



EVIDENCE

**Additional Support for Learning (ASL) in Scotland  
31 December 2023**

**NASUWT evidence to the Scottish Parliament Education,  
Children and Young People Committee**

The NASUWT's submission to the Scottish Parliament Education, Children and Young People Committee sets out the Union's views on the key issues which should be explored by the Committee in its scrutiny of Additional Support for Learning (ASL) in Scotland. 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.

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

1. The most recent survey of NASUWT members which focused specifically on Additional Support Needs (ASN) was conducted earlier in 2023 (in February) and highlighted some key concerns linked to the presumption of mainstreaming.
  
2. In response to a question asking if pupils with ASN receive the support to which they are entitled:  
47% said Sometimes;  
35% Rarely;  
and 3% Never.
  
3. When asked to identify the key reasons why pupils did not always receive such support:  
75% cited 'Long waiting lists for support';  
60% identified 'Cuts to external services mean that my school cannot access the necessary specialist support';  
While 57% suggested 'Budgetary pressures mean specialist support is too expensive for my school to obtain'.
  
4. The survey was UK-wide (though only the Scotland-specific figures are reported here) and there was no specific option on the list of reasons linked to the presumption of mainstreaming, nevertheless, many of the specific comments added to the survey by respondents touched on this, for example:  
  
'Not enough staff to support pupil needs. I am coping on my own with a class where the academic level for some is First Level and others Third Level. Within the class there are pupils with IEPs, ASD, SEBN, ADHD';  
  
'Pupil specialist placements are so hugely oversubscribed. We are seeing a massive rise in neurodivergent children within mainstream classrooms';

‘Closure of ASN and specialist schools, without facility to cater to ASN children in mainstream schools, causes problems’;

‘There seem to be no additional funds for ASN pupils in mainstream in Scotland. Resources have to be taken from elsewhere in the school.’

‘Poor behaviour issues have increased. This affects the rest of the students whose education is suffering.’

**For children with additional support needs, in your experience:**

- *Can you provide details of how these additional support needs were recognised and identified initially? Was there any delay in the process which followed the identification of additional support needs and formal recognition which leads to the accessing of the additional support? If so, what was the delay?*
- *Where the child is being educated in specialist settings can you give examples of where their needs are being met, and examples of where they are not being met?*
- *What specialist support does the child receive and what support do you get in accessing this support? Are there any gaps in the specialist support provided either because the prescribed support is not available or extra support not formally prescribed is not being provided?*
- *On balance, do you view the presumption of mainstreaming as having been a positive or negative development for your child or in general, and on balance, do you view the presumption of mainstreaming as having been a positive or negative development for other children in Scottish schools?*

This section seems aimed very much at parents/carers and the individual experience of their child(ren). A broader response by NASUWT to the Call for Views is contained later, under Any Other Comments, and does touch on some of these matters.

### **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?*

5. The 2023 NASUWT Survey on ASN asked what impact the pandemic has had on ASN pupils, producing the following results:

Emotional and mental wellbeing - 86% say this has declined in pupils as a result of the pandemic;

Access to specialist internal support and staffing within your school – 84% say this has declined;

Educational attainment/academic progress – 78% say this has declined;

Access to specialist external services and support – 72% say this has declined;

Attendance at school/college – 61% say this has declined.

6. While there was no specific question on local authority support post-Covid, the answers at 2. and 3. above make clear that teachers believe support for ASN pupils is now worse post-pandemic.

### **The use of remedies as set out in the Act**

- *How are parents/carers and young people included in the decisions that affect the additional support for learning provided to young people and could this be better?*

- ***Are you aware that there are statutory remedies around the provision of additional support for learning as set out in the 2004 Act, specifically:***
  - ***Right to have a ‘supporter’ present in discussions or an ‘advocacy worker’ make representations to the local authority, the local authority does not have to pay for this. (s.14)***
  - ***Right to an advocacy services, free of charge, for those taking cases to the Additional Support Needs Tribunal (s.14A)***
  - ***Independent mediation, free of charge (s.15)***
  - ***Independent adjudication, free of charge (regulations under s.16)***
  - ***A Tribunal for certain issues involving Co-ordinated Support Plans, placing requests and disability discrimination cases under the Equality Act 2010.***
- ***If you have experience of any of these processes, do you have any comments on your experiences?***

Again, this is a section which is very much focused on parents/carers and the individual experience of their child(ren). Broader comments by NASUWT are contained in the next section.

