Education, Children and Young People Committee

9th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 17 November

Covid-19 pandemic: Impact on children and young people

Introduction

The Committee is scrutinising the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children and young people. The Committee will be taking oral evidence at Committee meetings in November and December before undertaking further engagement in early 2022.

The Committee, at this meeting, will take evidence on the impact of the pandemic on children and young people with additional support needs and care experienced young people.

Committee meeting

The Committee will take evidence from two panels of witnesses. On the first panel—

- Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People's Commissioner;
- Stephen McGhee, Managing Director, Spark of Genius, and representing the Scottish Coalition Services Coalition (SCSC); and
- Linda O'Neill, Education Lead, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS).

The second panel will comprise—

- Laurie Black, Convener of the ASN Committee, Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS);
- Ramon Hutchingson, Co-ordinator, Autism Resources Co-ordination Hub (ARCH) - South Lanarkshire; and
- Sally Cavers, Head of Inclusion, Children In Scotland.

Supporting Information

Written submissions have been provided by the Scottish Coalition Services Coalition (SCSC); Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS); Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS); Autism Resources Co-ordination Hub (ARCH) - South Lanarkshire; and Children In Scotland. These are provided at **Annexe A** to this paper.

A SPICe briefing to support this evidence session is at **Annexe B.** An additional SPICe briefing, providing an overview of work and guidance recently published by key international, UK and Scottish organisations, is included at **Annexe C.**

Gemma Cheek
Assistant Clerk
Education, Children and Young People Committee
12 November 2021

Annexe A

Education, Children and Young People Committee

9th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 17 November

Impact of Covid 19 on Children and Young people with additional support needs and care experienced young people submission pack.

This paper provides the submissions from some of the witness organisations for the meeting on 17 November 2021.

- Autism Resources Coordination Hub (ARCH)
- Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS)
- Children in Scotland
- Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)
- Scottish Coalition Services Coalition (SCSC)

Autism Resources Coordination Hub (ARCH)

Written Submission to Scottish Government Education – Children and Young People's Committee for Autism Resources Coordination Hub (ARCH) South Lanarkshire
On

"The Impact of the Pandemic Lockdown experience on South Lanarkshire's Neurodivergent children and young people"

"Tell me and I'll forget, teach me and I'll remember; Involve me and I'll learn" (Benjamin Franklin)

"Children have a right to receive and impart information, to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in any matters affecting them from the early years onwards. Their views should be given due weight according to their age, maturity and capacity" (Articles 12 and 13 UNCRC)

Introduction:

This submission represents the distillation of hundreds of views communicated over the past 22 months of Lockdown during weekly online support sessions held within South Lanarkshire for our Autism community. By using the ZOOM platform ARCH has continued to sustain cohesion within what has been collectively experienced as an isolating and anxiety-inducing lockdown experience.

What needs established from the outset are the 'atypical' ways in which the pandemic disproportionately impacted on autistic children and young people who were already struggling to 'fit in' to a neurotypical education system.

This was articulated in the findings outlined in the **Morgan review**, and the 2018 '**Not Included, Not Engaged, Not involved'** report which respectively highlighted the structural and systemic challenges faced by autistic/ ASN C&YP in ensuring their GIRFEC wellbeing indicators were being met within mainstream education.

The sudden and unanticipated imposition of lockdown in March 2020 was clearly experienced by all as an immediate transition into what was called "The New Normal".

This required considerable flexibility and resilience from autistic C&YP and their families as well as education staff in striving to manage the demands of sustaining a semblance of educational normality in an otherwise abnormal and anxiety-inducing experience.

By definition 'transitions' of any kind present disproportionate stresses on autistic children and young people, so the 'new normal' became an overwhelming experience for many, as well as their parent carers striving to support them. Indeed, we know that when autistic C&YP are in a state of sensory overwhelm their capacity to think flexibly becomes narrower more rigid and/or restricted inducing fear, panic, and resulting in an array of distressed behaviours.

Prevalence figures:

The additional support needs of autistic C&YP are no longer restricted to a small minority in Scotland's mainstream and ASN schools. A tranche of reviews undertaken in 2020-2021 by amongst others; Exeter University, Dr Amanda Kirby and the Cambridge Autism Research Centre have all aligned with the North American Centre for Disease Control (CDC) 2019 figures showing that autism and ND prevalence figures have increased significantly in the 20 years between 1998-2018. These studies have shown that diagnostic figures in England and Wales rose from **3000** per year in 1998 to **65,000** per year in 2018.

The Cambridge Autism Research Centre revealed an upwardly revised prevalence figure of **1 in 57** in a study of over 7 million C&YP, and Amanda Kirby's review of care experienced children and young people revealed neurodivergent prevalence figures of **44% within the care experienced population** in England and Wales. Indeed, the Morgan review highlighted that Autistic C&YP when taken together with ASN and other ND conditions like dyslexia and dyspraxia, total some **33% of Scotland's school pupils.**

When considered alongside published pre-lockdown figures for autistic C&YP having significantly greater levels of mental health problems, suicide rates, self-injurious behaviours and school-related problems, the post-lockdown effects might be reasonably predicted as profound.

Anxiety-Related Issues/Trauma:

The concept of ACE's (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and trauma-informed practice is becoming increasingly prominent within the professional vernacular. However, the acronym also denotes another lockdown-related factor; **'Adverse Cultural Environments'**. The lockdown experience created such an adverse context for our autistic children and young people, who were bombarded by daily catastrophising media articles, usually accompanied with graphic visuals of mortality and infection levels and led to conversations within families and other networks about impending mass deaths. This was compounded for many autistic C&YP who suffered the real loss of loved ones during the pandemic, once again impacting on a population with impaired resilience factors both personally and socially and who processed everything in a literal manner.

Lockdown was also experienced by neurotypical children and young people as anxiety inducing, however the effects on autistic C&YP were amplified with many showing signs of developmental trauma. ARCH has seen a corresponding upsurge in related distressed 'crises' occurring, with parent carers often being left to deal alone and largely unsupported with these issues as services had been 'paused' or otherwise restricted.

The absence of structured support was also compounded due to sometimes significant differences of opinion relating to eligibility criteria between, on the one hand parent carers of autistic C&YP, and on the other staff responsible for operating the Education lockdown' hubs' designed to support 'vulnerable' C&YP.

The "quiet voices" of our autistic C&YP were too-often drowned out amongst the clamour of wider social, political, and public health priorities.

Unrealistic Expectations:

Many autism families experienced additional stress due to the requirement to complete schoolwork within family homes. This presented issues related to a clash of context, as many autistic C&YP struggled to undertake school-related tasks at home given their literal view that 'school is school' and 'home is home'.

Education staff were tasked with trying to maintain some curricular activity via remote learning, which often created additional stresses for families simply trying to contain and manage their autistic C&YP's anxiety levels and other distressed behaviours throughout lockdown.

Similarly, education staff are now, within the recovery phase being tasked with supporting many autistic C&YP experiencing anxiety related school absences or challenges due to emotional and behavioural consequences engendered by lockdown.

Autistic C&YP are equally experiencing significant transitional stresses in navigating their return to full time education, as the message of lockdown remains somewhat 'fixed' in ND minds which are less able to adapt as quickly or as easily as their neurotypical counterparts.

What could help during the recovery phase?

- Mandatory workforce training in autism awareness for all undergraduate and qualified teachers, social care, and health staff.
- Development of programmes for Scotland's Neurotypical C&YP to promote greater understanding of Neurodiversity and Disability.
- Create systems to identify, monitor, build and maintain the emotional and mental wellbeing of autistic C&YP
- More presence of other disciplines within Scotland's schools i.e. social care and health staff to deliver specific programmes.
- Dedicated relationship education programmes which have the potential to help autistic C&YP acquire the social and emotional learning skills they need to have good mental health and wellbeing.
- A requirement to produce accessible public information in a range of formats including visuals and easy read.
- Rights- based supports established via legislation and a commissioner's office
- Corrective Emotional Experiences utilising relational-based work to create a welcoming, shared, safe and nurturing space for autistic C&YP.
- Build positive partnership relationships between autistic C&YP, parent carers and staff to ensure their voice is heard and views respected.
- Systems to ensure any action points are integrated, sustained, and monitored to ensure progress.
- Designated autism leads within every school to ensure more coordinated approaches and identify professional development needs.

- Recognition of the risk of increased social exclusion for autistic C&YP and proactively seek to implement strategies to counter this.
- Ensuring Education is incorporated into National Autism Strategies

Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS)

Response to the Education, Children and Young People Committee session on the impact of the pandemic upon children and young people with additional support needs and care experienced young people.

November 2021

CELCIS is Scotland's Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, based at the University of Strathclyde. We are thankful for the opportunity to give evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee on the above subject. Our written response is based on research evidence, practice experience and feedback from our long-standing, cross-organisational networks,comprising practitioners and leaders working across the spectrum of children's services and other public services in support of children, young people and families. We are grateful for the opportunity to discuss the areas we have detailed below, and those of interest to the committee, at the evidence session.

Key Messages

- Structural inequalities that existed prior to the pandemic have been compounded for many families. The 'digital divide' and levels of poverty and inequality have been brought into stark focus and must be addressed in order to ensure all children and families have equity of access to supportive services.
- There is no nationally recognised definition of 'vulnerability', or common tool for assessing children's wellbeing. Many children who may have benefited from accessing school hubs during the pandemic may have missed out on learning and social interactions due to the variable ways in which local areas assessed 'vulnerability'. A lack of consistent wellbeing data makes it difficult for adults and professionals to accurately understand the impact of the pandemic on children's wellbeing.
- Regular, attuned and timely support is required from trusted adults to understand children's individual needs, and plan for and provide the support they require. The workforce must have the skills, capacity and emotional support to provide this.

Context

All children have their own unique strengths, and their own needs. Babies, children, young people (anyone under the age of 18 referred to hereafter as children), in need of care and protection, and their families, are no different. With the right support, all children can thrive throughout their lives, and yet Covid-19 has presented significant challenges in how we respond to the needs ofchildren and families struggling in difficult circumstances. Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, care experienced children and their families faced several complex andoften difficult circumstances which presented barriers to positive educational experiences; the public health crisis compounded these. The pandemic and subsequent public health protection response is affecting many in areas such as digital exclusion, loss

of learning and education, mental health, poverty, and food security; however, these are examples of long existing inequalities that have been intensified and continue to disproportionately affect many care experienced children and families.

Scottish Government Educational Outcomes data from 2018/19 (the most recent pre-pandemic data available) shows that 'looked after children (a), on average, have lower attendance rates, higher exclusion rates, leave school earlier, and attain fewer qualifications than all other children (1). Whilst having experience of care, or having an additional support need, are not predictors of poor educational achievement or attainment, this data highlights the importance of providing more effective and responsive support to meet children's individual needs.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 promotes the interests of 'looked after children' by stating that they are presumed to have additional support needs (ASN) unless assessed as otherwise; and must be routinely considered for a co-ordinated support plan. A [freedom of information request from 2016](#) shows that these presumptions and assessments were not being undertaken consistently across Scotland, with the rights of many children to assessment for additional support not being upheld. We are concerned that this continues to remain the case, and the consequent inequalities will have beenfurther exacerbated by the pandemic. Good quality, appropriate and timely ASN provision should be available at every phase of children's learning journey to ensure equity of access to the curriculum in accordance with the recent recommendations, and subsequent action plan, within the [Additional Support for](#) [Learning review](#) conducted by Angela Morgan.

Areas of particular significance in relation to the impact of the pandemic upon children with additional support needs and children with care experience.

Loss of learning

During the two lengthy school closures in the first year of the pandemic, education hubs were made available to support specific children and families.

The criteria for accessing education hubs (children of key workers and 'vulnerable' children) meant that some children and families who would have benefited from this vital support missed out due to the variable and inconsistent ways that local areas assessed 'vulnerability.'

Whilst initial rigidity in these criteria did become more flexible, not all care experienced children were assessed or prioritised for this support, despite many being on compulsory supervision orders. Some care experienced children who would have benefited from the support offered by a hub placement will not have been offered a place, and some children will have missed more learning than others.

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a 'Looked after' and 'looked after child' are the terms used in current legislation to refer to a child or young person who is cared for under a formal arrangement with a local authority. It has a specific legal meaning, butwherever possible, the more inclusive term 'care experience' is preferred.

We note with concern that the number of children who accessed hub supports for vulnerable children only represented around 0.5% of the children with multi-agency child's plans, which undermines the right to education for this group of children, who are more likely to face barriers such as digital exclusion when accessing educational learning at home (2). Additionally, families who were already struggling with multiple issues and were not able to access support from a hub were faced with the challenging task of attempting to meet the range of children's educational, social, and emotional needs at home without the supports and protective measures offered in a school environment.

This said, there are positive lessons to be taken forward from this experience. Some children felt more able to engage in and participate in their learning while they were at home. We must listen to children to understand why this was and ensure that the curriculum is flexible enough to apply these principles, as far as possible, in an education setting.

Understanding need and wellbeing

During the school closures, loss of learning, and limited contact with trusted adults within schools that provide nurturing and consistent relationships for children and families, impacted not only on children's education, but their wider wellbeing. Although a range of work is underway, there is currently no nationally agreed method of measuring children's wellbeing. The tools that schools use to understand children's wellbeing can vary within and between local authority areas.

Due to this variability, it is difficult to build an accurate picture of how the pandemic has impacted and continues to impact children, either individually or as a group. Understanding children's needs and how their life and circumstances have been impacted by the pandemic is dependent on the adults in their lives who know them and understand their needs. Children and families will need the adults who know them, alongside other relevant organisations, to develop robust plans to support them.

