

## **EIS Response to the Education, Children and Young People Committee's Additional Support for Learning in Scotland: Call for Views**

### **Introduction**

The Educational Institute of Scotland ('EIS'), the country's largest teaching union, representing almost 65,000 members across all sectors of Education and at all career levels, welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Education, Children and Young People Committee's Call for Views on Additional Support for Learning ('ASL').

For long, the EIS has campaigned for increased resourcing of ASL to bridge the gap between policy and practice in our schools and for a long-term resourcing strategy – including action to reduce class sizes and significantly enhance the availability of specialist ASL support and expertise within schools – to match the scale of the promise to children and families made within the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act almost two decades ago.

Over the course of the pandemic, we have seen the level and complexity of additional support needs in the children and young people in our schools grow, whilst poverty continues to extend its crippling grip across families in Scotland, intensifying in the midst of the cost-of-living crisis, with hunger, fuel and digital poverty now impacting one in three children in some areas. Over this period, Scotland's teachers have been on the front line, working relentlessly to meet the holistic needs of children and young people in their classes, often having to provide much needed support whilst their pupils sit on lengthy waiting lists to access specialist services. And despite highlighting these challenges through responses to parliamentary inquiries and a range of consultations, including those on education reform, and repeatedly citing the need for additional investment in core education funding, as well as in partner agencies to implement early intervention measures, no meaningful change has been forthcoming.

Against this backdrop, our members are exhausted, trying to balance the competing and unrealistic demands placed on them in the classroom. The current climate, of under-investment in ASL, is now having an impact across the whole learning population and is detrimental to the wellbeing of children and young people; the wellbeing of teachers; and the educational experience for many pupils. Successive EIS meetings, EIS member surveys, including our recently published Violence and Aggression National Branch Survey Report<sup>1</sup>, and even discussions on Pay Attention picket lines have identified that supporting ASN, along with tackling excessive workload and pupil behaviour, are the issues of greatest concern to them and as a result, feature as the three pillars of our Stand Up for Quality Education Campaign.

The Institute is not alone in highlighting concerns about the funding of ASL. Indeed, the final report<sup>2</sup> by Professors Alma Harris and Carol Campbell, emerging from the National Discussion, sends a strong message to the Scottish Government,

---

<sup>1</sup> [Violence & Aggression Branch Survey Report and Campaigning Recommendations: F \(eis.org.uk\)](https://www.eis.org.uk/violence-aggression-branch-survey-report-and-campaigning-recommendations)

<sup>2</sup> All Learners in Scotland Matter - [\\*AllLearners in Scotland Matter: The National Discussion on Education Final Report \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/all-learners-in-scotland-matter-the-national-discussion-on-education-final-report)

calling for *'adequate sustained funding to provide staffing and specialist resources to be able to achieve the commitment to inclusivity and [meet] the needs of each learner, **with a particular urgency for children and young people identified as having Additional Support Needs**'* (emphasis added).

They go on to acknowledge that despite the current budget constraints and austerity, *'there is an urgent need to review and improve approaches to ensuring adequate, secure, and sustainable funding to provide staffing, specialists, and necessary resources to fully achieve the aspirations of meeting individual needs and an inclusive system'*.

The Humanly Report<sup>3</sup>, independent research commissioned by the Scottish Government and published in September 2023, examines the provision for pupils with complex additional support needs and again focuses on the imperative of resourcing to deliver inclusive education. Despite this clear recommendation, in her letter to the Education, Children and Young People Committee<sup>4</sup>, the Cabinet Secretary made no reference to resourcing as part of the Government's response to this research.

We cannot ignore this report's conclusions:

*'What is clear, and not new; the needs of children with complex additional support needs are incredibly varied, and a tailored and flexible approach is required to meet their need and enable them to flourish at school. This research has identified four themes that are integral to delivering inclusive and tailored approaches to all children and young people. These include:*

- *Resourcing, in particular in relation to staffing;*
- *The brilliant, committed and supportive nature of staff surrounding pupils;*
- *Where children are placed for their schooling; and*
- *Robust training for all providers who interact with children with complex additional support needs.'*

The evidence is clear and the call for sufficient and immediate resourcing of ASL overwhelming. We now need the Scottish Government to act, for the children and young people in our schools, for their families and for our teachers and school staff.

Against this backdrop, the Institute welcomes this inquiry into ASL and has the following comments to offer:

### **Implementation of the Presumption of Mainstreaming**

**The presumption in favour of 'mainstreaming education' strengthened the rights of pupils to be included alongside their peers, with the four key features of inclusion as present, participating, achieving, and supported.**

---

<sup>3</sup> Research into Provision for Pupils with Complex Additional Support Needs - [1 \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

<sup>4</sup> [SG - Gaelic - Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills \(parliament.scot\)](http://www.parliament.scot)

- *To what degree do you feel the presumption of mainstreaming successfully delivers on inclusive education for those pupils requiring additional support?*

Scottish Education is not currently delivering inclusive education consistently for children and young people in our schools. Despite the best efforts of teachers and school staff who work hard every day to try to ensure that children enjoy and achieve at school, the rising level and complexity of additional support needs, in the context of austerity and decades of cuts, is adversely impacting inclusive practice.

