

# Education, Children and Young People Committee

## Additional Support for Learning - informal participation session with parents and carers

Monday 19 February 2024

### Note of discussion

#### Committee member attendees

Sue Webber MSP (Convener)  
Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP  
Liam Kerr MSP  
Willie Rennie MSP

#### Discussion on ASL with parents and carers.

The Committee spoke with parents and carers and support staff/volunteers from DIFFERabled Scotland and Parent to Parent on additional support for learning. Participants were split into two groups for discussions. The following summary is intended to provide an overview of the main themes that emerged from those discussions.

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

**How were your child's additional support needs first identified? How long did it take from those needs being recognised to additional support being put in place? Did you experience any delays – and if so, what do you think caused these?**

- One parent reported that there was a lack of identification of needs prior to primary beginning, this was within the

private nursery sector and no transition planning made for the child on starting primary school. This led to difficulties in the transition onto primary school.

- Another parent reported that their child's transition from a local authority nursery into the co-located primary was smooth.
- Waiting list for CAMHS varies between 3 and 5 years which meant one parent had to go private for a diagnosis. Delays in diagnosis is extremely problematic when pupils are transitioning from primary to secondary school.
- One parent said that the school argued that no referrals were needed for their child however this was due to the support being provided by the parent which enabled their child to attend school. In order to get the support, the parent had to withdraw their support in order to get the support the child needed from the school which was extremely difficult for the parent.
- There are often delays in diagnosis as children can mask their symptoms and needs while at school. It was said that with neurodivergent pupils, girls were often better at masking than boys resulting in greater delays in diagnosis for girls.
- One parent highlighted that small rural schools worked well for their child where a more holistic approach to support was offered and class sizes were smaller.
- More needs to be done to collect robust data on Emotional Based School Non Attendance and understanding the reasons behind these figures.

- Delays in diagnosis can be caused by schools dismissing parents' views that their children had ADHD and other conditions.
- One parent said that their child's ASD was considered only through the lens of Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties.
- Several parents said that professionals considered their parenting skills were a key factor in relation to their child's needs. Some said that they were told that they must attend a parenting programme before assessments for neurodiversity could be considered.
- A parent said that their child was referred to Speech and Language Therapy. The child was subsequently diagnosed with ASD and the parent said that the initial referral delayed the correct assessment taking place.
- Schools and nurseries should listen to parents more regarding their concerns for their children. Some parents pay for private assessments and this may lead to a two tier system.
- Several parents said that their children were commonly left on their own without support, outside of the classroom. Others raised concerns about part-time timetables and informal exclusions.
- Several parents expressed concerns about physical restraint which can play a part in pupils refusing school.
- School staff are aware that additional support resources are limited which can affect their decisions on whether or not to support a pupil needs additional support.

- One parent said that in their area they experienced a very bureaucratic process with the Education Authority's Education Psychologists' service before support could be put in place. This process involved two committees before being referred to the Education Psychologist committee and the parent is not allowed to attend the committees to advocate their child's position.
- There is a lack of teacher training on additional support needs for neurodivergent pupils with conditions such as autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyscalcula, etc.
- Ongoing staff training on understanding and providing additional support for learning should be mandatory on an annual basis.
- One parent reported that an Educational Psychologist suggested that Cognitive Behavioural Therapy may be beneficial for their child. Rather than putting in place that support, the school was advised to purchase a book on the practice. This suggestion was made after the 'two tier system committee process.'
- There is a lack of educational psychologists available to work with children directly.
- Under the 2004 Act, additional developmental support needs are not being met unless a diagnosis is made which causes problems where this diagnosis has not been made. This breaches the act; many teachers are not fully aware of their duties under the act.
- Another parent reported that there is variable practice even within schools. One child was not supported until there was a formal diagnosis, another had support in place based on the needs prior to a formal diagnosis.

- Teachers, both mainstream and ASN teachers are under immense pressure and senior management in schools must provide leadership for all staff in understanding and providing support for pupils with additional support needs.
- Schools often are not aware of all the available services which pupils could be referred to.

**If your child goes to a special school – or attends a specialist unit within a mainstream school - can you give examples of where their needs are being met, and examples of where they are not being met? What do you think makes the difference between these two different outcomes (e.g. cost, geographical location, availability of specialist services)?**

- One parent spoke of their child who could not attend the mainstream school due to their additional support needs and, despite being happy in a specialist school 1 day a week, they were still not being referred to a full time specialist school so this decision was being appealed.
- One parent highlighted that transitioning from primary school to secondary school during lockdown exacerbated their child's anxiety and additional support needs and has meant that their child is now not attending school at all. Support was been provided through music lessons once a week for 8 weeks through enhanced school provision which had a positive impact on the pupil however this has now ended.
- Small specialist schools offer small classes with teaching staff who understand pupils and their individual needs.
- Smaller schools and smaller classes work better for pupils with ASN.

- Pupils who cannot attend school often feel isolated and lonely resulting in further mental health issues. Some parents said that this situation should be considered a needs-based issue.
- One parent said that their child was unable to attend school due to anxiety and there had been no education provision put in place.
- Schools should be able to provide a wide range of education provision for pupils with high anxiety levels such as flexi schooling.
- Another parent described how their child attended a hub in the school during lockdowns. The return of the full school was a difficult process.
- Transitioning can be very difficult when the correct support is not in place.
- Schools are making decisions about pupils without taking the time to get to know the pupil. Child should always be at the centre of the plan under GIRFEC Guidelines.
- Staffing issues are threatening ASN rooms, which will be detrimental for pupils as they would not cope in mainstream classes.
- The mainstream school with large open plan rooms is not suitable for a number of pupils with additional support needs. This can create sensory difficulties.
- One parent said that there should be more flexibility within the system to support the education of pupils with additional needs. For example, she suggested that there should be greater flexibility for pupils to begin college before their school-leaving date, if that is appropriate. The

idea of letting older children access college courses from age 1, if school isn't working for them.