Alternative certification

Isolation had a significant impact on mental health. We have reports from local health teams of an increase in self-harming and hospital admissions due to lack of preventative support and interventions. A recent survey by Children's Parliament has also highlighted a rise in children feeling scared or anxious because of the pandemic and there being a lack of appropriate support around this (3).

With the 'cancellation' of exams and development of the Alternative Certification Model (ACM), children's anxiety and fear relating to the pandemic has been added to due to uncertainty about the impact of assessment changes on their future and how their educational achievements are recognised. Some care experienced pupils felt that the Alternative Certification Model was preferable to the traditional exam diet as it allowed efforts throughout the academic year to be recognised, as they felt end of year exams could put pressure on pupils and did not take account of individual circumstances (4).

However, alongside others, care experienced learners have also highlighted the confusing impact and intense pressure of multiple changes to assessment; poor communication and not knowing what to expect in school; and concerns that limited account is taken of challenging circumstances if appealing grades (for example a child having to move from one foster carer to another during the assessment period).(5) As uncertainty over assessment arrangements continues, children not only require clear communication about what to expect, but for their rights to participate in decisions around assessment to be fully and meaningfully realised.

To support with this, our Virtual School Head Teacher (VSHT) Network produced a practice paper for Designated Managers (a promoted member of staff within an educational establishment who has responsibility for all 'looked after' children within their setting(6) and SQA coordinators in schools to support them to understand the additional considerations required for pupils with care experience during the ACM process to mitigate possibilities of disproportionate disadvantage to care experienced learners due to this method of certification. The Additional Support for Learning Action Plan recommends that new measures are developed which should value and ensure visibility of the diverse range of achievements that are possible for all children with additional support needs.

An opportunity exists to integrate our learning from the pandemic and the Alternative Certification Model for care experienced learners, to inform the wider approach to reforms of the Scottish Education System currently being consulted on by the Scottish Government. As corporate parents, Scottish Ministers and other public bodies have a duty to ensure services meet the needs and promote the interests of those with care experience. It is vital that any reform relating to the curriculum and assessment is undertaken with care experienced learners' needs and views at the heart. Seeking, and incorporating, the views of children and families is an asset and lever for change in itself. Done well, participation in decision making can lead to responsive, inclusive, and meaningful service redesign and delivery.

Regular, attuned support

Families have strong resources that can be utilised and built upon, it is the role of services and professionals to provide scaffolding to promote and develop their efficacy. In line with Scotland's 'Getting It Right For Every Child' (GIRFEC) approach, ensuring rights and relationship-based, timely support to children and families is central to meeting needs and alleviating pressures which have been compounded by the pandemic. During the pandemic we heard from our education networks that there was a reduction in the number of Team Around the Child (TAC) meetings which are crucial to the GIRFEC approach, in developing plans and implementing person centred and timely support for children and families. As the pandemic recovery progresses, children will require either new or updated Child's Plans to take account of missed learning and any changes to family circumstances which may impact upon their wellbeing and their ability to achieve and attain. Education practitioners, working together with children, families and multiagency partners, to develop and implement these plans require the time and resource to undertake this, alongside all other parts of their workload. Without dedicated time and capacity, there is a risk that

the quality or regular review of children's plans is compromised, to the detriment of children's wellbeing and educational experiences.

All children benefit from predictable, consistent patterns and routines, particularly those with additional support needs. The [Independent Care Review Promise] recognised the important role schools have in enabling children to enjoy stable, nurturing relationships (7). Over the past 20 months, public health guidelines have necessitated restrictions to specialist and peripatetic supports being available within schools. This reduced children and family's access to crucial additional supports e.g., educational psychologists, mentors, speech and language therapists, social workers, counsellors and school health staff.

These additional supports are often integral components of Child's Plans, which contribute towards improving the educational experiences and outcomes for children with additional support needs and children with care experience.

Without regular and meaningful access to this additional support, children may take longer to catch up on any missed learning and children's rights to additional support may not be fulfilled.

The digital divide

Digital access and digital literacy emerged at the beginning of lockdown as an area which posed significant barriers for some children and families in accessing education and other supportive services; many of these issues have endured throughout and beyond lockdown. For children and young people with additional support needs these issues may be particularly difficult where they are unable to access support such as assistive technology or the specialist support that can be required to make effective use of it.

Over and above education, in an increasingly digital age much of the everyday information and support that families need (from accessing advice services and welfare, to social connections) must be accessed online. The pandemic highlighted that many families do not have the digital skills or necessary IT or connectivity to enable them to access these crucial services. These structural inequalities risk further disempowering and disenfranchising children and families who may have struggled with these aspects before the pandemic, and who have found themselves further marginalised by the significant shift to the necessity of providing services and support solely online. In addition to ensuring equitable access to digital connectively, more must be done to upskill practitioners to better support children and families to develop their digital skills (8).

Poverty and inequality

Fragile family environments can develop anywhere, at any time, but the external pressures and inequalities of the pandemic have exacerbated existing structural inequalities and difficulties for many. In the continued context of rising prices and September's removal of the £20-per-week uplift to Universal Credit, such pressures are likely to continue, with concerns for food and fuel poverty going in to winter. Poverty intersects with other stressors upon families, such as mental health problems, poor housing and stigma. The Independent Care Review recognised

poverty as one of the mediating factors that increase the risk of child abuse and neglect, and research indicates the disproportionate number of children placed apart from their families within the poorest neighbourhoods in Scotland (9).

Provisions to supporting children in poverty cannot be distinguished from support to their families and consideration must be given to providing support for families in this position, and those whose circumstances have worsened during the pandemic and been affected by reductions in community services and other preventative supports. We anticipate, through engagement of senior leaders in children's services and an understanding of data that this will lead to more families in need of care and protection (10).

Listening to children and young people

Children's rights to express their views freely in all matters affecting them is a general principle underpinning the UNCRC. Children's views must be sought, heard and taken into account, yet the pandemic has had a significant impact on children's participation. For all children, but particularly for children who are care experienced, their right to participate must extend from the everyday decisions in their lives about the care that they receive, up to the policy decisions that affect them. The opportunity must be taken now to learn from the experiences of children during the pandemic to inform decision making for recovery. To enable meaningful participation takes time and resource, as well as strong relationships between children and the adults around them.

Supporting the workforce

Through engagement with the [CELCIS Education Forum](#) and our [Virtual School Head Teacher (VSHT) Network](#) we know that education staff, have and continue to find working conditions and workload in the current context extremely challenging. We have heard that teachers and other education staff are exhausted and facing challenges with their own mental health and wellbeing. We know that these issues are not unique to the education workforce but are present for all the children's service workforce staff who have continued to work tirelessly to provide support to children and families throughout the pandemic.

The pressures and challenges felt by children in relation to the Alternative Certification Model have also been felt by staff. Meaningful, consistent relationships with trusted professionals who are responsive to the needs of children and families are crucial, and to provide this, the needs of staff require significant attention. The health and wellbeing of the workforce is intrinsically linked to the health and wellbeing of our children. We must ensure that the workforce has access to appropriate and meaningful support to enable them to care for and educate our children.

Thank you for providing us with this opportunity to respond. We hope the feedback is helpful; we would be happy to discuss any aspect in further detail.

Linda O'Neill

Education Lead

[1] Scottish Government (2019) *Looked after children: educational outcomes 2018-19.* Edinburgh; Scottish Government

[2] Scottish Government (2020) *Supporting Vulnerable Children and Young People; Data Intelligence Report*, Edinburgh; Scottish Government (pg. 4)

[3] Children's Parliament (2020) *Corona Times Journal: Edition 2*, online resource https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/childrens-journal-2/

[4]SPICe (2020) *Summary of evidence young people alternative certification model.pdf*; Edinburgh, SPICe; (pg. 16)

[5] Currie, L. (2021) *Education, Children and Young People Committee School Assessment: Alternative Certification Model 2021*. Edinburgh: SPICe.

[6] Scottish Government (2008). *Core tasks for designated managers in educational and residential establishments in Scotland. Edinburgh*: The Scottish Government

[7] Independent Care Review (2020) *The Promise*, Glasgow: Independent Care Review (pg.70)

[8] Roesch-Marsh, A., McGhee, K. & Gillon, F. (2021) *The digital divide: The impact on the rights of care leavers in Scotland.* Glasgow: CELCIS

[9] Bywaters P et al (2017) *Identifying and Understanding Inequalities in Child Welfare Intervention Rates: comparative studies in four UK countries*. Briefing Paper 4: Scotland. Nuffield Foundation.

[10] Scottish Government (2020) *Supporting Vulnerable Children and Young People; Data Intelligence Report*, Edinburgh; Scottish Government

Children in Scotland

Education, Children and Young People Committee

The impact of the pandemic on children and young people with additional support needs and care-experienced young people

November 2021

Background

Giving all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish is at the heart of everything we do.

By bringing together a network of people working with and for children, alongside children and young people themselves, we offer a broad, balanced, and independent voice. We create solutions, provide support, and develop positive chance across all areas affecting children in Scotland.

We do this by listening, gathering evidence, and applying and sharing our learning, while always working to uphold children's rights. Our range of knowledge and expertise means we can provide trusted support on issues as diverse as the people we work with and the varied lives of children and families in Scotland.

Children in Scotland is pleased to submit written evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee's inquiry on *'The impact of the pandemic on children and young people with additional support needs and care-experienced young people.'* Our submission and our oral evidence will focus on the impact of the pandemic on children and young people with additional support needs.

Children in Scotland additional support for learning services and projects

Children in Scotland has three national additional support for learning services:

- **Enquire** is the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning. Enquire raises awareness of children's rights to extra support in school, helps families and schools work together to ensure children get the support they need and provides advice to children and young people who might be struggling in school. Reach is the children and young people's part of Enquire which can help young people, parents and carers and professionals understand children's rights to be supported and involved in decisions, so they have an equal chance to flourish in their education.

- **Resolve** is an independent mediation service for parents and carers of children and young people with additional support needs. There is no charge for the service to parents and carers and it can be accessed when there are disagreements about any aspects of a child or young person's education that are not resolved locally. Resolve currently works in 15 local authority areas.

- **My Rights, My Say** is a support service which provides advice and information, advocacy (for children to prepare for and understand the consequences of their own and their parents' use of rights), legal

representation for Tribunal references and a service which independently seeks children's views to inform decision-making. Children in Scotland provides two parts of the service.

Children in Scotland also supports the **Inclusion Ambassadors**, a group of 22 secondary school-aged pupils who have a range of additional support needs and attend a variety of school provision. Current membership of the group represents 16 local authorities across Scotland. Evidence from the group in this document is taken from a recent report published on the groups work[1].

This submission is based on evidence shared with these services and from the Inclusion Ambassadors.

Key themes identified

The following themes have been identified on the impact of the pandemic on children and young people with additional support needs based on enquiries, cases and meetings. Due to the nature of the Children in Scotland services and projects these themes focus on provision of support for learning and the impact of school closures.

We believe these are all issues that should be explored further to ensure a full understanding of the impact of the pandemic on young people with additional support needs. In each of the areas outlined we have heard evidence of a range of experiences, this could be down to variations in experience regionally or indeed on a case-by-case basis.

1. Level of support and impact on learning

The Inclusion Ambassadors have met regularly online over the course of the pandemic. They reported that levels of support dropped during school closures. Calls from parents and carers to the Enquire helpline during the period confirmed this view, reporting that the experience of a drop in the levels of support appears to have been the case across all phases of the pandemic (i.e., when schools closed, when they reopened and in the period since reopening).

Specific themes and issues identified on the Enquire helpline relating to school closures include:

- Absence of individualised home learning appropriate to children's needs.
- Inconsistency and confusion about eligibility for hub places under the 'vulnerable child' definition.
- Related to the point above, a lack of access to hubs for families who felt this was needed for their children due to their needs or circumstances.

Overall, there were mixed messages about communication with families during school closures. The Resolve service found that positive communication between schools and families during school closures was reported but Enquire saw that parents and carers often felt there was very little communication.

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[1] **https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/IA_Report2021_Final-pdf.pdf**

Parents and carers contacting Enquire on the return to school noted changes or reductions to support in school for their child or young person due to covid restrictions.

Parents and carers contacting Enquire have also reported the longer-term impact or concern about:

- Long term reduction in support/ or the level of support for their child
- Delays in identifying needs
- Failure to plan for support (and transitions planning not taking place for school changes or leaving school).
- How behind with their learning children were on the return to school.

Since schools returned in August 2021, the Resolve mediation service reported seeing a significant pressure on staff – in particular their time which means there is less time to speak informally with families. This has the potential to have an impact as - in Resolve's experience - this is often where small niggles are listened to and addressed.

2. Technology

Across Children in Scotland's services and projects, 'technology' and access to it was a common theme during the period of school closures and remote home learning. Children and young people's experience of online learning has been variable – with some stating a preference and other reporting real challenges in engagement and support. Children have reported being included in online classes, but then being openly exposed as having an additional support for learning need causing feelings of embarrassment and withdrawal from the class.

Some children have reported preferring online learning as the pace and flexibility has been preferable, with some children saying that a blend of online and in person teaching would be the preferred option going forward. Indeed, some children have said they have struggled with the return to classrooms when a positive online experience was had.