However, the wording of the question implies that the success or failure of delivering inclusive education is linked directly to the presumption of mainstreaming, the suggestion being that if education is not inclusive, then the principle of mainstreaming is flawed. The EIS would urge caution with this narrative and highlight the importance of separating the principle and policy of the presumption of mainstreaming from its implementation in practice.

**The EIS is clear that the presumption of mainstreaming, if resourced appropriately, can successfully deliver inclusive education for pupils with additional support needs ('ASN').**

The presumption that, children and young people will be educated alongside their peers in their local schools, where appropriate, is sound. Special Schools and Special Units also have an important and valuable role to play, in more appropriately meeting the needs of pupils for whom mainstream provision may not be a suitable setting. *However, crucially, to be effective, both must be adequately resourced.*

Education is a human right, a public service and a public good, which enables all children to meet their potential. However, the vision of a truly inclusive society and education system is threatened by austerity and the lack of proper funding. Considerable investment is needed to ensure that we 'get it right for every child'. Sustained effort is needed to ensure that teachers are able to work effectively, safely and with the right support to do their job well. Scotland's children and Scotland's teachers deserve a system where promise meets practice, not 'mainstreaming on the cheap'<sup>5</sup>.

In order to deliver an education to all children that is inclusive, schools must be sufficiently staffed and resourced to ensure that each child's needs are known to teachers. Class sizes must be smaller to allow teachers to meet those needs. The correlation between additional support needs and pupil maxima is already established in the SNCT Handbook in relation to special schools and units. The increased level of additional support needs in mainstream must therefore translate into smaller class sizes in mainstream settings also. In addition, each member of staff must have access to, and protected time for training, be afforded the time to plan how to meet the

---

<sup>5</sup> [ExploringTheGap.pdf \(eis.org.uk\)](http://ExploringTheGap.pdf(eis.org.uk))

diverse needs of pupils and must be able to access the expertise of specialist colleagues when needed.

### ***The Imperative for Additional Resources***

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EIS was campaigning strongly in relation to the chronic under-resourcing of ASL provision, which has been subject to swingeing cuts over the past decade or more, against a backdrop of increasing poverty-related need, and large class sizes.

We raised these concerns in 2017 in evidence given to the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee Inquiry into ASL, and in the final report, the Committee acknowledged:

*'A strong theme of evidence from parents and teachers...was the gap between the experience envisaged of inclusive education and the experience of the children they supported in practice' and the 'lack of resources, specifically staff, was regularly cited'.<sup>6</sup>*

In 2019, the Scottish Government published research on ASL, which found that most local authority officers felt that there was still more to do to improve the balance of ASL provision, including developing the resources available in mainstream schools in terms of money, staff and facilities, and being able to recruit specialist teachers and support staff. The research states that

*'In some areas, there was a clear feeling from local authority officers and schools staff that there was not enough resources to meet needs – particularly in mainstream schools'.<sup>7</sup>*

Since the pandemic, we have only seen additional support needs rise and therefore, the imperative for additional funding become even more urgent.

- ***Rising Levels and Complexity of ASN***

(i) *Rising Need in the Children and Young People with ASN*

In 2023, 37% of the school population were identified as having an additional support need compared to only 6.5% in 2009. This latest statistic also represents a 2.8% increase in the number of pupils with ASN in our schools over the last year.

Although more detailed information about the type of provision, which these pupils accessed, will not be available until March 2024, we know from the Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland that in 2022 the presumption of

---

<sup>6</sup> [How is Additional Support for Learning working in practice? \(azureedge.net\)](https://www.azureedge.net)

<sup>7</sup> [Additional Support for Learning: Research on the Experience of Children and Young People and Those That Support Them \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

mainstreaming resulted in 95% of pupils with ASN spending some, or all of their time, in mainstream classes<sup>8</sup>.

In 2022, over a quarter of all primary school children (28%) were identified as needing additional support within mainstream settings. In secondary schools, there were over nine times as many children with additional support needs in 2022 than in 2007: 123,854 compared with 13,357<sup>9</sup>.

As well as seeing rising levels of additional support need, we have also seen the complexity of that need increase, as children and young people have grappled with the impact of the pandemic. Societal issues such as poverty and substance dependency have also had a bearing. The PISA results 2022 published earlier this month highlighted that 11% of 15-year-olds in the UK reported skipping a meal at least once a week because there was not enough money to buy food<sup>10</sup>. This compared to an OECD average of 8%. This significant level of poverty-related hunger has an impact on concentration, learning and behaviour. The Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (2023) also reported an increase in reports of secondary teachers encountering pupils under the influence of drugs or alcohol at least once a week. This figure has jumped from 5% in 2016 to 16% in 2023<sup>11</sup> and demonstrates an unmet additional support need in these young people.