- Moving from classroom to classroom and loud bells in mainstream schools can be very difficult for pupils with ASN.
- ASN provision and resources is inconsistent across schools.

**As a parent/carer advocating for your child, what help do you need to make sure your child receives the right support? Who is best placed to provide that support?**

- There should be more guidance on flexi schooling, a half way house between home schooling and mainstream schooling, which is more rounded and helpful than part time timetables. A Hybrid Model is needed.
- All mainstream teachers should be aware of the services within and outwith school, which are available to pupils with ASN.
- Peer support can be helpful for pupils with ASN.
- A nominated person with oversight of pupils with ASN would be helpful and could address the inconsistencies across schools. This would help support parents who are currently providing the support, knowledge and expertise needed for their children which is extremely demanding.
- One member of staff, as in primary schools, is often better for pupils with ASN so a nominated member of staff in secondary schools who oversees pupils with ASN would be helpful.

- Organisations need to share information on what services they offer, which could help address constant referrals from service to service.
- Access to formal planning mechanisms was seen as an issue by several parents. Some parents could not understand why a Co-ordinated Support Plan was not in place, when their child's situation appeared to meet the criteria for this. They reported that schools appeared to resist putting CSP's into place and difficulties in navigating the school hierarchy at secondary school to find out who was ultimately responsible for the plan.
- A lack of a plan was seen as a huge barrier to putting in place multi-agency support.
- Another parent reported that some parents have found that their child does not have a formal plan of any sort – rather there is 'planning' which is verbal and not written down with targets/commitments. Parents cannot therefore hold schools to their commitment or review the plan effectively given no written reviews are produced.
- Parents of neurodivergent children can often be neurodivergent themselves which makes it extremely difficult to get the right support with parents feeling they are being 'gaslit'.

**In your opinion, has the presumption that children with additional support needs should be educated in a mainstream school been helpful or unhelpful for your child? What do you think about the policy of mainstreaming more generally?**

- It is unhelpful where schools do not listen to parents on what additional support needs are required, or where a request is made to place the child in a specialist school.



Reasonable Adjustments are a legal requirement and not a choice.

- Not all pupils can attend a mainstream school and this should be understood more by schools and local authorities. Presumption of mainstreaming means presumption of a right to mainstream school. This is important. However, 'presumption of mainstreaming' is increasingly interpreted as a presumption that all children are capable of attending a mainstream school without the appropriate accommodations needed for each individual child.
- Some ASN pupils need very specific accommodations, which a mainstream school cannot provide. There is often no offer of alternatives (e.g. flexi schooling, online learning, specialist school). Children with the intellectual capability to learn within the mainstream environment, but whose sensory issues mean that mainstream schooling can be overwhelming, are leaving school with little or no qualifications. They effectively lose their right to an education, when they cannot sustain attendance at a mainstream school due to these sensory issues.
- One parent supported the presumption of mainstream education as this had been helpful when arguing that their child should remain in a mainstream setting, when school were forcing their child into an unsuitable specialist placement. Their child would not have academically achieved within this placement, which would have prevented their successful transition onto university from their mainstream school.
- When the needs of a pupil are not being met in a mainstream school it can be a very negative and damaging experience for that pupil and for the parents witnessing this.

- Mainstreaming is not child led.
- Delays in diagnosis are causing difficulties where a child with ASN is at a mainstream school.
- Transitioning is key to pupils with ASN requiring an Enhanced Transition process.
- There needs to be a greater importance placed on the voices the children particularly, when their needs are not being met.
- Research should be undertaken to look at how much more it costs the economy to support a child who is not being properly supported in school (parents leave work to support children, the students cannot find work after school because they do not have qualifications). The child ends up unable to find employment due to lack of qualifications which means it is important education right for all children so that they stand more chance to find work after school.
- There is a lack of information given to parents about complaints and Tribunals and how to access them. One parent stated that it was important to include that currently people are told to just complain within the school/social work system. However, often your complaint is about the person who is the Year Head/DHT or SW team leader, who is the person who also deals with complaints.
- One parent stated that it was really important to stress that many parents are themselves professionals or well educated and who value education and would normally support their child to do as well as possible within a school setting, and to make the most of school.

- One parent highlighted the importance of listening to and valuing the input from parents. They said that, although children's views are equally important, sometimes children aged under 12 are given more credibility than parents. Sometimes professionals use this to their advantage and children often agree to things which are in the best interests of the service/school, not the child. The parent's role as an advocate needs to be properly recognised and training in independent advocacy for parents was suggested.
- One parent stated the importance of post-school education and transition to adulthood - specifically the impacts of not being in full-time education or training on availability of Universal Credit, legacy benefits, and child benefit for low income families.
- One parent stated that the post-school education and transition to adulthood - specifically the impacts of not being in full-time education or training on availability of Universal Credit, legacy benefits, and child benefit for low income families. No older child aged 16-19 should have pressure placed on them to pay part of their parents' rent or household bills, yet this is happening all the time to vulnerable young people who may not have attended education for several years before age 16.