A practical part of this concerned the use of Microsoft Teams and its functionality. Children and young people reported that Teams is not the easiest platform for them to use and engage through. However, some comments from the last Inclusion Ambassadors session suggested that this had improved in a few situations. Schools had got a better handle on how to use it and this was making it easier for people to check back on notes etc. The Inclusion Ambassadors group will be exploring this further in the coming months and would be happy to share further evidence with the Committee then.

Some children supported by My Rights, My Say reported how they disliked attending school before the pandemic. While other young people have reported feeling more comfortable asking for support while working remotely, suggesting there may be some benefits to using technology. The Resolve service has reported similar findings, with families being more confident to ask questions or report issues if they don't need to do it in person.

Children using My Rights, My Say have engaged well with the service using video conferencing platforms throughout the pandemic. Removing the option of face-to-face meetings has meant more emphasis being placed on identifying and being flexible about the communication preferences for children and young people. Feedback from children My Rights, My Say has worked with has given the service a greater awareness of the benefits of engaging with children and young people online. Remote work will continue to be an option for future work as long as it supports children and young people to access My Rights, My Say.

"I feel that working remotely has widened our knowledge and understanding, given children and young people access to opportunities and methods and also challenged our ability to adapt to those methods. A real positive for me is that young people have not been as negatively impacted by remote working as we may have assumed. It is the adults involved in the process that have had to challenge themselves and rethink what engagement actually is." **Children's Views worker**

However, this preference has not been replicated by members of the Inclusion Ambassadors. They have expressed a real desire to get back to face-to-face meetings of the group particularly because of the social element but also because of the impact working online has had for the amount that can be effectively covered during each session.

Overall, it is felt that the increased use of online engagement has been a positive thing for children and young people with additional support needs, but it must be one of the options for consideration in the future - the needs and preferences of the individuals must be considered in any decision making about the provision of learning and engagement activity.

3. Friends, socialising and change

Children in Scotland heard from members of the Inclusion Ambassadors group that they lost out on opportunities to socialise while at home during school closures and we know from work with the group that this is a particularly important to them. It was a key part of the recent vision statement the group produced which was one of the agreed actions in the Additional Support for Learning Action Plan[2].

The initial bubble situation was a challenge to them when schools re-opened. Young people felt they were missing out on opportunities to see friends. At the recent sessions, the Inclusion Ambassadors reported that they are starting to feel like this situation has improved slightly and they are getting to see friends more within school.

Both Enquire and Resolve had heard similar reports from parents and carers.

Parents contacting Enquire talked about the impact of school closures on their child in relation to:

- The negative impact on children and their families of the loss of support from school and routine.

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[2] https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/IA_Vision-Statement_Final.pdf

- The impact on their child of returning to school after the long absence.

The Resolve service had a number of referrals that involved children and young people who had school anxieties prior to covid, and the pandemic had made them virtually housebound/bedroom bound. Parents of children with social, emotional and behavioural needs reported a change in their child's behaviour at home following the pandemic restrictions.

4. Delays in planning and decisions

Both the Enquire and Resolve services identified issues with delayed timescales related to co-ordinated support plans (CSPs) and Tribunals which link to the level of support theme above.

Parents and carers reported the following to Enquire:

- Delays in timescales for CSPs as a result of the effective suspension of duties within the Additional Support for Learning Act.
- The pushing back of the placing request response deadline meant that families were finding they had even less time to prepare and plan for transitions with their children.
- Due to the extending timescales for appeal to refused placing requests some children may have to transition twice if they do not hear back before the start of the school year. [3]
- Children who needed but missed out on enhanced transitions faced attending a school they had not seen or visited before.

Enquire heard from families asking if their child can repeat a year because of how much they are struggling to learn at home or because transition plans and support have been so significantly impacted.

Resolve worked with families who found that extended Tribunal timescales caused extra distress during the pandemic and in several cases the child or young person was out of school during this time due to a disagreement over the placement.

5. Transition from school

Transitions are often challenging for children and young people but can be even more so for young people with additional support needs. Due to the school closures, Enquire advisors have heard from families:

- Where transition planning meetings have been cancelled or rescheduled for much later in the year.
- Where a young person was due to leave school, but the school closure has had huge impact on planning and preparing for their post-school destinations.

Children in Scotland has recently given its support to Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP's Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill. In

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[3] The legislation on placing request timescales and the transition planning duties under the Additional Support for Learning Act caused concerns for families before the pandemic so this deadline extension exacerbates this situation.

our response to the previous consultation on this Bill, we welcomed the weight and importance that proposals like a Transitions Plan, Transitions Strategy and Minister would give to the wider important and worrying challenges around health, education, social care transitions. At the time, though, we had reservations that these steps may not bring about the desired changes for disabled children and young people. However, we believe that the landscape disabled young people and their families are now facing has changed significantly.

For more information on this response please contact Sally Cavers, Head of Inclusion

Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)

EIS Submission to the Education, Children and Young People Committee on the Impact of Covid on Children and Young People with Additional Support Needs/ Who Are Care Experienced

The EIS, Scotland's largest teacher trade union and professional association, representing teachers across all sectors and all career levels, is pleased to provide written evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee on the impact of Covid on children and young people with additional support needs and those who are care experienced.

The information which is set out below has been gathered from members of the EIS national Additional Support Needs Network, from Executive Committee discussions and a meeting of ASN Teachers in one of our Local Association areas.

The comments pertain mainly to the observations and experiences of teachers working with young people within mainstream settings.

Rising incidence of additional support need

A common theme across a number of recent discussions has been the further increase in the numbers of young people presenting with an even wider array of and more acute additional support needs, as a result of the impact of the pandemic.

Many young people who did not have additional support needs before Covid struck, require significant additional support now as a result of their experiences over the duration of the pandemic. The societal and family contexts coupled with disruption to learning have meant that an increased number of children and young people now require additional support.

EIS members from various local authority areas have reported an increase in the numbers of children presenting with delayed development- for example, still wearing nappies or with minimal speech and language acquisition on arriving in Primary 1.

Also reported has been an increase in violent incidents arising from pupils' distressed behaviour, most notably among P1 and P2 children who traditionally have been less likely to exhibit violent behaviour.

It was recently reported to the EIS national executive Committee from one Local Association area, that over the period of a few days in that week, one Early Primary teacher had suffered a broken jaw and damage to the eye socket from being kicked in the face by a pupil; and another in a different school had a tooth knocked out, having been punched in the face by a child in Primary 2. Others at the meeting concurred based on experiences in their own areas that there is acute need relative to distressed behaviour among a larger cohort of young people than previously, yet Behaviour Support provision is another area in which resources have diminished significantly over the past decade.

Mental health impact

Within this context, more children and young people are presenting with mental health problems for which there is insufficient immediate or timely support.

CAMHS waiting lists are growing and while the Scottish Government may have set the wheels in motion with regards to alternative types of support to CAMHS, the wheels are turning too slowly to enable timely intervention for the many young people who are struggling currently. Not only does this impact negatively on their wellbeing, it impedes their ability to learn.

Counselling support, particularly within the Primary sector where even pre-pandemic more and more young people were presenting with mental health-related additional support need, is sparse.

Against such a backdrop of limited specialist wellbeing support, members report a rise in general anxiety, and in issues related to sleep and eating, across the board for pupils.

Impact of Covid-related bereavement

EIS members are reporting increased need for bereavement support for young people who have lost family members over the course of the pandemic. Given the socio-economic distribution of Covid deaths, this need will be greatest among children and young people from the poorest families and communities.

In one case reported, young people and staff continue to be distressed at the death from Covid of a teacher in the school.

The limited availability of bereavement support and the need to observe Covid safety protocols around visitors to school buildings have meant, however, that young people suffering the effects of bereavement are not getting the support that they need.

Impacts on young people with ASD

EIS members have reported that some young people with Autism experienced heightened levels of anxiety in relation to Covid infection risk, displayed, for example, by staying at home- 'hiding'- within a safe environment, for fear of catching Covid in school on door handles and via paper.

Some young people with very complex ASD needs struggled with mask-wearing protocols and being unable to see teachers' faces as they wore masks in accordance with guidance in the interests of mitigating the risks of infection for all.

Many young people with ASD struggled to make the transition from home learning where they had been relatively isolated back to school with 30 or more young people in a class, being confused about social distancing requirements, for example.

Impact on care experienced young people

One of our ASN-specialist members has observed that care experienced young people who are looked after at home appear to be more impacted than those looked after out of the home. This is suggested by a worsening of general behaviour and an increase in impulsive behaviours, more swearing, and use of transphobic and misogynistic language.

Impact on young people with English as an Additional Language

During periods of school closure EIS members reported concerns about the impact of the shift to online learning on young people from migrant or refugee communities who have English as an additional language and whose parents/ carers with varying degrees of proficiency in English were not all able to provide the support to their children that other parents were.

On return to school buildings, with the reality of pre-pandemic cuts to EAL service provision still very much being felt, the EIS remains concerned about the disproportionate impact of Covid on the learning of this cohort of young people, particularly those of refugee status who are in many cases likely to be experiencing the effects of displacement-related trauma.

Parents struggling to cope

It has been reported to the EIS that some parents of young people with more complex needs have sent them to school when they were infected with Covid, this perhaps reflective of parents' struggle to support their children at home.

Impact on learning

EIS members report, in the context of a specific focus on Literacy and Numeracy as part of the Recovery Curriculum, that the experiences of the pandemic and associated disruption to learning are impacting negatively on the development of young people's skills in literacy and numeracy.

Additional strain on resources

Prior to the Covid 19 pandemic, the EIS was campaigning strongly

in relation to the chronic under-resourcing of ASN provision, which has been subject to swinging cuts over the past decade or more, against a backdrop of increased austerity-related need, and large class sizes.

As teachers and other school staff have struggled to cope, the impact on workload, health and wellbeing has been significant. The EIS's 2018 all-member survey probed this area and found that:

- 78.2% of respondents (from a total of over 12,000) disagreed or strongly disagreed that provision for CYP with ASN in their school was adequate.
- EIS members were 62 times more likely to report feeling stressed 'frequently' or 'all of the time' at work if ASN provision was inadequate within their school.
- 42% of teachers working in Support for Learning said they regularly worked more than 8 extra unpaid hours per week.
- 86% of Support for Learning teachers said that their stress levels were high
- 52% of all respondents cited the struggle to meet the needs of young people with additional support needs as the single greatest cause of their stress at work.

Without there having been significant additional investment of resource prior to 2020, and the Morgan Review of ASL largely body-swerving the issue of under resourcing

of ASN provision, this picture, is likely, and appears from anecdotal evidence, to have worsened during the course of the pandemic. (The EIS is soon to launch an all-member survey which is designed to capture some new data in this area.)

In the meantime, there are reports of increased stress-related staff absence and burnout.

At times where Covid-related staff absence is particularly acute in the Special School context, the remaining staff are working constantly throughout the day without breaks and lunchbreaks to attend to essential personal care needs in addition to providing learning.

GIRFEC

EIS members are reporting greater need for Nurture provision but insufficiency of resources to provide it and an increase in the number of GIRFEC-related meetings yet with no increase in the number of staff able to plan for, attend and take forward the outcomes from such meetings. The impact of this is further delays in young people getting the support that they need and associated heightened distress.

Delayed assessment and diagnosis of additional support needs

Waiting times for assessment and diagnosis of young people's additional support needs is commonly in the region of 6-12 months, meaning that there are long delays in young people receiving the tailored, evidence-informed support that they need.

Geographical challenges

For some pupils in certain geographical areas, poor internet access, social isolation in small and remote communities, and lack of opportunities for after school activities, either individually or combined, are factors which can both intensify the level of need and heighten the barriers to the requisite support.

Lessons on what worked during school closure

During periods of school closure when school communities sought to respond to the needs of young people with additional support needs, many innovative approaches were taken that had nurture at the heart of them. For example, working with smaller groups of pupils to take them hillwalking, to engage them in crafts activities, and provide support for digital learning.

In addition to responding to the specific learning needs of pupils, significant additional investment is needed to support Nurture at this time, arguably for all pupils and students, and most definitely those with social and emotional additional support needs and/or who belong to the families and communities that have been disproportionately impacted by Covid.

Facing up to the challenge

The EIS continues to believe that the Scottish Government and Local Authorities need to be honest about the size of the challenge that we face with regards to ASN provision and about how we address it.

Scotland needs a long-term resourcing strategy- including action to reduce class sizes and significantly enhance the availability of specialist ASN support and expertise within schools- to match the scale of the promise to children and families made within the Additional Support Needs Act almost two decades ago; and to respond to the now even more urgent and larger scale need which has emerged as a consequence of the pandemic.

To continue to dodge the issue of resources and to tinker around the edges of fixing the problem does a huge disservice to many.

It is letting down children and young people with additional support needs, including those who are care experienced, whose wellbeing, learning and associated outcomes are negatively affected by lack of appropriate support.

It also does a disservice to the children and young people in our schools who do not have additional support needs and whose daily educational experiences are impacted by the classroom dynamics which emerge from the fact that there are very large numbers of young people beside them who do need extra help, yet only one teacher and an insufficient numbers of additional ASN teachers and support assistants to give that help and to respond to their own needs and entitlements as learners. Furthermore, the stress impact of these conditions for teachers has a negative effect on the learning environment for all learners. OECD research shows that where teacher wellbeing is sound, learning outcomes for young people are enhanced.

The inertia around ASN resourcing is also letting down families who see the damage that the lack of support does to their children, who are upset by it and are either, where they have capacity, forced into advocacy activity that they should not have to be engaged in; or where they do not have capacity, continue to be distressed by their child's struggle.