Critically, factors such as these which exemplify the rise in demand for support has not been reflected in resourcing.

## *(ii) Rising Need: More Mental Health Issues*

An EIS report published in 2019 highlighted that one in ten children and young people aged five to sixteen has a clinically diagnosable mental illness.<sup>12</sup> In 2018, it was reported that there had been a 22% increase in the number of referrals received by specialist services since 2013/14. This increase followed on from a sharp rise in the identification of mental health conditions in children in the preceding years.

The Mental Health Foundation reports that 20% of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in any given year<sup>13</sup>. It has also reported on the mental health challenges experienced by various groups of young people facing extra difficulties, including teenage girls, young people with learning disabilities, looked after children, young carers and LGBT young people.

Since the pandemic we have seen only seen the number of children and young people, requiring support for their mental health, rise. Teachers

---

<sup>8</sup> [Pupil+census+supplementary+statistics+2023+-+December.xlsx \(live.com\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Pupil+census+supplementary+statistics+2023+-+December.xlsx \(live.com\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> [a97db61c-en.pdf \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Behaviour in Scottish schools: research report 2023 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> [ExploringTheGap.pdf \(eis.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Children and young people: statistics | Mental Health Foundation](#)

supporting older children and young people have attested to the mental health challenges which they face and for which there is insufficient immediate or timely support.

Unsurprisingly, the data gathered from the Health and Wellbeing Census Scotland 2021/22<sup>14</sup> confirms this evidence. Analysis of the data indicates that positive mental health and wellbeing decreases as children become older, with clear differences by sex and deprivation.

Girls have less positive perceptions than boys across aspects of life; from perceptions of schools and pressures of schools work; feeling positive about their future; being worried about perceptions of their body image, sleep, diet and physical activity; and having trusted adults to whom they can talk.

Whilst the level and complexity of need created by poor mental health is rising, the support remains inadequate and teachers and school staff are often left to support children and young people, while they wait for lengthy periods to access specialist services.

### *(iii) Rising Need: the Impact of the Pandemic*

All children and young people have been affected in some way by the pandemic. Confinement, restricted social interaction, illness, bereavement, poverty and food insecurity will all have made their mark to varying degrees on individuals, families and communities.

For children in the early stages of primary, they would have missed, over the periods of lockdown, the opportunity to attend Early Learning and Childcare settings; to make friends with children of their own age; and to develop vital social skills, such as sharing and even how to play cooperatively. They would also have missed the opportunity to participate in vital transition opportunities, as they prepared to enter primary education.

EIS members from various local authorities have reported an increase in the number of children presenting with delayed development or minimal speech and language acquisition on arriving in primary 1. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that there has been an increased level of distressed behaviour in this cohort of children as they struggle to communicate an underlying need verbally and in socially acceptable ways.

We also know that families living in poverty were amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic and reports highlight the growing numbers of children who are now attending school with serious health concerns, such as malnutrition and rickets.

Furthermore, an entire generation of young people in our secondary schools have had their personal, social and emotional development seriously

---

<sup>14</sup> [HWB+Census+2021-22+-+publication+-+2023+-+key+findings.docx \(live.com\)](#)

inhibited during repeated lockdowns and many struggle to express their feelings, with anger, confusion and frustration manifesting itself through violence and aggression. It is no surprise that almost three quarters (72%) of the responses to our recent Violence and Aggression National Branch Survey reported that violence and aggression had 'increased significantly' over the last four years.

There have been numerous reports of the increased level and severity of additional support needs since the pandemic. The Report on Children and Young People's Health and Wellbeing, published by the Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sports Committee, on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2022<sup>15</sup>, outlines the negative impact which the pandemic has had on the mental health of children and young people and suggests that the full extent of this impact and how long-lasting it will be, have yet to be fully understood.

In setting out its recommendations in the report, the Committee sought assurances from the Scottish Government that the long-term impact of COVID-19 would form an integral part of the future design and development of mental health services and support for children and young people. Whilst there has been investment in CAMHS and counselling services, to address the delays in accessing provision, its impact has yet to be seen, as need increases and waiting lists continue to grow. These delays, however, have a direct impact on learning, behaviour and attendance and place even greater pressures on school staff, particularly those in pastoral care and management, who are left to respond to young people's needs in lieu of the specialist support needed. They do this, whilst also delivering on their core remits, which include supporting the wellbeing of all learners.

The EIS has been clear with the Scottish Government that Education Recovery would need significant investment to meet these needs, not the 'business as usual' approach which we quickly saw emerge.

