formal learning for many children who have been affected during this crisis.
33. Now more than ever, working arrangements in schools need to ensure that teachers and school leaders are able to concentrate on their core responsibilities for teaching and leading teaching and learning. If it is to be resilient in the face of Covid-related disruption and dislocation, the education system cannot afford to encumber its teaching workforce with tasks and responsibilities that do not make effective use of their skills and talents as qualified teachers, that create excessive workload burdens or undermine their wellbeing. This will require every school to remove or remodel requirements on teachers that threaten to distract them from focusing on the needs and interests of pupils.
34. The Scottish Government must ensure the workforce is as well placed as possible to support children's learning and development. The aspirations of the Government to achieve excellence and equity across school systems cannot be achieved without adequate funding. There are currently significant challenges to the recruitment and retention of teachers, including the pay levels of experienced teachers and excessive workload suffered by the profession.

## **Education Recovery Plan**

35. On 5 October 2021, the Scottish Government published *Coronavirus (COVID-19) education recovery: key actions and next steps*. Given the central role of teachers to securing education recovery, the strategy is disappointingly light on tangible actions to improve teachers' pay and working conditions, without which any pledge to recruit additional teachers and support staff will not be realised.
36. The education recovery strategy largely restates existing plans and policies. While there are some potentially helpful additional programmes and ideas, these seem at best to be bolt-ons to a pre-pandemic policy framework.
37. The NASUWT has consistently argued that a recovery strategy with no financial investment associated with it shows limited ambition and without which remains deeply unsatisfactory. Equally, any effective recovery strategy needed to be based on a clear assessment of the full implications of the pandemic and how these should be addressed. Without an effective assessment of the scale of the challenge, there is no way of knowing whether the amount of resource available is likely to be sufficient.
38. Recovery needs to be understood as a long-term process, given the pandemic's far-reaching effects, and the NASUWT considers that the Scottish Government's strategy to date fails to set out a holistic post-pandemic vision which would support children in all aspects of their lives, not just within formal education.

## **Vision for recovery**

39. The effects on society of the COVID-19 pandemic have been deep and wide-reaching, causing long-lasting issues that will undoubtedly be felt for many years.

40. It is undeniable that the impact of the global crisis in disrupting children's education has been significant. Educational progress and achievements have been inhibited, alongside damage to the social and cultural development of children and young people, and their emotional and mental wellbeing.
41. The NASUWT recognises the urgent need for a long-term, sustainable and properly funded education recovery strategy. A comprehensive strategy that brings together the work of schools and other bodies is essential.
42. Although the educational implications of the pandemic have been significant, it is clear that other important dimensions of children's lives have been affected. For this reason, the NASUWT rejects recovery strategies premised on a narrow vision of 'catch-up', in which the aim is little more than to fill in the gaps left by disrupted schooling. The Union also rejects an approach that asserts that the innate resilience of children means that any adverse impacts can largely be addressed simply by returning them to full-time education with limited or no additional support.
43. Recovery should be viewed as an opportunity to tackle deep-rooted structural issues affecting children and young people in all aspects of their lives that have been exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic. Other education systems, including those in the Netherlands and the United States, have developed bold and ambitious plans that reflect this reality. To be sustainable, recovery will also need to be manageable for those in the workforce with day-to-day responsibilities for children and young people. It will need to take into account the pressures they faced before the pandemic, the increased pressures they encountered during it, and the challenges they will need to take on as it recedes.

44. For these reasons, the NASUWT advocates a holistic view of recovery, based on supporting children in all aspects of their lives, including, but not limited to, those relating to formal schooling. Schools will have a critical role in securing recovery, but they cannot be expected to contribute in isolation or without working in effective partnerships with other services for children and young people that are resourced adequately and supported appropriately.
45. It is also clear that the impact of the pandemic has not been experienced uniformly. While it is likely to be the case that every child has been adversely affected by the crisis, some will have been impacted on more profoundly than others, particularly those who were more vulnerable or more disadvantaged before the pandemic.
46. There are huge disparities in educational outcomes that young people face from particular backgrounds, and this is an increasing problem that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Racism, racial injustice, economic disadvantage and other discriminatory factors have impacted on the education outcomes and life chances of young people well before the pandemic as a result of systemic inequalities. This situation has worsened for young black pupils, as well as those from Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) and poorer backgrounds, further compounding the socioeconomic disadvantages they face. Any education recovery plan and supportive budget must address these existing disparities and ensure that, going forwards, policies and practices focus on demonstrable positive outcomes for all pupils and communities.
47. The Scottish Government must recognise and seek to address the demonstrable disparities in experience and outcomes that particular groups of pupils have faced during the pandemic, including those that relate to race, socioeconomic status and geographical location. It must give practical effect to provisions set out in equalities legislation, particularly the Public Sector Equality Duty, and the specific duties

and responsibilities these establish in respect of those with protected characteristics.