It is letting down the teachers and other school staff who are left to respond to an array of increasingly complex support needs and the distress of children and families that emerges when needs are unmet as a result of insufficiency of resources, on a daily basis.

And it will lead to failure of the collective mission to close the poverty related attainment gap.

In looking to recover from the impact of Covid, as with many other areas of society, a return to a pre-Covid 'normal', a pre-pandemic 'business as usual' mode, regarding support for children and young people with additional needs, including those who are care experienced, will be grossly insufficient.

Scottish Children's Coalition Services

Impact of the pandemic upon children and young people with additional support needs and care- experienced young people.

Background to the Scottish Children's Services Coalition

The Scottish Children's Services Coalition (SCSC) - www.thescsc.org.uk - is an alliance of leading providers of care and support to vulnerable children and young people, as well as to their families and carers.

We are committed to improving the lives of these children and young people, and our vision is for Scotland to be the best place in the world for them to grow up in. As a coalition we aim to achieve this through campaigning for better care and support. This seeks to ensure that they have access to a wide range of high-quality, well-resourced and easily accessible services, tailored to their individual needs and helping them achieve their full potential.

Our members deliver specialist care and support to children and young people with additional support needs (ASN) and mental health problems, as well as to their families and carers. They also provide care and support to care experienced children and young people, as well as to their carers.

Members of the SCSC are: Falkland House School- www.falklandhouseschool.org, LOVE Learning - www.l-o-v-e.org.uk, Spark of Genius - www.sparkofgenius.com and Young Foundations - www.youngfoundations.com.

The COVID-19 pandemic

Feedback from our members and other agencies points to the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had an incredibly damaging impact on those with additional support needs (ASN), as well as their families, widening the educational attainment gap.

It has served to exacerbate a deeply challenging situation that already existed pre-pandemic for vulnerable children and young people, who disproportionately come from more deprived communities.

Scientific evidence indicates that, particularly for children living with social deprivation, the risks to health and wellbeing of staying at home during the lockdown outweighed the risks of returning to school. Children suffered considerably as a result of school closures, with the burden falling disproportionately on those with ASN, especially those experiencing additional social disadvantages.(1)

The ongoing situation with the pandemic has widened existing inequalities, with unequal access to IT, varying levels of support and differences in family resources. This has proven even more difficult for those with ASN, especially those with more complex needs. Parents were often left caring entirely alone in the home environment, with an even greater impact on single parents.

[1] Scottish Government. *"Excellence and Equity during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Strategic Framework for Reopening Schools, Early Learning and Childcare Provision in Scotland*, 2020.

This is set against a background of escalating numbers of those with ASN, while the funding per pupil with ASN, number of specialist ASN teachers, and resourcing to third sector/community service support falls.

ASN background

In 2020, 226,838 pupils in Scotland's schools (publicly funded primary, secondary and special) were identified with ASN, representing just under a third of all pupils (32.3 per cent). Of these 58.0 per cent of are boys. (2) The number of pupils with ASN has nearly doubled (92.2 per cent) since 2012 from 118,011 pupils, an increase of 108,827. This represented 17.6 per cent of all pupils in that year. (3)

The increase in the number of pupils with ASN is due to a number of factors. These include increased awareness, better identification and continued improvements in recording those with ASN, as well as Increased survival rates for children and young people with complex needs leading to steeply increased numbers. In addition to this there has been an increase due to rising levels of poor mental health and social, emotional and behavioural issues, worsened by increasing levels of poverty and inequality.

Educational outcomes

It is too early to assess the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on those with ASN, but preliminary statistics point to a widening in the educational attainment gap as well as an escalation in mental health problems.

Leaver destinations

Leaver destinations for school leavers (2019/20) released by the Scottish Government on 15th June 2021 highlight the falling levels of school leavers with ASN, entering a positive destination nine months after leaving school. This includes the likes of further education, higher education, employment and training.

- While 87.2 per cent of 2019/20 school leavers with ASN were in a positive destination nine months after leaving school, this is a decrease on 2018/19 when the figure was 87.9 per cent. For those with no ASN the figures are 94.9 per cent and 95.1 per cent respectively.
- The gap between those school leavers with ASN and those with no ASN in a positive destination has increased from 7.2 per cent for 2018/19 to 7.7 per cent in 2019/20.

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[2] Scottish Government, *Summary statistics for schools in Scotland - 2020 Edition*, 15th December 2020, table 4.5. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-2020/pages/5/ (accessed 15th December 2020).

[3] Scottish Government, *Pupil Census 2020 supplementary statistics,* 23rd March 2021, table 1.5. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics/ (accessed 24th June 2021).

Co-ordinated support plans (CSPs)

A CSP is a legal document, the only education plans that are legal documents, requiring services such as education, health and social work to work together to give a child or young person the support they need. It provides some guarantees of entitlement to additional resources and legal redress, placing statutory duties on local authorities to review and ensure the provisions contained within it are being met.

Despite a Scottish Government promise that there would be no reduction in the proportion of pupils receiving them since their introduction in 2004, there has been a significant fall in the number of pupils with CSPs, from 3,448 in 2012 (4) to 1,534 in 2020 (5), amounting to a drop of 55.5 per cent (publicly funded primary, secondary and special schools). This is a reduction from 2.9 per cent to 0.7 per cent of those with ASN and currently amounts to 0.2 per cent of the pupil population.

While those with ASN come disproportionately from the most deprived neighbourhoods, they have a lower proportion receiving a CSP when compared with those from the least deprived neighbourhoods.

This clearly raises concerns that those requiring a CSP, which come predominantly from more deprived communities, are not receiving the guaranteed support required.

Mental health

The challenges facing those children with mental health problems, both prior to and created by the pandemic, and their inability to access adequate services has been well-documented.

Figures from Public Health Scotland indicate that at the end of June 2021, 1,686 children and young people had been waiting over a year for treatment from specialist child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) provided by the NHS. This figure represents a doubling from June 2020 (787). They also represent 14.4 per cent of those waiting for specialist treatment. (6)

While undoubtedly damaging, the impact of the pandemic on the mental wellbeing of many of our young people is not yet fully understood.

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4 Scottish Government, *Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland, No. 3: 2012 Edition*, 11th December 2012, table 3.5. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-3-2012-edition/pages/15/ (accessed 12th March 2018).

5 Scottish Government, *Summary statistics for schools in Scotland - 2020 Edition* (PDF link), 15th December 2020, table 4.5, p. 19. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2020/12/summary- statistics-schools-scotland-2020/documents/summary-statistics-schools-scotland/summary-statistics-schools-scotland/govscotper cent3Adocument/summary-statistics-schools-scotland.pdf?forceDownload=true (accessed 15th December 2020).

6 Public Health Scotland, *Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services: Waiting Times in Scotland, Quarter Ending 30th June2021*, CAMHS Waiting Times Tables (Excel), table 1b, 7th September 2021. Available at: https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-camhs-waiting-times/child-

Figures from August however indicating that self-harm among the young in Scotland was at its highest level for 14 years may be a sign of things to come. (7)

Referrals to social services

Referrals to child protection services fell during lockdown in over half of Scottish councils and plunged by more than a quarter in some areas. (8)

The biggest fall was in Renfrewshire, where referrals to children's services fell by 29 per cent, but a number of other local authorities recorded referrals dropping by more than 20 per cent.

It is no surprise that during the lockdown restrictions there has been a decline. The opportunities to identify where problems existed at an early stage have been absent and all the time that we're not identifying support that young people need, they're being damaged, whether this be through, for example, abuse or neglect.

Some of Scotland's most vulnerable children have slipped under the radar and that as the situation eases there will be an influx of referrals to already overstretched and under-resourced services.

There is potentially a whole generation of children and young people who are being traumatised, not being safeguarded, and that's simply not acceptable and will impact not only on the individual concerned but on society as a whole.

Resourcing for children with ASN

Reduction in ASN funding

Figures from the Scottish Government highlight that average spend per pupil on additional support for learning by local authorities in Scotland (primary, secondary and special education) has fallen from £4,276 in 2012/13 (9) to £3,224 in 2019/20 (10) (in cash terms). This amounts to an overall cut in spending of £1,052 per pupil, representing a 24.6 per cent drop.

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and-adolescent-mental-health-services-camhs-waiting-times-quarter-ending-30-june-2021/ (accessed 7th September 2021).

[7] The Scotsman, *Self- harm cases in children at highest level in Scotland in 14 years* , 13th August 2021.

Available at: https://www.scotsman.com/health/self-harm-cases-in-children-at-highest-level-in-scotland-in-14- years-3344687 (accessed 4th November 2021).

[8] Sunday Post, *Off the radar: Fears for vulnerable children as lockdown referrals fall* , 10th October 2021. Available at: https://www.sundaypost.com/fp/off-the-radar-fears-for-vulnerable-children-as-lockdown-referrals-fallif-children-are-not- in-school-it-is-less-likely-concerns-will-be-identified/ (accessed 4th November 2021).

[9] Scottish Parliament, *John Swinney MSP Written Answer*, table 3. 24th April 2017. Available at: http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W- 08627&DateTo=23/11/2017 23:59:59&SortBy=DateSubmitted&Answers=All&SearchFor=All&ResultsPerPage=10 (accessed 25th April 2017).

[10] Scottish Parliament, *Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP Written Answer*, table 4, 1st June 2021. Available at: https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S6W-00064&ResultsPerPage=10 (accessed 4th June 2021).

Spend per pupil with ASN has therefore slumped dramatically, while the number of pupils with ASN has escalated dramatically and the number of specialist teachers supporting them has fallen (see below).

Spend per pupil ranges from £1,737 in Edinburgh to £5,849 in the Shetland Islands, pointing to a 'postcode lottery' in spend across local authorities (see Annex 1 for spend per local authority).

Reduction in ASN teacher numbers

The number of ASN teachers in publicly funded schools has fallen by 578 over the period 2012 to 2020, from 3,389 to 2,860 (full-time equivalents), a drop of 529 equating to a cut of 15.6 per cent.[11] This is despite an 92.2 per cent increase over the same period in the number of pupils identified with ASN to 226,838 as highlighted previously, amounting to an increase of 108,827 pupils.[12] In 2012 while each ASN teacher was supporting 35 pupils with ASN, by 2020 this figure had risen to each teacher supporting 79 such pupils.

While we are in favour of a presumption of mainstreaming, the decline in resourcing leading to a lack of support makes this extremely challenging for those supporting children with ASN, as well as their peers.

Conclusion

The pandemic turned children's and families' lives upside down. Children's education and childcare were disrupted, mental health issues among parents and children increased, and some families who were already struggling were pushed to breaking point

It is vital that those with ASN get the care and support they need, especially during and as we come out of the current Covid-19 crisis. This is also key if we are to genuinely close the educational attainment gap as we know that those with ASN are disproportionately drawn from poorer neighbourhoods.

With evidence of cuts in spending per pupil with ASN and in the number of specialist teachers supporting this group, being able to achieve this is clearly challenging.

It is vital that the Scottish Government and local authorities work together to provide the necessary resourcing to address the needs of those children and young people with ASN, who represent some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society.

Without taking urgent actions we risk creating a lost generation of vulnerable children and young people impacted by COVID-19.

[11] Scottish Parliament, *Shirley-Anne Somerville, Written Answer*, 1st June 2021. Available at: https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/written-questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-00088 (accessed 11th June 2021).

[12] Scottish Government, *Pupil Census 2020 supplementary statistics,* 23rd March 2021, table 1.5. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics/ (accessed 24th June 2021

Annexe B

Education, Children and Young People Committee

17 November 2021

Covid 19: Additional Support for Learning

Introduction

In the following three weeks, the Committee will be taking evidence on the impact of the pandemic on education and young people. This week the Committee will take evidence from two panels with a focus on the pandemic and children with additional support needs.

This paper sets out the context of Additional Support for Learning (ASL). This was a significant area of concern for the Committee in the previous session and the Scottish Government and local government are working through recommendations of an independent review published in 2020. This paper then briefly outlines how the Scottish Government and the education system responded to the pandemic. The last two sections focus on the impact of the pandemic and recover from these impacts respectively.

Members will also be provided with submissions from witnesses and a separate SPICe paper which highlights a number of relevant publications.

Additional Support for Learning

A person has 'additional support needs' (ASN) if, for whatever reason, they are unlikely to be able to benefit from school education without additional support. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 provides that local authorities identify the additional support required by every child for whose school education it is responsible and "make adequate and efficient provision" for those children. Local authorities are not bound to provide support that would require unreasonable expenditure, however.

This definition of ASN is broad and includes, for example:
- very able children

- those who may need temporary additional support due to family circumstances such as bereavement

- children with physical or learning disabilities.

The 2004 Act provides for a presumption that a looked after child or young person has additional support needs. Aside from this, the 2004 Act does not list particular conditions or type of need.

The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 provides for a presumption that children will be educated in mainstream schools, with certain exceptions. Statutory guidance on the 2004 Act provides a non-exhaustive list of conditions, and statistics are gathered on the reasons for schools providing additional support. There is no requirement for diagnoses to access additional support.

The number of pupils identified as having one or more ASN has grown significantly in the past decade. The most recent summary school statistics published in December 2020 show that 32% of pupils were identified as having at least one ASN in September 2020. It is not clear how much of the growth is due to changing identification practice or underlying changes in Scotland's children, however.