*(iv) Rising Need: the Impact of Poverty*

One in four children in Scotland lives in poverty, with the numbers rising to one in three in some areas. This is strongly linked to having additional support needs. The Growing Up in Scotland study found that there was a notably higher prevalence of additional support needs amongst children living in the two most deprived quintiles. This was apparent for both boys and girls, with boys in the most deprived quintiles reporting rates of nearly twice the average.<sup>16</sup>

One study found that 7.3% of children from the most deprived areas had mental health difficulties at the start of school, rising to 14.7% in primary three. The Mental Health Foundation reports that children in the lowest

---

<sup>15</sup> [Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People | Scottish Parliament](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Growing Up in Scotland: Early experiences of Primary School \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

income quartile are 4.5 times more likely to experience severe mental health problems than those in the highest.<sup>17</sup>

A 2018 Audit Commission report on child mental health<sup>18</sup> stated that children living in low-income households are three times more likely to suffer mental health problems than their more affluent peers.

The link between poverty and poor mental health has been recognised for many years and is well evidenced.<sup>19</sup> The Mental Health Foundation Report, 'Tackling Inequalities' considers the relationship between socioeconomic inequalities and mental health issues, highlighting growing evidence that supports a link between Adverse Childhood Experiences ('ACEs') and poor physical and mental health outcomes. ACEs have been found to account for 29.8% of mental health disorders. They are thought to create chronic stress, which then leads to problems with child development; these problems, in turn, lead to health-harming behaviours and poor mental health.

The overwhelming evidence between the adverse impact of poverty on educational outcomes and life opportunities cannot be ignored and urgent action is needed to provide equity for all.

(v) *Rising Need: Violence and Aggression*

The Behaviour in Scottish Schools Survey published on Tuesday, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023 confirms that incidents of violence, aggression and disruptive behaviours in Scotland's schools have risen significantly over the past few years, with worrying evidence to suggest a new increase in misogynistic views, attitudes and behaviour by male pupils.

The latest PISA results also show that 35.8% of Scottish pupils have witnessed a fight on school property in which someone was hurt, compared to the OECD average of 17%<sup>20</sup>.

These results align strongly with the findings from the EIS Violence and Aggression Survey. In that report, 83% of respondents reported incidents of violence and aggression every single week, with 72% indicating that incidences of violence and aggression have grown over the past four years.

The report also makes a clear link between the unmet needs of pupils with ASN and incidents of violence and aggression, with 94.3% of branches highlighting that unmet need exacerbates this behaviour. With 92.3% of special school branches also citing the correlation between the two, it would appear that the issues around meeting the needs of learners is prevalent in those settings, in the same way as in mainstream schools.

---

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.mentalhealth.org/statistics/metal-health-statistics-poverty>

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2018/nr\\_180913\\_mental\\_health.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2018/nr_180913_mental_health.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> <MHF-tackling-inequalities-report.pdf> ([mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk))

<sup>20</sup> [Summary | PISA 2022 results](https://www.oecd.org/pisa/summary/) ([oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org))



The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to leave comments, with many highlighting members' frustration at the under-resourcing of ASN provision:

*'So many young people receiving minimal support for conditions that can lead to emotional dysregulation (for example) and being expected to manage this in a class of 30 without any additional support in the class. Not enough PSAs to go round. Teachers not having the time or space in their timetable to offer individualised support themselves. Lots of young people with undiagnosed conditions due to NHS waiting lists for CAMHS.'*

*'More children with more complex needs and less support and less resources in an environment not equipped to meet their needs.'*

*'A lot of our incidents are made worse because our continually increasing amount of children with ASN have unmet needs.'*

Some members also highlighted the added difficulties in trying to de-escalate behaviours with children and young people with more complex ASN whilst also trying to teach the full class:

*'Practice, nurture, RRS and understanding distressed behaviours guidance. On one hand we are encouraged to support and understand all behaviour as communication, however, when the behaviour is threatening or violent, can it be considered acceptable? Members broadly feel issues with unmet needs exacerbate extreme behaviours, and often those needs make de-escalation difficult when also dealing with a full class.'*

With 99% of branches indicating that poor pupil behaviour is having a detrimental impact on the learning experience of pupils in schools and almost all branches reporting an increase in stress, anxiety and depression in teachers, the Scottish Government cannot ignore this evidence. It must take urgent action to address the underlying unmet needs which are laid bare in these reports and make schools safe places for pupils to learn and teachers to work.

It is clear, therefore, that additional support needs are increasing and becoming more complex for a variety of reasons. Against this backdrop, inclusive practice is thwarted by underinvestment in education.

- ***Underinvestment in Education***
- *Decline in Specialist Teachers*

The EIS has long raised concerns over the systemic under-resourcing of education, particularly ASL, the dramatically declining numbers of specialist staff and unsustainably large class sizes, leaving significant gaps in provision to be filled by class teachers.