48. Greater understanding and action around the interaction between mental health and protected characteristics is required. The Intercultural Youth Scotland (IYS) draft report on race and mental health<sup>6</sup> specifically calls out the lack of acknowledgement of racial trauma in current services, the trust gap with existing mental health services, and the need for specialised mental health in order to overcome this. The IYS report which looked specifically at Black and People of Colour (BPoC) children and young people's mental health advocates for the development of a specialised response to the significant but hidden, impact of race and racism on mental health, noting:

*Encountering racism and hearing about racism against others had a clear negative impact on many of the children and young people's mental health. This manifested in various ways, including feelings of isolation, hurt, anger, loss of motivation; constant worrying; hypervigilance; unsettlement; and self-doubt*

*Worryingly, most children and young people did not feel they could discuss race and racism and their effect on their mental health with school staff or other adults with authority. Reasons included that they did not feel they had a safe space to do so and that racist incidents were not taken seriously by school staff and other adults*

*BPoC children and young people experience a wide range of barriers to engaging with mental health services, including thinking the problems they face are not serious enough to merit engaging with mental health services; not acknowledging mental health issues until*

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[https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:2qUbl1\\_MrxcJ:https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b9aaa1c0dbda3921bdda433/t/60a7ea8aaa94945b3abaf3e9/1621625990178/IYS%2BMental%2BHealth%2BReport+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk](https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:2qUbl1_MrxcJ:https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b9aaa1c0dbda3921bdda433/t/60a7ea8aaa94945b3abaf3e9/1621625990178/IYS%2BMental%2BHealth%2BReport+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk)

*they reached a breaking point; lack of knowledge about available services; and misunderstandings of counselling. Altogether, these barriers reflect the hidden dynamics of structural racism in the mental health sector – the alienation and marginalisation of BPOC children and young people*

49. The Union has, as a result of representations made to the Scottish Government, ensured that the Mental Health in Schools working group will look to provide guidance or support around the relationship between race and mental health as a long term aim, however there is still an absence of any commitment to immediate action which is necessary to ensure the Whole School Approach Framework (WSA) published on 24 August 2021 is not perceived as race blind. Ensuring support is available and relevant to black young people across Scotland is a challenge we all need to tackle together.

50. The Scottish Government publication, *Coronavirus (COVID-19): framework for decision-making*, states:

*'We must take these lessons into how we recover from this crisis. The austerity-driven response to the 2008 financial crash did not work and worsened the inequality that was part of its cause; we must not repeat those mistakes. Inequality is also worsening the outcomes for those people impacted by the coronavirus. Our younger people deserve a fairer and more secure economic future.'*

51. It is critical that the Scottish Government does more than just espouse equality and that it actively seeks to address the societal inequalities, discrimination and prejudice faced by black and minority ethnic communities, building a future founded upon the trade union principles of equality and fairness.

52. A diverse teaching profession is vital to securing high educational standards and supporting the mental health and wellbeing for all

children and young people. The Scottish Government must play its part to support increased employment and skills opportunities and deliver supportive and inclusive workplaces for people from black communities in Scotland.

53. Recovery will also need to reflect the aims and objectives of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including those set out in Article 12 of the Convention on ensuring that appropriate weight is given to children's views in matters that affect them, especially since the introduction of the Convention into domestic law. Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC provide the right to education, and more generally to the rights of children to have their wellbeing promoted in all respects, as the preamble to the Charter confirms. In a context where the UNCRC is incorporated into domestic legislation, these become legal requirements on the Scottish Government.

54. Given the significant scale of the recovery challenge and the need for it to be impactful, it will be essential that it is subjected to an ongoing system-level evaluation, such that it makes a difference for children and supports the workforce.