The submission from SCSC stated to the Committee —

> The increase in the number of pupils with ASN is due to a number of factors. These include increased awareness, better identification and continued improvements in recording those with ASN, as well as Increased survival rates for children and young people with complex needs leading to steeply increased numbers. In addition to this there has been an increase due to rising levels of poor mental health and social, emotional and behavioural issues, worsened by increasing levels of poverty and inequality

In 2020 there were around 227,000 pupils identified as having ASN. Of these around 16,000 children and young people spend no time in mainstream classes – around half of these CYP are in special schools. The support for children with ASN can come from a range of sources, including: the classroom teacher, social work, health services, or specialist support. The discourse about ASL can focus on CYP who require a significant amount of support.

The 2004 Act places duties on local authorities at the level of the individual, ie it provides rights for individuals. Tensions can occur between families and local authorities about how these rights are met and the resources required.

ASL Review and response

An independent review on how ASL was being delivered in practice was announced by the Scottish Government in January 2019. The review was ed by Angela Morgan. The predecessor Committee took evidence from Ms Morgan on 18 November 2020, stakeholders on 20 January 2021, and the then Cabinet Secretary on 3 February 2021.

The review report, '[Support for Learning: All our children and All their Potential](#)' ("The Review") was published in June 2020.

The report focused on the experience of children and young people, their parents and practitioners. It highlighted five common threads of that experience.

- A disconnect between policy intention and the practical experience

- Significant challenges to meet the needs of children

- Not all CYP and those that support them are equally valued

- Children and young people and the parents, carers and professionals working closest to them all express frustration at not being listened to by people within the system who they perceive to have the power to act or make changes

- There are a range of strategic and operational factors which create the disconnect between policy and practice.

Some of the key points that the report makes can be grouped under culture, pedagogy and relationships with parents/carers. The Review set out four Key conditions for delivery. These were—

- Values driven leadership;

- An open and robust culture of communication, support and challenge – underpinned by trust, respect and positive relationships;

- Resource alignment, including time for communication and planning processes; and

- Methodology for delivery of knowledge learning and practice development, which incorporates time for coaching, mentoring, reflection and embedding into practice. (p27)

The review stated—

> "Unfortunately, we cannot assume and take for granted that all individual professionals are signed up to the principles of inclusion and the presumption of mainstreaming. Evidence emerged in the course of this work, which raises the deeply uncomfortable fact that not all professionals are. Values and beliefs, culture and mind-set are fundamental and there is more work to do in this regard." (p40)

Throughout the review is concerned with communication, good relationships and kindness in public service. Ms Morgan told the predecessor Committee in November 2020—

> "I found many dedicated, skilled and inspiring professionals who are enormously committed to children and young people who have additional challenges. I found that the system is overly dependent on those individuals,

and it is fragmented and inconsistent." (Col 2)

Ms Morgan set out her view that the concept of mainstream school should be updated to reflect the needs of all children, and that provision should be flexible and child-centred. This could be considered a conceptual shift from additionality to universality. The Review also discussed the balance between universal and specialist provision. In November, Ms Morgan said to the predecessor Committee—

> "There is a tricky balance between inclusion and specialism, and I comment on that in my main report. We need both—we need to be careful and understand that, if we were to develop a different concept for mainstreaming that was more genuinely inclusive, we would need to ensure that the specialism was not lost." (Col 9)

Identifying additional needs is a duty under the act. From there professionals are expected to plan and put in place support to meet the additional support needs. In some cases when a child needs a range of extra support planned, delivered and co-ordinated, this will entail a formal plan, either a non-statutory Child's Plan or a statutory Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP). A CSP is required when the child has complex or multiple needs, which are likely to last for more than a year, and involve another service providing support in addition to the education service. The CSP is particularly important as it opens up certain appeal routes to the Tribunal in cases of dispute. The Review noted that, while planning processes are important, they are a means to an end – ensuring the support is provided to the child. The Review stated—

> "A very significant level of energy is being devoted to child planning processes. This complies with process targets, but does not necessarily result in active delivery of support. This causes disappointment, frustration and anger for children, young people, and their families and a sense of failure and helplessness for staff." (p28)

A group is looking at CSPs as part of the response to Ms Morgan's review. An interim report of the [Co-ordinated Support Plans Short-Life Working Group](#) is expected to be published shortly.

The Review made a number of Recommendations in relation to teachers' professionalism, education and on-going development. (Recommendation 5.1) The Review's focus was on the capacity and practice of all teachers rather than specialist teachers.

The Review summarised the experiences of parents and carers it had engaged with as being characterised as being in fights or battles with the local authority. The provided a broad narrative of parents and carers' experiences where they had been negative—

- hope and belief that a request for help to a public service would be responded to;
- frustration with lack of information and restricted communication;
- hurt and anger at being ignored or dismissed; and

- loss of confidence and trust.

The Review recommended that—

"Schools and local authorities must work in partnership with parents and carers to develop, and deliver, ways of working together that support and promote positive relationships, communication and cooperation." (first bullet of Recommendation 6.1)

Response and update on progress

The [Scottish Government published an Additional Support for Learning: Action Plan on 21 October 2020](#). The Scottish Government stated that it, COSLA and ADES are "collaborative partners in this action plan" and the recommendations were all accepted or in one case partially accepted.

In 2019, the Scottish Government established the [Additional Support for Learning Implementation Group](#). The group's purpose is to "provide advice to Scottish Government, the Scottish Education Council and Scottish Ministers on key issues relating to the implementation of Additional Support for Learning." This group was charged with taking forward work on many of the recommendations.

The [Scottish Government and COSLA published a progress report](#) on delivering the recommendation of the Review on 1 November 2021. This set out the breadth of the task—

"Delivery of the measures set out in our joint action plan, will require continuous review to ensure that we achieve the broad and deep change necessary to achieve our ambitions that all children and young people are valued, respected, included and supported to achieve and succeed."

The progress report provided information on the work taking place to deliver the recommendations of the report. This included confirmation that the Young Ambassadors for Inclusion had developed [a vision statement](#).

The progress report stated—

"[We] must acknowledge the impact that Covid-19 continues to have on children and young, their families and professionals. We therefore commit to working closely with our partners in ASLIG to take the opportunity to review the current action plan, take stock of what we have achieved despite the challenging circumstances, and agree the priorities for the future to ensure that meaningful change is realised As part of this, we will collaborate with ASLIG to identify opportunities to re-engage with families and professionals to ensure that their voices inform the agreed priorities for the future.

"ASLIG will publish an updated action plan in Spring 2022. Alongside this, the Scottish Government and COSLA will work with partners to continue to deliver the measures set out in the ASL Action Plan to ensure that we achieve the broad and deep change necessary to achieve our ambitions that all children and young people are valued, respected, included and supported to achieve

and succeed. We will continue to report on progress and as part of the updated action plan in Spring 2022, ASLIG will set out future reporting cycles."

Resources

The remit of the Morgan Review asked that the support for children with ASN be considered within the existing funding available. The review did not consider the sufficiency of funding. Instead it recommended that Audit Scotland undertake work in this area. The review noted that spend on ASN can be unpredictable. It noted—

> "Expenditure on Additional Support for Learning comprises one of the areas of most unpredictable local authority spend associated with legal entitlements. However, senior figures in public sector finance confirmed that it tends to be overlooked at corporate level in local authorities due to the focus on the other very real challenges of providing adult and older people services."

Spend on ASL is largely a matter for local authorities. However, there are some more direct ways in which the Scottish Government supports ASL, including support for a number of grant-maintained special schools, the Enquire service run by Children in Scotland, and funding additional ASN classroom assistants in agreement with local government.

The SCSC's submission highlighted an answer to a PQ on the reported spending on ASL by local authorities. This shows that around 12% of spend by local authorities is identified as being on ASL. The preamble to the data stated—

> "Local authorities are asked to provide this data in line with guidance to ensure returns are completed on a consistent basis to allow for a reasonable degree of comparability. However, these figures may be affected by variations in local accounting practices and education strategies. It is important to bear this in mind when making comparisons between local authorities and years."

The submissions of the SCSC and the EIS both argue that the funding for ASL is insufficient. The EIS stated—

> "Scotland needs a long-term resourcing strategy- including action to reduce class sizes and significantly enhance the availability of specialist ASN support and expertise within schools- to match the scale of the promise to children and families made within the Additional Support Needs Act almost two decades ago; and to respond to the now even more urgent and larger scale need which has emerged as a consequence of the pandemic."

Progress of children and young peoples' care reform

Following publication of the Independent Care Review findings in February 2020, The Promise Scotland was set up by Scottish Ministers as an independent organisation to drive reform. Its goal is to enable Scotland to 'keep the promise' to

embed significant change in the care system by 2030 so that care experienced children have a voice in decisions about their care, feel loved and safe in their families and are supported to develop relationships, supported by a system that provides help and support for children, families and the workforce when required.

The Promise Scotland does not hold statutory powers or responsibilities; it exists instead to **oversee, drive and support change**. It works with organisations and individuals all over Scotland to help others deliver change for care experienced children and young people. Deputy First Minister, John Swinney MSP, has responsibility at cabinet level for cross-government delivery of 'The Promise'. The Promise Scotland aims to reflect the voices of care experienced people in its work at every stage, including having care experienced board members and staff involved in its work. In a written answer published in March 2021, then-Minister for Children and Young People Maree Todd stated the Scottish Government will "underpin the work that needs to be done to make the real transformation to developing policy".

The Promise's recently published Plan 21-24 is the first of three publications setting outcomes to be fulfilled by organisations and individuals across Scotland by 2024. Work will begin on Plan 25-27 in late 2023. The final plan, Plan 28-30, will follow this, setting out the final steps toward keeping the promise. The Promise Scotland will monitor progress organisations across Scotland make to deliver change. Annual rolling change programmes will be produced to provide a framework for delivery. Change Programme One is the first of these.

Members may wish to explore with the panels:

1. **Whether the approach and recommendations of the Morgan Review remain relevant in supporting children with ASN and their families post pandemic.**

2. **Does recovery from the pandemic necessitate accelerated progress on the Morgan Review and the Promise?**

Scottish Government response to the pandemic

2020 and 2021 have been dominated by the effects of and response to the Coronavirus pandemic. In March 2020, schools were physically closed to most children. Their education was continued through remote learning. Schools reopened fully in August 2020. However, the second national lockdown at the turn of the year once again meant children were, for the most part, learning remotely. In the weeks up to Easter 2021, in person schooling was phased in for different age groups with a full return after the Easter break.

Supporting the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of remote learning has been a key policy focus for national and local government. Schools are more than places of learning. They are also where children are supported and plans on returning to schooling have prioritised supporting young people's wellbeing.

The Scottish Government sought to work collaboratively with stakeholders in

response to the pandemic. It quickly established the Covid-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG), which in turn established a number of working groups covering a range of topics. These groups advised on significant policy decisions and supported the production of associated guidance.

Put simply, the Government's role was threefold. To make policy decisions, often backed up in law through the Education Continuity Directions. To support the collaborative approach to those decisions, the production of guidance and the delivery on the ground. Lastly the Scottish Government provided additional resources.

The response to the pandemic has required significant efforts from across the system. Teachers, school leaders, local and national agencies all had to adapt to a fast-changing environment.

Education Scotland reports on the January school closures

During the second school closures in January, Education Scotland undertook weekly reviews of practice. A summary covering the first five of these stated—

> "Local authorities and schools are better prepared and more equipped to deliver remote learning. They have learned from the experiences of the previous lockdown and have responded quickly to ensure learners can access remote learning. Local authorities and schools have taken active steps to improve children's and young people's access to resources by using additional funding, including Pupil Equity Funding to purchase digital resources and tools for learners."

The summary also noted that, compared to the Spring 2020 school closures, communication with families had improved. There was a string focus on pastoral support and monitoring wellbeing and learners also felt that the experience of learning in the second lockdown was better than the first.

The fourth and the tenth Education Scotland reviews in this series are of relevance to this session. These were:

Schools: a focus on meeting learning needs, including those with additional support needs was based on discussions across 127 schools including 80 primary, 36 secondary and 11 special schools in late January 2021. It found, among other things—

> "Schools recognise the importance for children and young people, who require additional support in their learning, being able to achieve success in a range of ways. They provide opportunities for their learners to participate in fitness classes, sign language groups and charity work. Often, these include learning outdoors and promote learning away from the screen. Schools take time to celebrate children's and young people's successes through achievement of awards and certificates."

[…]

"Most schools [75-90%] work in partnership with other agencies to support children and young people with additional needs. This includes educational psychologists, teachers specialising in autism, and speech and language therapists. Schools are deploying specialist and support staff in a range of ways to help meet children's and young people's needs."

[…]

"A few schools [less than 15%] reported that some learners who require additional support find it challenging to use digital devices. In these circumstances, schools are working to ensure families have access to hands on, practical resources that will allow children and young people to learn at home."

And—

"In a few schools [less than 15%], learners with more complex additional support needs attend school full time.

The review recommended that the approaches taken by schools to provide personalised support for those children and young people with complex additional support needs be shared.

[Approaches for providing learning for children and young people with complex learning needs](#) was published in March 2021. The aim of this report was to highlight and share successful approaches to remote learning taken in a small number of schools. This report found that:

- Local Authority support and professional learning supported improvement

- Schools autonomously allocated resources and provided personalised approaches to meet individual learning needs; and

- Engagement with parents and carers had increased.

The report identified the following areas of improvement—

- "Continue to improve approaches to assessing learning and evaluating the progress of learners with complex needs.

- "Ensure a focus on planning for transitions to reduce any anxiety and support change.

- "Learn from their experiences of remote learning to identify what has worked successfully that could be continued post-pandemic to support learners with complex needs."