Teacher census data shows that there are too few staff working in ASL and that the general trend over recent years has been a decline in staff with specialist roles, e.g. Behaviour Support, English as an Additional Language ('EAL') or Learning Support. Scottish Government statistics demonstrate that across Scotland, ASN teacher numbers fell in 22 out of the 32 local authorities over the period 2010 to 2022. In 2010, there were 3,524 Full Time Equivalent ('FTE') ASN teachers<sup>21</sup> across all local authorities falling to 2,843 FTE in 2022<sup>22</sup> – a loss of 681 FTE teachers or a staggering 19% decrease in provision, at a time when the number of children and young people with an identified ASN in Scotland's schools had increased by almost 24%<sup>23</sup>.

- *Overburdened Teaching Staff*

Teachers have excessive workloads, which militates against them being able to meet the needs of every child to the extent they would wish.

Successive EIS member surveys on workload have demonstrated the extent of the problem and the 2023 survey was no different:

- Almost three quarters of respondents (71%) are dissatisfied with their workload levels
- Almost 70% of respondents reported working more than 5 hours extra a week, with almost 60% of them (40.7% of respondents) stating that they worked more than 8 hours on top of their contracted hours.
- 72.5% of respondents were stressed all of the time or frequently (19.7% and 52.8% respectively)

When asked to what extent they felt they had time in a typical working week to complete paperwork, liaise with colleagues and external agencies and attend meetings in relation to supporting pupils with ASL (all cornerstones of GIRFEC policy), 77% of respondents indicated that they rarely (53.4%) or occasionally (23.5%) had time to do this.

There was an opportunity for members to share comments under this question and overwhelmingly, members reported that they could not complete the tasks listed because they were too overstretched. Finding time for meetings was a key pressure and many members said that there was

---

<sup>21</sup> ASN teachers described by the government as teachers whose main subject is Learning Support Primary and Secondary; ASN; ASN Behavioural Support; ASN Learning Disabilities; Hearing impairment; Visual Impairment; or English as an Additional Language.

<sup>22</sup> [Teacher+Census+Supplementary+Statistics+2022+V2.xlsx \(live.com\)](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Pupils+Census+Supplementary+Statistics+2022+V2.xlsx \(live.com\) – table 6.7](#)

an expectation that the workload associated with ASL be completed in non-working hours.

These are a selection of the comments made:

- *'There just never is enough time to do everything I need to do. The demands are endless, the workload is completely unmanageable. I was planning on handing my notice in at the end of this academic year due to the effects of the stress, however the cost of living crisis has made me realise I have no choice but to stay. I am now working on survival strategies to protect my health.'*
- *'This usually falls outwith contracted hours as you can't complete what's necessary to teach a class within 35 hours, never mind all that goes with supporting children with additional needs.'*

When asked to identify what would make the biggest impact in reducing their workload, 60% of all respondents said that more classroom assistants or support for inclusion and pupils with ASN would make a big impact. This was followed by smaller class sizes (51%) and less bureaucracy (49%).

One member summed this up in the following:

- *'There are far too many 'priorities' and meetings to discuss meetings/meetings for training when we just need to be able to teach the pupils in front of us. Also large class sizes (32/33) with a wide range of pupil needs (EAL, dyslexia, behaviour, ASN, socio-emotional, SIMD 1/2) makes it very difficult for one teacher to meet all needs all the time regardless of how much time, effort and preparation is put in to meet all those needs.'*

When members were asked what would make the biggest impact in improving their wellbeing at work, more than half of all respondents said more classroom assistants/support for inclusion and pupils with ASN. This was the top response in all sectors apart from secondary education which indicated improved pupil behaviour in the classroom.

Our members have reported that moving to a crisis-led role, with less time for preparation of learning and teaching materials and with the workload burdens outlined here, make them more likely to leave teaching, due to stress and unreasonable expectations. In our 2023 member survey, those who indicated that they were contemplating leaving the profession in the next five years, cited workload, resourcing and abusive behaviour as the motive to leave.

With the global shortage of teachers and of subject specialists in secondary education, losing qualified, experienced teachers from the profession is even more worrying. It adds to the workloads of others, damages morale across the school community and impacts negatively on the potential of delivering inclusive education.

- *Decline in Learning Support Assistants*

In addition to there being too few teaching staff and classroom assistants who would traditionally support teachers, there are also too few ASL assistants. Schools should have enough teachers, including those with ASN qualifications, to enable them to meet the needs of all children; but we firmly believe that provision should also be augmented with learning support assistants who are appropriately skilled in addressing the diversity of additional support needs. Learning provision needs to be a partnership between teachers and specialist assistants, with teachers, as the most highly qualified professionals in the classroom, leading young people's learning; and assistants contributing targeted support as needed.

Some schools no longer have any one-to-one support for pupils with additional support needs or specialist services. And even where a support base is attached to a mainstream setting, pupils can also miss out on their opportunity to attend mainstream classes for part of the time, because there are not enough pupil support workers to attend the session with that pupil. This impedes transition to mainstream from the young person involved.