### **Class Sizes**

55. Studies indicate that limiting class size can have a powerful impact on pupils' educational experiences. The Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project in Tennessee and the Class Size and Pupil-Adult Ratio (CSPAR) study in the UK supported the view that class size had positive implications for pupils' learning. This impact was particularly evident for younger pupils, those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with relatively lower levels of prior attainment. Other studies have pointed to the benefits for the development of pupils' non-cognitive skills (such as persistence and engagement) of smaller class sizes.

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56. Evidence suggests that smaller class sizes can not only have positive benefits for all pupils, but have also been associated with particularly positive outcomes for black pupils and those for whom English is an additional language.

57. Literature reviews of teachers' reported experience confirm that reductions in class size can positively impact on teacher workload and stress levels. Evidence from other jurisdictions further suggests that reductions in class size can help address concerns relating to teacher recruitment and retention.

#### **D. How does addressing poverty lead to improved health and social care outcomes?**

##### **Impact of Poverty**

58. More than one in four (260,000) of Scotland's children are officially recognised as living in poverty. In the absence of significant policy change, this figure is likely to increase in the coming years, with Scottish Government forecasts indicating that it will reach 38% by 2030/31. Analysis by the Resolution Foundation suggests the Scottish child poverty rate will be 29% by 2023-24 - the highest rate in over twenty years: this would reverse the fall in child poverty observed in the UK since the late 1990s

59. The NASUWT is clear that one of the most profound and damaging consequences of child poverty is the impact that it has on pupils' educational attainment, their wider wellbeing and their future life chances. The recent Audit Scotland report highlighted that national progress towards closing the equity gap was not consistent, with indicators at some councils deteriorating, which is of significant national concern.

60. The Union has campaigned consistently for more effective action to ensure that no child grows up in circumstances where they are deprived of the economic, social and cultural resources they need to thrive and make the most of their potential.

61. Securing high quality education for all must be allied to a concerted national effort to end child poverty.

62. We know that money can make a world of difference. With greater investment in areas of disadvantage, children from the poorest households would benefit from improved facilities within schools as well as more opportunities to continue learning, including personal and social development, outside the school gates with dedicated funding for play schemes, recreational and youth and community facilities.

63. The establishment of a purposeful, coherent and integrated approach across Government policies and practices to tackling child poverty and social exclusion must, therefore, be regarded as a fundamental duty of any Government.

64. Teachers and school leaders are acutely aware that poverty is a key inhibitor of educational progress. The NASUWT has undertaken extensive research into child poverty through research on the impact of financial hardship on children and young people and the cost of education.

65. The Union is clear that key to tackling child poverty is:

- the establishment of an effective statutory and regulatory framework for policy development and implementation;
- sustained investment in anti-poverty programmes;
- co-ordinated Government policy on education, health and housing; and
- a welfare system that supports children and families.

66. Poverty and disadvantage can have a profound impact on pupils' educational achievement and, moving forward, the Scottish Government must adopt an intersectional approach to addressing socio-economic disadvantage. In the UK today, children from black communities continue to be affected disproportionately by material disadvantage. The most recent official data shows that black and minority ethnic children are twice as likely to grow up in poverty as their white peers. The Union has campaigned consistently for more effective action to ensure that no child grows up in circumstances where they are deprived of the economic, social and cultural resources they need to thrive and make the most of their potential. The right to grow up free from poverty and socioeconomic insecurity is one of the most important children's rights, and the disproportionate impact of poverty on black children must not be ignored.

### **Cross-Agency Approach**

67. The NASUWT agrees that partnership working is critical to effective child poverty reduction strategies. However, it is important that agencies with responsibility for the wellbeing of children and young people are able to collaborate effectively to address poverty and its causes. Collaborative working has to be supported and facilitated and requires the investment of time and financial resources.

68. It is critical that this collaboration is organised in a way that allows each children's service to discharge their distinct functions effectively and in a way that minimises practitioner workload.

69. The principal contribution made by schools in enhancing the wellbeing and life chances of children and young people relates to their work in providing high-quality learning experiences,

70. Multi-agency working is too often subject to excessive and unjustifiable local variation in the form that collaboration is expected to take, the way that collaborative arrangements are overseen and managed, as well as the ways in which responsibilities are distributed between different services and agencies. There needs to be a consistent and coherent national approach.
71. Disadvantaged and vulnerable children should be able to benefit from common, minimum expectations of how agencies will work to address poverty and its causes, regardless of locality or postcode.
72. The Scottish Government should work with the NASUWT and other relevant stakeholders to develop an effective framework for poverty reduction activity in all local authority areas that addresses the considerations set out above and that permits local flexibility only in circumstances where this can be justified objectively.