Hubs and online learning

While schools closed to most children in Spring 2020 and from January 2021, in-person education was available for keyworkers and vulnerable children. In terms of defining vulnerability, Scottish Government guidance in the first school closures was relatively light touch, with local authorities having significant discretion, and there was an expectation that individuals with complex ASN would continue to receive the necessary support.[4]

Prior to the second school closures, the Scottish Government published guidance which included a definition of vulnerability. Decision making was devolved to local authorities but vulnerable children could, according to the guidance, include looked after children, children 'on the edge of care', and with pupils with ASN, where there are one or more factors which require significant or co-ordinated support. Schools or local authorities retained discretion on attendance at hubs.

Scottish Government guidance on supporting children and young people with complex additional support needs published in January 2021 stated—

> "Only children and young people who have been identified as vulnerable or children of keyworkers should currently [in January 2021] attend school. Not all children and young people with complex additional support needs will be assessed as vulnerable as defined in the most recent guidance. The aim of providing continued care to vulnerable children is to prioritise their continued safety and welfare which may rely on the support delivered within a school setting. Those who work directly with children and young people with complex additional support needs are best placed to identify which children and young people are vulnerable and should attend schools at this time.

> "When determining which vulnerable children should attend school in person, local authorities and schools should have regard to the overarching policy aim … to reduce the number of children, young people and adults from different households interacting in-person within communities (including schools) as far as possible, in order to prevent COVID-related harms. If it is possible for children and young people, including those with complex additional support needs, to be cared for safely and have their learning supported sufficiently well at home, that approach should be the preferred one. It should not be assumed automatically that all children with complex additional support needs are within the category of 'vulnerable' in this context."

Interpretation of vulnerability varied. Celcis' submission to this Committee stated—

> "The criteria for accessing education hubs (children of key workers and 'vulnerable' children) meant that some children and families who would have benefited from this vital support missed out due to the variable and inconsistent ways that local areas assessed 'vulnerability.' Whilst initial rigidity in these criteria did become more flexible, not all care experienced children were assessed or prioritised for this support, despite many being on

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[4] See the then Cabinet Secretary's comments on 19 March 2020, (col 36)

compulsory supervision orders."

The Scottish Government published daily data on the attendance at schools when they were only open for children of key workers and vulnerable children. Between mid-January and mid-February attendance at all school was between 6-8% on most days. The figure for secondary schools was around 3%, and for primary schools it was 9-11%. The figure for special schools was more volatile, ranging between 13% and 21%.
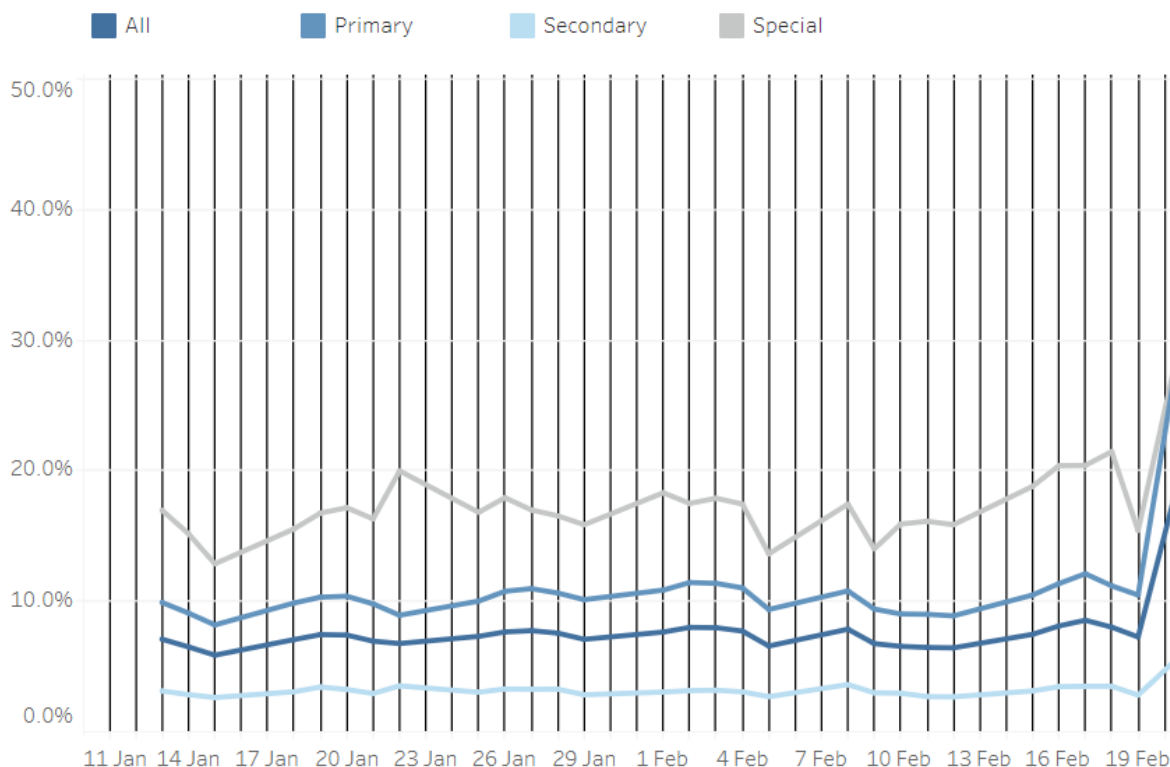
Additional resource

The Scottish Government has made available significant additional resource to local authorities to support the school system in the past two years. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) education recovery: key actions and next steps document published in October 2021 stated—

> "Work to support children and young people has been a top priority since the very start of the pandemic, and over £450m of additional funding has already been committed during 2020/21 and 2021/22 as part of education recovery. £240m of that total has already been provided for the recruitment of extra staff to ensure resilience and to provide additional support for learning and teaching. In addition a further £145.5m is being added permanently to the local government settlement from April 2022. This will allow local authorities to offer sustained employment of additional teachers and support staff.

> "Further significant funding is being made available for a range of initiatives that are important to education recovery, including the provision of free school breakfasts and lunches all year round for all children in P1-7, digital devices

for every child, abolition of fees for instrumental music tuition, removal of core curriculum charges, and the full rollout of 1,140 hours of high-quality Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)."

Members may wish to explore with the panels:

3. **How central were the needs of children with ASL or Care Experienced children and their families in the Scottish Government and local authorities' responses to the pandemic?**

4. **How were the voices of children with ASL or Care Experienced children and their families heard in decision making about school closures and other restrictions?**

5. **What was the experience of children and young people attending hubs? To what degree did these hubs support the learning and wellbeing of children with ASN who attended?**

6. **The degree to which additional support needs were met for children not attending schools or hubs?**

7. **Have the panels seen evidence that the funding for additional resource has been directed to ASL?**

Evidence of the impact of the pandemic

The [Scottish Government's Coronavirus (COVID-19) education recovery: key actions and next steps](#) document stated—

"During periods of lockdown, some learners will have had positive experiences, enjoying the extra time with family and developing their digital skills and independent learning. Research shows us, however, that COVID-19 has had adverse consequences on the health and wellbeing of some learners, as well as their attainment."

Data on the quantitative impact of the pandemic in educational terms in Scotland is patchy. Indeed, it is likely to be too early to say what the longer-term impacts of the pandemic will be. These impacts are likely to be multifaceted and complex. A rapid [review undertaken by the UCL Social Research Institute in September](#) stated—

"This review has been carried out at a particular phase of the pandemic, when it is still too early to assess what the separate effects for education have been of the pandemic, the lockdown, and the attendant social, economic and political challenges. What has appeared consistently in the commentary on the pandemic has been a theme of the interconnectedness of the education sector with all other areas of public policy and social relationships. …

Therefore, it is challenging to separate out harms due specifically to closure of schools and harms due to other factors connected with the pandemic."

The same review set out the range of harms highlight in literature on the pandemic. These were impact on "children's learning and attainment, mental health and wellbeing, physical health and nutrition and increased exposure to risk".

Some evidence suggests that the initial impact on mathematics has been greater than that on literacy.[5] Literature consistently highlights impacts likely falling most heavily on those who were in some way disadvantaged prior to the pandemic, thereby potentially widening educational inequalities. Celcis' submission stated—

> "Structural inequalities that existed prior to the pandemic have been compounded for many families. The 'digital divide' and levels of poverty and inequality have been brought into stark focus and must be addressed in order to ensure all children and families have equity of access to supportive services."

Advice from Education Scotland set out how children from more deprived background's health and wellbeing and learning at home could been disadvantaged compared to their more affluent peers. Health and wellbeing factors listed included greater financial and therefore emotion strain in the household, difficulty accessing services, and families at greater risk to the virus. Factors limiting learning at home included, lack of quiet spaces to undertake work, less access to books, less time undertaking school work at home. There is a correlation between children identified as having ASN and material deprivation.

In addition, a report by the Scottish Government published in July 2021 on the experiences of vulnerable children, young people, and parents found—

> "Children and young people who had had tailored additional support for their learning prior to the pandemic, such as those with Additional Support Needs (ASN) or those with limited English, found it very difficult to take part in home learning when this support was removed, and felt that they were falling further behind their peers as a result. These groups called for increased 1-to-1 support from teachers, or face to face contact. Some children and young people with ASN were also particularly affected by the change in their daily routines.

> "Another issue relevant to several groups was the suitability of online service provision, including some remote technology and social media. Some children and young people with ASN were unable to use video calls or social media due to their health conditions, or found it very difficult to engage with. Some participants with domestic abuse experiences within their home also struggled to find private places to make use of remote support services, and some were unable to access support that had previously been provided face to face outside the home."

Submissions from the participants of this evidence session provided valuable information on the impacts on different groups of young people. EIS' submission

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[5] See Coronavirus (COVID-19): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues - evidence on children, schools, early learning and childcare settings and transmission- summary report

provided intelligence from its network of teachers. This identified:

- A rising incidence of ASN and increased violence, particularly at early primary level.
- Increasing "anxiety, and in issues related to sleep and eating, across the board for pupils" with insufficient specialist services or support;
- Increased need for bereavement support;
- Children and young people with ASD struggling with moving between home and school-based learning as well as mask wearing;
- Particular impacts on children with English as an additional language, whose parents may not have the language skills to support home learning;
- Experiences of the pandemic and associated disruption to learning are impacting negatively on the development of young people's skills in literacy and numeracy

SCSC's submission stated—

"The pandemic turned children's and families' lives upside down. Children's education and childcare were disrupted, mental health issues among parents and children increased, and some families who were already struggling were pushed to breaking point."

ARCH's submission provided evidence of some of the impacts on Autistic and neuro-diverse children and their families. It said—

"The lockdown experience created such an adverse context for our autistic children and young people, who were bombarded by daily catastrophising media articles, usually accompanied with graphic visuals of mortality and infection levels and led to conversations within families and other networks about impending mass deaths. … Many autism families experienced additional stress due to the requirement to complete schoolwork within family homes. This presented issues related to a clash of context, as many autistic C&YP struggled to undertake school-related tasks at home given their literal view that 'school is school' and 'home is home'."

Children in Scotland's submission reported that—

"Parents and carers contacting Enquire have also reported the longer-term impact or concern about:

- Long term reduction in support/ or the level of support for their child
- Delays in identifying needs
- Failure to plan for support (and transitions planning not taking place for school changes or leaving school).
- How behind with their learning children were on the return to school."

Members may wish to explore with the panels:

8. **To what degree are the impacts on children and young people from the closure of schools or the wider impacts of living through the pandemic?**

9. **What positives should be taken from the pandemic for children with ASN, looked after children and their families? Have children with certain conditions, age and stage, or family circumstances fared better than others?**

10. **Does the panel have evidence of increased neglect, abuse or domestic violence in Scotland?**

11. **Since schools returned in Spring, has the panel seen positive changes as children and young people reconnected with schooling and other services?**

Recovery

The [Scottish Government's Coronavirus (COVID-19) education recovery: key actions and next steps](#) document notes the significant likely impacts on children and young people. It frames some of the responses to pandemic as a renewed focus on existing priorities. It said—

> "While the global pandemic has forced us to reflect upon learning in new and unexpected ways, our fundamental ambition around [the vision and priorities set out in the National Improvement Framework] remains undiluted. As well as the moral imperative to support our current generation of children and young people, this is also an essential investment in the future of our society. We must all invest time, hope and attention in their social development and educational achievements, and we must ensure our work is underpinned by a rights-based approach, shaped by what children, young people and their families and carers tell us."

The key actions and next steps document sets out a wide range of policy actions the Government is or will be taking forward in school education and early years. More detail on this is included in a separate SPICe paper provided at **Annexe C** to this briefing. As noted above, this includes additional resource which is to support extra staffing, access to digital devices and mitigations to improve safety in schools.

In keeping with the Scottish Government's broad approach to education where significant power sits with local authorities and schools, the specifics of the actions to support education recovery will be left to local decision-makers. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills told Parliament [on 3 June 2021](#)—

> "It is right that local authorities, schools and headteachers, who know their pupils best, decide what the package looks like, instead of a diktat from here that assumes one size fits all. That would be the wrong way to go about it. Surely, we should empower schools."

To support this localised action, Education Scotland has produced guidance. [Recalibrating Equity and Social Justice in Scottish Education: Bouncing forward after COVID-19 lockdowns](#) identified "six broad principles which can be used to help schools and local authorities consider their use of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding and supports to recalibrate equity and help learners to bounce forward after

COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures." These principles included prioritising re-engagement with learning, identifying learners most impacted by poverty & COVID-19 (including learners with ASN), and providing high quality universal and targeted support.