On the occasions when support in the classroom is available, members highlighted, in our recent [Violence and Aggression Survey Report](#), that pupil support workers were often pulled away to help manage behaviour issues. Members report that this has presented significant challenge. Branches were asked what actions would best support all pupils and teachers in dealing with violent and aggressive behaviour. Increased support staff to support pupils with ASN was the most commonly recorded answer for both primary (75.5%) and special education branches (65.4%).

- *Too few Educational Psychologists*

There are far too few Educational Psychologists, which hinders the assessment of needs. Whilst we welcomed the agreement reached between the Scottish Government and COSLA in May 2018 for funding for trainee educational psychologists, to cover trainees' fees and living costs, there were only 11 more Educational Psychologists<sup>24</sup> employed in Scottish schools in 2022 than in 2012, when the level of additional support need was considerably lower. Teachers' experience in schools remains that access to Educational Psychologists is both infrequent and insufficient. Rather than working directly with children and young people, Educational Psychologists are more removed from schools, being asked to provide consultancy and develop and deliver training for teachers and school staff.

- *Cuts to Specific Services*

Some children's needs are best met when teachers can augment the support offered in the classroom with support from specialists such as English as an Additional Language ('EAL') teachers or Speech and Language

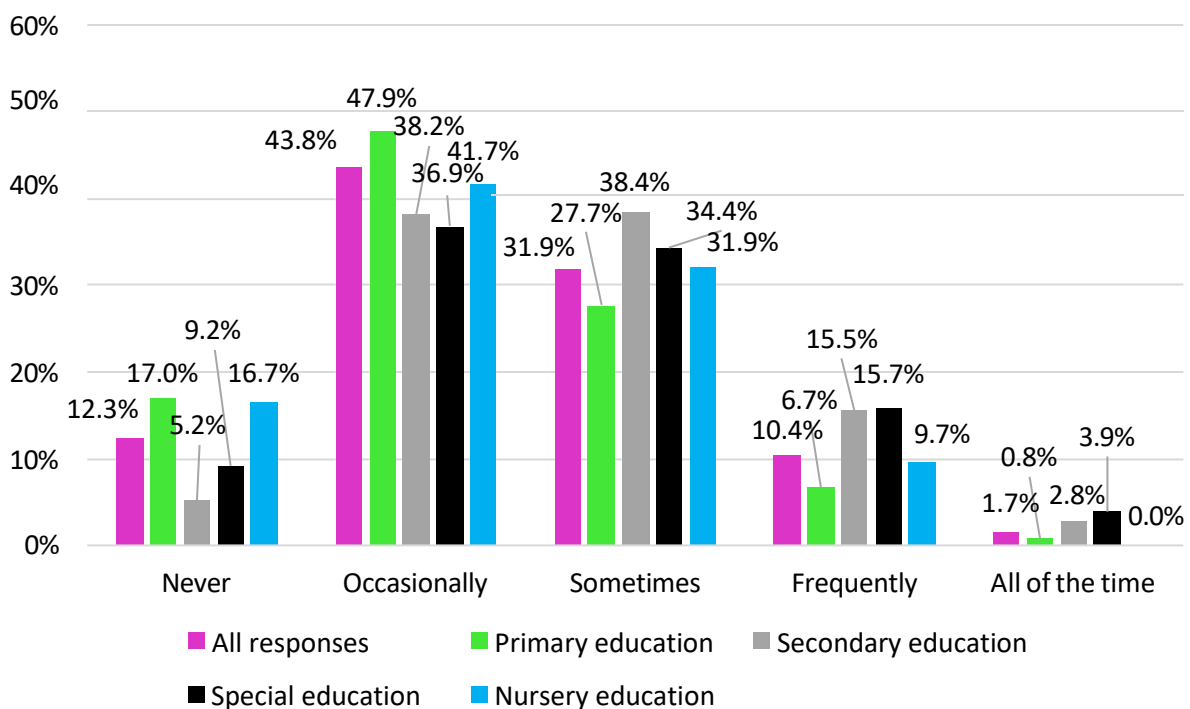
---

<sup>24</sup> [School+Support+Staff+Statistics+2022.xlsx \(live.com\)](#) – 398 in 2022 as opposed to 411 in 2012.

Therapists. Under austerity budgeting, many of these services have experienced significant cuts. Members report increasing difficulty in referring children to the services they need to be fully engaged and involved in their education and even where they can access the service, the nature of the support has changed from direct engagement to one of consultancy for the class teacher. When direct support is offered, there can still be issues with accessibility, as some schools simply cannot afford the transport costs to take the young person to the service.

In our 2023 all member survey, members were asked to what extent children and young people in their settings were able to access front line services, when the support need is identified. 12% of all respondents said they were never able to access front line services when the need is identified (17% in Primary and Nursery), and 44% said they could only access this occasionally at the point of first need (48% in Primary and 42% in Nursery). These figures are deeply worrying as this type of support is often vital to enable a child or young person to participate fully in education, as well as providing external support for any issues outside of school. If early intervention strategies which underpin 'Getting It Right for Every Child' are to operate effectively, immediacy of access must be secured.