### **Wider Services**

73. The NASUWT believes that the educational success and wider wellbeing of children and young people is dependent on ensuring that their legitimate rights and entitlements are respected in all aspects of their lives, both within and beyond school.
74. Teachers and school leaders have important roles to play in this respect but the contribution of families and other agencies with responsibilities for children and young people's care is also critical.
75. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child confirms that it is a responsibility of the state to ensure that children and young people, as well as having access to an effective education, are safe, secure, can make a contribution and enjoy good physical and mental health.

76. The NASUWT's policy and campaigning work in this area focuses particularly on the role of wider public services for children and young people. Health, social care, youth justice and cultural and leisure services all have a critical part to play, working in partnership with schools, to ensure that every child has the best possible start in life, as well as good future life chances.

77. For this reason, the NASUWT has drawn attention across the UK to reductions in the resources available to these services and ineffective frameworks for collaboration between them. Critical areas of concern, including child protection and promoting good mental health among young people, depend crucially on a well-funded public service framework.

78. The NASUWT campaigns actively on children's rights issues. The Union is clear that the right to grow up free from poverty and socio-economic insecurity is one of the most important of these rights. Children and young people also have a right to be safe, to have their voices heard and to be free from exploitation and abuse.

### **Lessons learned**

79. The Scottish Education and Skills Committee, during the previous parliamentary term, undertook an inquiry into child poverty and attainment. NASUWT submitted evidence to the inquiry and supported the committee recommendations that:

- Better measures be developed to assess levels of poverty
- Education authorities need to review their school practices to ensure that they do not discriminate against low income families
- The Scottish Government should survey schools to assess the level of charging for school activities
- Schools should poverty-proof their uniform policies

· The Scottish Government should review how pupil equity funding is being used and give more support and guidance to schools on interventions to address poverty and the attainment gap

80. The committee recommendations remain relevant and greater read-across between parliamentary committee inquiries would support and ensure consistent accountability for government decisions.

## **Funding**

81. School funding is a highly politically charged issue. It is extremely easy for stakeholders in the education system to perceive inequalities, even injustices, in school funding when comparing different schools or different local authorities.

82. The NASUWT cautions against the 'a child is a child is a child' approach to a funding formula, which would have as a key assumption that there should be a high baseline funding figure for each individual child (weighted for age), irrespective of their circumstances. The geographical and socio-economic characteristics of Scotland demonstrate how this would not just be profoundly regressive, but also unrealistic.

83. Scotland is a sparsely populated country and that sparsity is the key factor in determining school funding levels. The correlation between sparsity and high education funding can clearly be seen and high levels of weighting for both deprivation and sparsity remain crucial factors for any common formula.

84. The processes underpinning Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) across Scotland have been variable. While the NASUWT welcomed funding targeted at closing the poverty-related attainment gap, feedback from members suggests that not all headteachers have liaised with their teaching staff to support the identification of the best use for the

money. Equally, the accountability mechanisms within local authorities need to be strengthened to ensure that PEF is being used appropriately.

85. Regrettably, while core services continue to be cut and support staff removed, PEF will not deliver the impact needed in reducing the poverty-related attainment gap.

### **Rurality/poverty**

86. Place-based measurements, such as the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) tend to fail to identify localised pockets of poverty in rural areas. Poverty in rural areas is often dispersed - unlike poverty that can be concentrated in urban housing developments - and interspersed amongst pockets of wealth. In other words, poverty in rural Scotland is often harder to measure and less visible. This is important, as rural poverty accounts for 16% of all poverty in Scotland<sup>7</sup>.

### **CONCLUSION**

87. It is important that poverty reduction continues to be prioritised by Scottish Ministers. The publication of periodic Child Poverty Delivery Plans offers an important means by which progress towards these targets can be tracked, and all relevant stakeholders, including the NASUWT, can be engaged meaningfully in this work.

88. It is equally important that the experiences of pupils who have a protected characteristic under the Equality Act are not totally overshadowed by a reliance on poverty as the sole factor affecting either educational participation or mental health and wellbeing and that an intersectional approach to poverty and mental wellbeing is adopted moving forward.

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<sup>7</sup> Glass, J., Bynner, C., & Chapman, C. (2020). Children and Young People and Rural Poverty and Social Exclusion: A Review of Evidence

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