The Scottish Government's Equity Audit published in January 2021 stated—

> "Closing the poverty-related attainment gap remains a key focus of the Scottish Government. Education remains, by far, the most effective means we have to improve the life chances of all of our young people. That has not changed. If anything, the disproportionate impact that closing our schools had on the most socio-economically disadvantaged in our society has demonstrated even more clearly the vital role that they play."

The International Council of Education Advisers' second report was published in December 2020. It said—

> "This is not a time for getting back to normal. It is not even time to develop a modified new normal. It is time to look to the future to redesign Scottish education as a universally designed system for all contingencies and disruptions. This system can and should develop self-directed learners; provide access to digitally-based learning as a human right; transform assessment to be continuous, inclusive and responsive; and ensure that all students and teachers are equipped with online and outdoor capabilities that will be pandemic-proof in the future and significantly better in the present. All of this can and should occur within a universally designed system that becomes increasingly inclusive, responsive, agile and collaborative, with changes in government resource allocations that reflect this shift."

Annexe C highlights a number of papers from Scottish, UK and international organisations. Several are concerned with how the response to the pandemic should be approached. Some themes from those papers are:

- Support social and emotional needs of learners;
- Support teachers and staff's wellbeing and capacity;
- Include parents/carers;
- Encourage innovation and build on innovative practices necessitated by the pandemic;
- The primacy of in-person teaching and learning;
- Measuring and understanding the scale and type of learning loss and health and wellbeing issues and supporting schools to do this.

The submissions make a number of suggestions on how to move forward supporting children and young people with ASN.

ARCH's submission made a number of specific suggestions. These includes—

- Mandatory workforce training in autism awareness for all undergraduate and qualified teachers, social care, and health staff.

- Create systems to identify, monitor, build and maintain the emotional and mental wellbeing of autistic C&YP.
- Build positive partnership relationships between autistic C&YP, parent carers and staff to ensure their voice is heard and views respected.

Celcis' submission called for—

"Regular, attuned and timely support is required from trusted adults to understand children's individual needs, and plan for and provide the support they require. The workforce must have the skills, capacity and emotional support to provide this."

Celcis also called for: support for the workforce, ensuring participation of young people in the decisions that affect them, and ensuring equitable access to digital connectivity.

EIS' submission suggested that wellbeing will need to a key focus. It said—

"In addition to responding to the specific learning needs of pupils, significant additional investment is needed to support Nurture at this time, arguably for all pupils and students, and most definitely those with social and emotional additional support needs and/or who belong to the families and communities that have been disproportionately impacted by Covid."

And, as noted above, the EIS also argued that the overall resource to support children with ASN has been insufficient prior to the pandemic. It said—

"In looking to recover from the impact of Covid, as with many other areas of society, a return to a pre-Covid 'normal', a pre-pandemic 'business as usual' mode, regarding support for children and young people with additional needs, including those who are care experienced, will be grossly insufficient."

This was echoed by the SCSC whose submission stated—

"It is vital that the Scottish Government and local authorities work together to provide the necessary resourcing to address the needs of those children and young people with ASN, who represent some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society."

Members may wish to explore with the panels:

12. **How are local authorities, schools and professionals approaching recovery from the pandemic? What is working well?**

13. **Whether the panel consider the response to the pandemic requires greater commitment to existing priorities and processes or if a qualitative change in how additional support needs are met is required?**

14. **How much of the responsibility for recovery from the pandemic in schools should be devolved to school and local authority levels? How should schools and local authorities be held accountable for progress?**

15. **What support do schools and teachers need to be able to identify the level of support required?**

16. **What support do schools and teachers need to be able to identify appropriate ways to support wellbeing and any lost learning for children with ASN?**

17. **How have teachers and support staff's wellbeing been supported in the past two years? How important is this in supporting children with ASN?**

18. **What have been the barriers to engage or re-engage parents and carers in their children's learning?**

19. **The panel's views on increased learning time or tutoring as methods to catch up on lost learning? To what degree are these approaches taking place in schools?**

20. **Whether planning processes and multi-agency support has been fully re-established to support children and young people and their families?**

Ned Sharratt, Senior Researcher (Education, Culture), SPICe Research
11 November 2021

Annexe C

Education, Children and Young People Committee

17 November 2021

Covid 19: Relevant Papers

Introduction

In the following three weeks, the Committee will be taking evidence on the impact of the pandemic on education and young people. To support this work, this paper identifies a number of publications on the impact and response the pandemic.

This paper is not intended to be an exhaustive literature review, the intention is to provide an overview of some work and guidance by key international, UK and Scottish organisations.

Scottish Government

Coronavirus (COVID-19) education recovery: key actions and next steps

https://www.gov.scot/publications/education-recovery-key-actions-next-steps/

The Scottish Government published this plan on 5 October.

This plan placed recovery within both the existing policy framework and plans for improvement and the planned reform in response to the OECD review (and other reports). The new approach to the Scottish Attainment Challenge will also reflect priorities to support children impacted by poverty.

ELC

The plan discussed the expansion to 1,140 hours and future plans to expand this offer to 1 and 2 year olds, as well as wraparound childcare for school aged children.

Specifically in terms of support in the face of the pandemic, the plan highlighted a number of actions, such as the promotion of outdoor learning and other existing programmes.

Health and wellbeing

This section refers to Scottish Government's Mental Health Transition and Recovery Plan. It highlights the support for children and young people the Scottish Government already put in place and the funding provided.

It also noted plans to refurbish play parks.

Supporting Learning and Attainment

Highlighted first in this section was the priority to ensure schools are kept open. It also referenced the ICEA's call for a pandemic-proof education system (see below) and planned reforms to the curriculum.

A key intervention of the Scottish Government has been to provide resource to local authorities to employ additional staff. Operationally, how these staff are deployed is a matter for the individual local authorities. The plan provided a case study which noted—

> "Where additional staff had been allocated to a school, these teachers and pupil support assistants mainly carried out targeted work with small groups or individual pupils. This work addressed the emotional wellbeing of pupils, e.g. to support re-engagement with school for those who were most anxious about doing so. Another focus was reinforcing and revisiting key learning in literacy and numeracy with identified pupils. Work was carried out with targeted groups and with whole classes. Additional staff either worked directly with identified groups or released permanent school staff to provide this targeted support."

Education Scotland's role in providing advice and support was also highlighted.

The Scottish Government stated it would produce a "recovery plan for parental involvement and engagement, which we will develop in the first half of the academic year". It also discussed improvements required to embed young people's voices across the system.

The National e-Learning Offer will be maintained as a resource for pupils who may need to self-isolate. The digital offer is planned to be further developed including through the delivery of a National Digital Academy "which will form a key part of an evolving pandemic proof education system". The plan also noted the intention to provide digital devices and internet connections where required.

The plan also set out broader policy activity, such as seeking to reduce contact time.

Ensuring equity

The plan noted that the Scottish Attainment Challenge would continue and funding would be increased.

Additional Support Needs

This section begins with the observation that—

> "The pandemic has had a significant impact on children and young people with additional support needs, and our goal during these challenging times has been to maintain attendance and engagement in learning wherever possible."

It noted continued funding for ASN support assistants and work to take forward the Morgan review.

National Qualifications

This section described the work to certificate learning in 2020 and 2021. It also noted that the Government will "continue to monitor the approach to National Qualifications, taking action and implementing any contingencies if necessary to mitigate any further disruption for learners". Further the Government planned to "set out details on further support available for learners by the end of October".

Supporting Positive Destinations For Young People

This section discussed support to Further Education, Higher Education and Community Learning & Development.

Supporting the Workforce

This section noted that further £750,000 package of support will be offered to support the education workforce in 2021/22. The 2021/22 package of support will include:

- The development of Staff Wellbeing Communities of Practice;

- A Professional Learning and Leadership (PLL) coaching programme, coach professional development and a 1:1 Coach matching;

- Building Coaching Skills capacity across Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs);

- 1:1 National Coaching offer;

- Coaching and Mentoring support for educators from minority ethnic backgrounds;

- A 'Stepping Stones' Programme.

Monitoring and Reporting Outcomes

This section noted that Education Scotland would undertake national thematic reviews to support improvement and identify what is working well and highly effective practice. Education Scotland produced similar weekly thematic reviews in early 2021.

The remainder of this section of the plan discusses routine data releases and the new Health and Wellbeing Census.

Experiences of vulnerable children, young people, and parents during the Covid-19 pandemic

https://www.gov.scot/publications/experiences-vulnerable-children-young-people-parents-during-covid-19-pandemic/pages/1/

This report highlighted findings of "qualitative research conducted with a range of children, young people and parents in vulnerable or seldom heard groups, carried out to explore their lived experiences during and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic."

This work found that participants reported declines in mental wellbeing for vulnerable children and young people and their parents. It also found that some services were less easy to access. Some groups found remote working difficult or stressful.

Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues - evidence on children, schools, early learning and childcare settings and transmission- summary report

https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-evidence-on-children-schools-early-learning-and-childcare-settings-and-transmission-from-covid-19---summary-report/pages/health-and-wider-consequences-of-covid-19-for-children-and-young-people/

In August 2021, the Scottish Government published a report by the Advisory Sub-Group which summarised the evidence on children, schools, early learning and childcare settings and transmission from COVID-19.

This included a section on the "Health and wider consequences of COVID-19 for children and young people".

These harms included mental wellbeing. In this regard the report stated—

> "There is consistent international review-level and UK evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic and the related public health control measures have adversely affected the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people with a range of negative emotional, behavioural and wellbeing outcomes reported. Adolescents and girls were reported to be more affected than children and boys, respectively."

However, the report noted that studies provide mixed pictures in terms of the impact on mental and physical health, with findings of positive and negative impacts. A similarly mixed picture in terms of educational outcomes. It said—

> "International review-level evidence about the effect of COVID-19 related school closures on educational outcomes is mixed, with some studies reporting a negative effect and others reporting a positive effect. Younger children and those from low-income households have been found to be more adversely affected. In an English study, the estimated learning loss of learning in reading after the first COVID-19 related school closures was 1.8 months for primary school-aged children and 1.7 months for secondary school pupils. The learning losses in mathematics were greater. On average, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds had experienced greater learning losses than their more affluent peers."

The report noted that international evidence points to restrictions leading to a reduction of referrals to children's services for "potential abuse, neglect and maltreatment of children and young people".

The report noted that some of the evidence should be treated with caution. It noted—

> "Many of the studies that examine the impact of the pandemic and related restrictions on children and young people's health and wellbeing use cross-sectional designs with recruitment processes that introduce a source of bias. There tends to be reliance on self-report or parent-report measures. Often, it is not possible to tell how representative the participants are of a general population."

Second ICEA report

[The International Council of Education Advisers' second report was published in December 2020](#). It focused on two priority themes:

- navigating the pandemic and beyond: redesigning schooling, teaching and learning; and

- governing and leading education system change and improvement

The ICEA recommended that the education system should aim to be universal. That is accessible by design to everyone and robust to deal with interruptions; key to this would be building on the digital aspects of education. It also affirmed the 'primacy of physical schools' along with an integrated and universal online service and the capacity to use this effectively. The ICEA argued that alongside this would need to be a focus on self-directed learning, which "includes self-motivation, time management, ability to screen out distractions, capacity for self-assessment, knowing when and how to seek assistance, self-regulation, and related skills."

The report suggested: greater focus on outdoor learning, reform to the assessment and examination system; the re-evaluation of CfE and the introduction of cyclical

curriculum reviews; include pupils, parents/carers and communities as partners in education.

The ICEA also recommended that the Scottish Government continue to develop a system with distributed responsibility. School leaders were identified as needing focused support as well as supporting the teaching profession more widely to build capacity in digital skills, outdoor learning and collaborative practice.

Equity Audit

The Scottish Government published *Coronavirus (COVID-19): impact of school building closures - equity audit* on 13 January. The equity audit focused on the impact of the school closures from March to August 2020. This included a literature review which found:

> "Considerable differences between the educational and learning experiences of pupils from more and less advantaged backgrounds. Whilst educational concerns are widespread, as revealed for example by surveys of parents and of pupils themselves, a range of differences in the learning experiences between these two groups are suggested by the literature."

In this respect, the Equality Audit identified a number of differences between the experience of children and young people from more and less advantaged backgrounds. These included—

- Time accessing learning

- Access to remote learning

- Access to resources to support home learning in relation to children and young people from more and less advantaged backgrounds – this includes digital disadvantage, access to adequate space, and parental support for learning

- children and young people's concerns about home learning

- parents' concerns about supporting home learning

The Equity Audit highlighted evidence that suggests that the negative impacts on attainment and "learning loss" is felt more strongly by socio-economically disadvantaged pupils or schools with higher numbers of socio-economically disadvantaged pupils.

The literature review also examined work on how teachers and schools' practice can be most effective. Key themes that are prominent in the literature on practice responses include:

- challenges involved in moving to online/remote or blended models of teaching;

- challenges in adapting tasks to the online environment;

- the lack of peer support for teachers;

- lack of peer interaction for pupils which is identified as motivation for learning; and

- variation in availability of technology (connectivity and hardware) for pupils, with socio-economically disadvantaged pupils being most affected.

In terms of remote learning, the Equity Audit referred to an EEF study which indicated—

> "There was a need to support learners to be able to work independently. For children experiencing challenges with self-regulation, they would benefit from more detailed support through, for example, daily plans or checklists."

The Equity Audit also examined issues such as the use of blended learning, and re-opening schools.