**Figure 11: To what extent are children and young people in your setting able to access frontline services at the point when the support need is identified? (by sector)**



Total responses: 15,173<sup>25</sup>

- *Delayed Identification of Need*

Not all additional support needs are medical or diagnosable in nature, but many are. In those cases, early diagnosis is helpful. The current lengthy delays between referral, diagnosis and receipt of post-diagnostic support, highlighted above and caused in part by the shortage in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Educational Psychology Services, are unhelpful to the child or young person, their family and teachers and school staff. With reports also highlighting the falling numbers of 27 month checks being completed by Health Visitors as a result of system capacity, opportunities for the early identification of needs will continue to be missed unless urgent action is taken.

GTCS registered teachers in nursery also play a key role in identifying and supporting children who require additional support for learning, in co-ordinating this support with the relevant agencies and in contributing to the multi-disciplinary team for GIRFEC purposes. We believe that the 56% decrease in the number of GTCS registered teachers in nursery since 2010<sup>26</sup> will also have contributed to this delayed identification of need.

- *Too Few Specialist Mental Health Services*

In the wake of the pandemic, it is clear the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland, together with the underlying causes of ill health, continue to raise significant concerns. The mental health and wellbeing of girls, especially of adolescent girls, is particularly poor and deteriorating.

Although there are a range of support services available across Local Authority and Health Board areas for children and young people, access to these services is inconsistent, and many have to wait lengthy periods before receiving an appointment with the professional involved. Reports demonstrate that a total of 1,570 children had been waiting over a year for treatment at the end of 2021<sup>27</sup>. Demand continues to outstrip capacity, not only in CAMHS but in other services designed to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Whilst there has been investment in CAMHS and counselling services, to address the delays in accessing provision, its impact has yet to be seen, as need increases and waiting lists continue to grow.

---

<sup>25</sup> There were 703 responses to the answer choice “not applicable” which have not been included in this graph. This figure represents all responses including those who ticked “not applicable” as an option.

<sup>26</sup> [Summary statistics for schools in Scotland 2023 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-for-schools-in-scotland-2023/pages/1613-teachers-in-ELC-in-2010-702-in-2023.aspx) (1613 teachers in ELC in 2010; 702 in 2023)

<sup>27</sup> [Waiting times grow for Scotland's child mental health services - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-61888888)

Access to mental health services should not be a postcode lottery. Now, more than ever, urgent action is necessary to ensure equity of provision and access to timely support for children and young people.

In commenting on the link between ASN and violent, aggressive and disruptive behaviour, one respondent to the EIS Violence and Aggression Survey highlighted the need for vital access to these services:

*'The reason for this is due to the fact that staffing and resources are not available to meet the needs of these children. CAMHS waiting lists (156 weeks) for an appointment has a big impact on being able to support'.*

- *Large Class Sizes*

EIS policy is that no class should exceed 20 pupils, while various circumstances in our view justify smaller groups (e.g. composite classes, classes featuring pupils with additional learning needs). In 2007, the SNP published its manifesto, pledging as a priority to introduce 'smaller class sizes, starting with a reduction in the first three years of primary to 18 or less'.

Unfortunately, this was a promise undelivered and since then, we have only seen class sizes rise.

Evidence clearly indicates that smaller classes have a significant impact on the quality of the learning experience, the ability of teachers to respond to pupils' needs, and on achievement and attainment. Many pupils with additional support needs, such as neurodiverse pupils, would benefit from smaller groupings. Quite simply, a smaller number of people in the room would reduce the amount of noise, movement and unpredictable action that many neurodiverse children find distressing, while enabling greater one to one support for individual children.

The overall average class size for primary has increased from 23.2 in 2021 to 23.3 in 2022. The average class size for P1-P3 increased from 23.0 to 23.1 between 2021 and 2022. The average class size for P4-7 also increased between 2021 to 2022 from 25.5 to 25.7.<sup>28</sup> However, despite these averages, over 10% of children in primary settings are in classes of more than thirty. Statistics on class sizes in the secondary sector are not collected as class size varies widely across subjects.

Every year the OECD produces a report on education systems across member states, including key information on class sizes and pupil teacher ratios. The 2023 *Education at a Glance*<sup>29</sup> OECD report highlights the average class sizes across key Member States. The United Kingdom figures refer to

---

<sup>28</sup> [Schools in Scotland 2022: summary statistics - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultations-petitions/ip/2022/01/schools-in-scotland-2022-summary-statistics)

<sup>29</sup> OECD, "Education at a Glance 2021 OECD Indicators" (September 2023) [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance\\_19991487/en.pdf?expires=1643305116&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=BACA73D09638A38DDB1EEFB8C5790C32](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance_19991487/en.pdf?expires=1643305116&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=BACA73D09638A38DDB1EEFB8C5790C32)

the English education system, and therefore no direct comparison can be drawn between Scottish class sizes and the OECD average presented in the report.