### **Any other comments?**

7. The evidence from the Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Review, led by Angela Morgan, was that ASL is not visible or equally valued within Scotland's education system. The NASUWT fully agrees that additional support provision should not be viewed as a minority area of interest, nor should it continue to be considered separately within the framework of Scottish education. Nevertheless, the situation remains that across Scotland there is great variability of ASN provision: a variety of approaches to cost-saving at local authority budget level

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 ASL.

8. A multi-faceted approach is required to ensure pupils can access appropriate support both within and outwith schools. This includes: appropriate CLPL; teachers being able to access sufficient time for learning, professional dialogue with colleagues, and reflection; workload that is manageable; appropriate levels of support staff to be made available; and advice and guidance from central support services.
  
9. In its submission to the Morgan Review, the NASUWT highlighted that policy and practice in respect of ASN were high priorities for the Union's members but that their experiences highlighted a range of issues and concerns about ASN. In particular, the Union noted that teachers had expressed concerns about some management practices relating to ASN. Many ASN teachers had also raised concerns that abuse and violence is now seen as 'part of the job'. These matters have not been addressed and evidence from the 2023 NASUWT Survey of members on ASN reinforces these points:
  - 89% of respondents indicated that their ASN responsibilities had led to increased stress over the past 12 months and the highest-ranked reason for this (cited by 85% of respondents) was Managing the Behaviour of Pupils. Sample comments about this include:  
'There is a culture of hiding violence towards staff to make out a school is good and improving when there is terrifying violence occurring.';  
'Often the challenging behaviour is extremely disruptive, stressful, abusive and can be violent.';
  - and sample comments linked to issues with headteachers/Senior Management include:  
'HT chooses to target resources towards children who will improve assessment scores/data';

'Our SMT are not properly trained and do not fully understand the needs of our learners and dismiss the professional opinions of the teachers in the rooms';

'If we raise concerns, both at school management level and beyond, the blame is put on us, what are we doing wrong or not doing? Nobody wants to acknowledge the issues properly because changes would have to be made so it's easier, and cheaper, for us teachers to 'put up and shut up' and those higher in authority to pretend that things are not that bad and just keep piling on the pressures'.

10. Further NASUWT input to the Morgan Review suggested that the demands being placed on teachers and schools were increasing, that increasing numbers of learners with more complex needs were being taught in mainstream classrooms, and that, across the system, the range and complexity of needs were increasing. Again, rather than seeing any changes or improvements in these areas, the 2023 NASUWT ASN Survey confirms that these problems continue. The other two key drivers of stress in ASN teachers (alongside Managing Behaviour, mentioned at 9. above) are:

- Increased complexity of needs of pupils I teach (85% of respondents);
- Increased number of pupils I teach with ASN (72% of respondents).

Sample comments which reinforce this are:

- 'The complexities are increasing, the support is decreasing. It's an awful situation for everyone involved. All services such as speech, OT, social service, CAMHs are stretched but they also step back and won't get involved and it all falls to education. The system is broken and we are failing these young people';

- 'More and more pupils with needs and staffing pressures mean the service has been diluted in my school. I am an ASN teacher and we are increasingly needed for general behaviour support, anxiety related issues etc';

- 'Support in some areas (dyspraxia, dyscalculia) is significantly weaker and training less available than others (ASD, dyslexia).'

11. NASUWT members' contributions to the Morgan Review also emphasised that cuts to specialist services were exacerbating the difficulties that schools face and inhibiting the ability of schools to access the support that children and young people with ASN need. Reports also indicated that schools and teachers were encountering significant challenges as a result of austerity, including issues arising from cuts to local authority and other education and health services. The 2023 NASUWT ASN Survey again reinforces that these trends have continued in the wrong direction.