Overall, the Equity Audit identified five broad factors driving the quality of educational experiences and attainment during the pandemic. These were—

- Health and wellbeing support.

- Digital infrastructure and connectivity.

- Support to parents and families.

- Teaching provision and the quality of learning.

- Support for teachers and the wider workforce.

'In Isolation, Instead of School' (Iniss): Vulnerable Children's Experiences Of Covid-19 And Effects On Mental Health And Education

https://www.cso.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/COVEDI2016-1.pdf

This small scale project was undertaken by researchers at the University of Edinburgh under the Rapid Research in Covid 19 programme. It was completed in October 2020 and explored the effects of the Spring 2020 lockdown and subsequent return to school.

The project surveyed young people, between a third and a half reported increased mental health difficulties due to school closures, exam cancellations, or the pandemic itself.

The project also ran focus groups and participants "often drew on examples from experience within their peer or friendship groups" to identify groups of people who might have been particularly affected. These groups were—

- young people with pre-existing mental health conditions;

- young people who receive additional support with learning;

- young people living in households where there is violence and abuse;

- young carers; and

- members of other minority groups, such as LGBTQI.

Participants also reported as opining that, "when schools re-opened to all pupils in August 2020, there was too little support for pupils typically seen as vulnerable, but also for the generality of pupils". Furthermore, "many felt that schools focused too much on 'getting back to normal', and offered too few opportunities for pupils to reflect on the impact of the pandemic".

Education Scotland

Education Scotland has several pieces of guidance to support schools in the response to the pandemic.

https://education.gov.scot/improvement/covid-19-education-recovery/

A number of these resources are to support staff and pupils' wellbeing. There appear to be few concrete examples of how to mitigate any learning loss.

Recalibrating Equity and Social Justice in Scottish Education: Bouncing forward after COVID-19 lockdowns identified "six broad principles which can be used to help schools and local authorities consider their use of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding and supports to recalibrate equity and help learners to bounce forward after COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures." These were:

- Impact of Covid-19
  Children from deprived families are more likely to be affected more than other learners by school closures?

- Prioritise re-engagement
  Both physically being present and emotionally

- Identifying learners most impacted by poverty & COVID-19
  All educational establishments, local authorities and national agencies need to use data as an evidence base. The resource also identifies the following groups of young people who might be particularly affected—

  o Groups who were already low achieving educational groups

  o Younger children

  o Children experiencing transitions

  o Children and young people with existing mental health, social and emotional difficulties

- Learners with additional support needs

- Intensifying support in the short-term
  Focus on those who need the most support. Prioritise targeted supports for core literacy and numeracy, language development, social learning, physical skills or concentration.

- High quality universal and targeted provision is vital
  Particularly suggests targeted small group or 1-to-1 interventions using classroom assistants.

- Long-term strategic vision still required
  The poverty related attainment gap has been a factor of our society before the current pandemic. These underpinning, deep rooted causes need to continue to be prioritised and tackled by all.

Lockdown Lowdown III

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cee5bd0687a1500015b5a9f/t/6101677adcb2d667b8d3b8da/1627481981761/July2021-LockdownLowdown-V3-Survey-Report.pdf

The SYP, Youthlink Scotland and YoungScot undertook three online surveys seeking views and experiences of young people through the pandemic. The third Lockdown Lowdown was open between 31 March and 31 May 2021.

As with any open online survey, the findings should be treated with some caution.

Generally, respondents were happy to return to school. . When asked what support schools or organisations for young people could provide to help with education, the most common theme reported was a desire for dedicated time or space to study. Some respondents also mentioned the need for mental health information and support.

In terms of mental health—

> "Respondents had mixed views of their mental health and wellbeing, with two fifths agreeing (40%) that they felt good about their mental health and wellbeing. This result was similar to results from the previous survey. Over a third (35%) Disagreed or Strongly disagreed with this statement."

The reported effects of the pandemic on pupils in special schools and colleges and what they need now

https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/The-reported-effects-of-the-pandemic-on-pupils-in-special-schools-and-colleges.pdf

This report was funded by the Nuffield Foundation and produced by Ask Research and NFER.

The research was based on "a representative survey of 190 special education providers in England, depth interviews with senior leaders from 40 of those settings and depth interviews with the parents/carers of 40 pupils who attend them."

The key findings were:

- Pupils in special settings experienced greater learning losses than pupils in mainstream settings due to the pandemic; around an average of 4 months' behind where they would have been with their literacy and numeracy, had it not been for the disruption related to the pandemic

- Pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans have experienced further developmental losses

- Legally required Health and Care input has been severely disrupted

- The wellbeing of families and staff has been negatively impacted

- Proposed recovery support does not meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

Ten Principles for Effective and Equitable Educational Recovery from COVID

https://www.oecd.org/education/ten-principles-effective-equitable-covid-recovery.htm

This paper was co-produced by the OECD and Education International and published in April 2021.

The ten principles are split into two sections . The first five are aimed at dealing with the ongoing pandemic and principles 6-10 are aimed at "recovery towards effective and equitable education".

1. Keep schools open as much and as safely as possible.

2. Ensure equity and align resources with needs.

3. Provide a remote learning infrastructure which is designed to reach all students.

4. Support teachers in their professional lives.

5. Enable teachers and parents to support learners.

6. Provide targeted support to meet students' learning and social and emotional needs.

7. Co-design a robust digital learning infrastructure with teachers and stakeholders.

8. Empower teachers to exercise their professionalism and benefit from professional learning opportunities.

9. Encourage a collaborative culture of innovation.

10. Learn from national and international evidence.

The State of Global Education, 18 Months into the Pandemic

https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/the-state-of-global-education_1a23bb23-en

This paper was published in September 2021. It drew from a range of evidence to present data from across OECD members.

The report is organised in six parts:

- School closures during the pandemic

- Early Childhood Education and Care

- Impact of COVID-19 on learning outcomes

- Support for teachers during the pandemic

- Financing of primary to tertiary education during the pandemic

- Impact of COVID-19 on labour market outcomes

The body of the report is descriptive and outlines differing approaches in different jurisdictions. The introductory 'editorial'[6] includes more prescriptive comments, which largely reflect the ten principles above. It also identified areas of opportunity from the pandemic, such as building on the digital infrastructure, teachers' exercising professional agency, and greater support for innovation at all levels.

What's Next? Lessons on Education Recovery

https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/what-s-next-lessons-on-education-recovery_697bc36e-en;jsessionid=ltNsVqytyS8foB8mi5wSlgr_.ip-10-240-5-14

This report was based on findings from a survey of ministries of education and was co-produced with UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. The Executive Summary was set out in four areas.

Monitoring and Mitigating Learning Losses From School Closures

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[6] Written by Andreas Schleicher, Special Advisor on Education Policy to the OECD Secretary-General and Director for Education and Skills

Under this heading the report noted that different jurisdictions had differing periods of school closures. The mitigation measures were also different, with "41 per cent of countries reported extending the academic year and 42 per cent reported prioritizing certain curriculum areas or skills" however "more than half of the countries reported that no adjustments have been or will be made at all education levels". Similarly there was variation in how certification was managed.

The report noted that remedial measures were less likely to be in place at pre-primary than at other levels of education. It also stated--

> "Most countries implementing remediation reported broad-based programmes for all children who need them, as well as for targeted groups."

The report noted that early evidence indicated that "students affected by school closures are experiencing an absolute reduction in learning levels or slower progress than expected in a typical year." And—

> "Measuring learning loss is a critical first step towards mitigating its consequences. It is vital that countries invest in assessing the magnitude of such losses to implement the appropriate remedial measures."

Deploying Effective and Equitable Distance Learning Strategies

The report noted a range of distance learning approaches had been taken. However the effectiveness of these approaches was not always evaluated.

In terms of supporting teachers, most countries provided teachers professional, psychosocial and emotional support. In addition ,teachers were provided with teaching materials suited to remote learning. Most countries also reported that teachers would be a priority for vaccination.

Policies were in place, especially among richer nations, to support digital access for marginalised communities.

Reopening Schools Safely for All

The report noted that reopening schools safely presented complex issues in relation to minimising transmission of the virus, finance for mitigations and ensuring re-engagement with learning.

Planning Ahead After Schools Reopen

The report argued that the focus should be on ensuring that schools are open. Thereafter the report said that education systems will need to adapt to support "uneven levels of knowledge and skills". It said—

> "As education systems forge ahead, measuring learning levels will prove more important than ever. System leaders need to understand the extent of learning losses and ensure that students, including the youngest learners, receive adequate and targeted support. Building on the investments made in remote learning systems will create resilient systems that can withstand the impact of

future crises. Low income countries, in particular, should receive the support they need to do the same."

Catch-up Programmes: 10 Principles for Helping Learners Catch Up and Return to Learning

https://inee.org/resources/catch-programmes-10-principles-helping-learners-catch-and-return-learning

The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies published this report which places catch up programmes in the context of other education programmes seeking to make up lost ground. This could be due to natural disasters, becoming a refugee, and so on. This report provided a definition for catch-up programmes.

"A short-term transitional education programme for children and youth who had been actively attending school prior to an educational disruption, which provides students with the opportunity to learn content missed because of the disruption and supports their re-entry to the formal system."

Central to the suggested approach in response to the pandemic is additional learning time.

The principles are organised under themes:

Learners

Principle 1: The catch-up programme meets the holistic needs of learners whose education was disrupted for several months to approximately a year.

Principle 2: The learning environment is physically and emotionally safe, and emergency prevention, preparedness, and response plans are in place.

Principle 3: The catch-up programme curriculum is condensed—prioritising, integrating, and reinforcing the most essential competencies.

Principle 4: Instructional time, delivery modality, and examinations are adapted.

Principle 5: The catch-up programme effectively uses learner-centred pedagogy.

Teachers

Principle 6: Teachers are (re)engaged and their well-being is supported after the education disruption.

Principle 7: Teachers have the capacity and resources to re-engage all learners and implement the catch-up programme.

Programme alignment

Principle 8: Learners, families, and communities are informed, consulted, engaged, and accountable.

Alignment with policy frameworks

Principle 9: The catch-up programme is recognised by and aligned with the national education system and has clear transition pathways.

Principle 10: The catch-up programme is integrated into the national education system and relevant humanitarian architecture.

Mitigating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on primary and lower secondary children during school closures

https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Yxnj8IdsTIU%3d&tabid=3842&portalid=0

The UCL Social Research Institute published this rapid review in September 2021 and was funded by the UK Government's Department for Education. It was based on the available literature and is therefore secondary research. The review was undertaken under the umbrella of the International Public Policy Observatory (IPPO) (https://covidandsociety.com).

The report's approach was to identify the harms of the pandemic and school closures, then identify mitigation measures, and then evaluate whether the mitigation measure reflected the harms.

The abstract of the paper stated in relation to harms:

> "There is evidence that the patterns of disruption to education during the pandemic have impacted on children's learning and attainment, mental health and wellbeing, physical health and nutrition and increased exposure to risk especially for those children living in potentially dangerous domestic settings. Although the quality of the evidence is uneven, it is clear that children living in poverty have been most affected, in particular through food insecurity and conditions triggering stress and anxiety in the home, alongside their more limited opportunities to access digital resources for learning, or indeed outside space for physical activity. Attempts to distinguish harms that impact in the short term from longer lasting harms may take time. It also requires schools to have access to contextually relevant diagnostic tools they can use to assess the range of harms in need of redress in their local context."

In relation to mitigation strategies:

> "We found no evidence for mitigation strategies directly relevant to the harms experienced by children due to school closures under COVID-19. Mitigation strategies suggested in the UK often derived their evidence of efficacy from circumstances quite unlike the prolonged patterns of disruption to education that COVID has caused. Most were designed to address the needs of a few

pupils struggling under normal circumstances and were not able to demonstrate their relevance at scale. We therefore examined the primary literature on recovery from unplanned school closures in other countries focused on school-based strategies that had been evaluated as effective under similar conditions."

And—

"We found some evidence of a range of harms but little research evidence on relevant mitigation strategies and an absence of evidence on those strategies that schools themselves have adopted since re-opening, tailored to local needs. Such mitigation strategies may be highly relevant for system learning, and it is important to document and evaluate their efficacy, and indeed learn from them. Closing schools during the pandemic has revealed the importance of schools in safeguarding children. School staff should be given the training and resources to be able to identify children at risk and refer pupils to appropriate services if necessary."

The paper concluded by arguing for school level evaluation of the harms of the pandemic. It said—

"The evidence suggests that equipping schools with the appropriate tools to diagnose needs across the spectrum of harms will be fundamental to planning efficiently and appropriately for recovery. It will also be useful inform local decision-making on how that funding should be spent."

Recovery during a pandemic: the ongoing impacts of Covid-19 on schools serving deprived communities

https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4614/recovery_during_a_pandemic_the_ongoing_impacts_of_covid_19_on_schools_serving_deprived_communities.pdf

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published this work in September 2021. The report is based on interviews with 50 senior leaders in mainstream schools largely serving deprived communities. It focused on schools' responses to Covid-19 in May/June 2021.

The key messages from this work were:

- Schools were adapting their curriculum and pedagogy to help pupils recover

- Pupils' wellbeing and mental health is an immediate and pressing concern

- The pandemic has affected pupils' emotional and academic readiness for transition

- School leaders identified urgent and important support needs which they felt must be addressed. These included escalated mental health support and long term investment.

Ned Sharratt, Senior Researcher (Education, Culture), SPICe Research
8 November 2021

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