When asked about the cost-of-living crisis/school budget pressures and their impact on children with ASN, members responded as follows:

Emotional and mental wellbeing - 84% say this has declined in pupils as a result of the cost-of-living crisis/budgetary pressures;

Access to specialist external services and support – 82% say this has declined;

Access to specialist internal support and staffing within your school – 77% say this has declined;

Educational attainment/academic progress – 74% say this has declined;

+

Attendance at school/college – 55% say this has declined.

Supporting children and young people with ASN requires urgent renewed investment in tailored services and education settings to ensure that there is equality of opportunity and choice for all.

12. This theme of budgetary pressures negatively impacting on ASN pupils has also come through in the Scottish Government's own *'Research*



*into Provision for Pupils with Complex Additional Support Needs in Scotland'*, published in September of this year. The research found that resource issues were negatively impacting many areas, including: access to specialist facilities and services (such as educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists), access to transport and, overall, inhibiting policy implementation. It also highlighted other key issues identified by NASUWT members in our 2023 ASN Survey, of a landscape which sees increased numbers of pupils with ASN and an increasingly complex range of needs alongside cutbacks in staffing.

13. In this same area of Pupils with Complex Additional Support Needs, NASUWT has had concerns for some time about how Co-ordinated Support Plans (CSP) are established for those with the most significant needs. Past experience has suggested that some local authorities can take a rather secretive and sometimes haphazard approach to these and there needs to be more transparency and consistency in this area.

14. The NASUWT welcomed the Morgan Review's recommendations on teacher education and development, namely:

'Teacher recruitment, selection, education and professional development and learning processes must align with the changed and changing profile of children and young people in Scotland, ensuring:

- All teachers hold and enact professional values of inclusion and inclusive practice and see this as a core part of their role.
- All teachers understand what additional support needs are. They are clear about their role in supporting the identification of additional support needs and the need to adapt their teaching to ensure a meaningful learning experience for all their learners.
- All teacher education and development includes nationally specified practice and skills development in supporting learners with additional support needs, as a core element.
- Practice learning and development at local level must include where and how to access specialists' expertise and support.

- Communication, relationship building and positive mediation skills development are incorporated and embedded into teacher education and development, supported by coaching and mentoring opportunities.
- Parity of career progression, pathway structures and opportunities for specialist teachers of Additional Support for Learning:
  - o There should be a first teaching qualification in additional support needs available during Initial Teacher Education; and
  - o The career path proposal under consideration by the SNCT to develop new career pathways should have an additional strand for Additional Support for Learning.
- The focus and methods for teacher education and practice learning are directly informed and developed by the feedback of teachers.
- Innovative and partnership approaches to practice learning should be developed including delivery and participation of children, young people, parents and carers.’

Whilst appreciating that the advent of a global pandemic necessarily impacted on taking forward the recommendations of the Morgan Review, the statistics and comments above from the most recent survey of NASUWT members on ASN provision suggests there has been little progress on these recommendations.

This is succinctly summarised by one of our senior NASUWT activists, an ASN specialist: ‘The implementation of the recommendations outlined in the Morgan Review represents a preliminary step towards advancing the provision of Additional Support Needs (ASN). To ensure that the needs of neurodivergent learners are adequately met, a greater allocation of resources, including teachers and pupil support assistants, is necessary. Additionally, ratios must be revised, taking into account the significant changes in reporting levels since 1985. Furthermore, it is crucial to ensure that buildings or spaces within buildings are appropriate for the developmental and physical requirements of the learners. By addressing these issues, improvements can be made to the education offered to learners with additional support needs, providing an enhanced learning experience.’

15. ASN deserves to be prioritised by the Scottish Government not only to highlight awareness of the significant issues the system faces, but also as a vehicle for ensuring greater investment in the sector. Investment in, and collaboration between, wider children's services is key. The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted and deepened pre-pandemic concerns about the fragmented nature of children and young people's services in key respects, 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. Without investing in appropriate provision, it is to be anticipated that ASN children's education and mental health and wellbeing will continue to be compromised.

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