However, if we look at the Scottish Government's own statistics for 2022, a comparison can be made. It is evident that with an average class size of 23.3 in 2022, Scotland is lagging behind the OECD and the EU22 average. The OECD average is 21 in primary and 23 in lower secondary and the EU22 average class size in primary schools was 20.

Teachers have made it clear that a reduction in class sizes would allow time to embed more inclusive approaches, giving them time and space to build the relationships with pupils that they need to provide effective support for children with additional support needs and allowing them to engage meaningfully with parents.

When asked what actions would assist teachers in dealing with violence and aggression in the classroom, secondary school branches (72.8%) recorded smaller class sizes as their favoured action in response to an EIS survey. Primary school teachers (65.5%) ranked this second in terms, only to the provision of increased support staff.

Commenting on the importance of smaller class sizes, one respondent said:

*'The drive to the 'presumption of mainstreaming' without reduced class sizes creates difficulties in managing such violence and aggression.'*

It is axiomatic, therefore, that large class sizes mean that teachers are less able to effectively track and monitor the wellbeing of their students, and such class sizes militate against inclusive practices, limiting the scope for preventative early intervention.

Although class sizes in special schools are restricted by the numbers specified in Appendix 2.9 of the SNCT Handbook<sup>30</sup>, the terminology used in this section is outdated and should be updated. In addition, there are issues in practice with the categorisation of children and young people according to these definitions. Too often, our members report that children with complex needs are being categorised wrongly and placed in larger class sizes. No account is taken of the range or complexity of needs, with the default position being that the child will be placed in a class of ten when they should be in a class of six. The consequence is that the young person becomes overwhelmed in the setting and the teacher and school staff have to manage their needs, amidst other vulnerable pupils, adding to the stress for all. Staff do their best to support children and young people in these situations, often to the detriment of their own health and wellbeing. Attracting and retaining staff to work in these conditions is becoming more challenging, resulting in staff shortages and adding to the never-ending

---

<sup>30</sup> [Appendix 2.9 - SNCT Handbook](#)



cycle of stress and workload for those who remain. This must be addressed as a matter of urgency, not only for the children and young people with severe and complex needs but for the staff working in these settings.

- *Too Little Time for Professional Learning*

It is important for all professionals working with children and young people to have appropriate, recognised qualifications. Regrettably, access to specialist qualifications in ASL has been eroded over the past two decades. In the past, teachers had access to funded post-graduate learning, with cover provided by the employer and time provided to enable the course of study to be completed successfully. Such opportunities rarely exist now. Teachers who engage in professional learning about ASL matters often do so in their own time (on top of already excessive workloads) and at their own expense.

Schools lack funding to cover the cost of supply staff to enable release from the classroom of teachers wishing to undertake relevant professional learning, and where funding may be available for cover, the requisite teachers may not be.

The EIS is aware from our professional learning offering, that courses in this area are routinely over-subscribed with a waiting list pending.

Furthermore, even if professional learning on ASL were to be available, teachers should be given protected and extended preparation time to reflect on their learning and engage with colleagues in collegiate dialogue about its relevance of the learning for their particular context. Time and space are crucial if professional learning is to impact inclusive practice and outcomes for children and young people.

- *Reduction in the Number of Special Schools*

In the period from 2016, there has been a 23% reduction (from 141 settings in 2016 to 109 in 2022) in the number of special schools.<sup>31</sup>

Whilst the EIS wholeheartedly supports the presumption of mainstreaming, it must be accepted that mainstream schools are not the correct learning environment for all pupils and there is a place for special schools, base units and tailored provision, where more bespoke arrangements can be adopted to support the needs of those children and young people.

Some EIS branches have highlighted the impact which the reduction in the number of special schools and support-based units in mainstream settings is having on the delivery of inclusive education for children and young people who are now having to spend significant periods of time in mainstream without the support they were previously getting.

---

<sup>31</sup> [Schools in Scotland 2022: summary statistics - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/schools-in-scotland-2022/summary-statistics/)

*"More and more ASD pupils who cannot cope in busy classes are being expected to integrate in mainstream without support."*

This may have an impact not only on the pupil with ASN but also on the learning of others in the class.

*'Mainly due to the fact that children who would previously have been placed in a base school are now in a mainstream school where ASL needs cannot be met due to larger numbers of children with ASN across the school. This is having a significant impact on the learning of all others in the classroom.'*

### *Conclusion*

It can clearly be seen that Scottish Education is not delivering inclusive education consistently for the children and young people in our schools and the impact of the pandemic, austerity cuts and wider societal factors are contributing to the evident gap between policy and practice. However, the presumption of mainstreaming can support the delivery of inclusive education but we need to see the commitment of the Scottish Government through significant increased resourcing in core education, specifically for ASL, to make this a reality in practice.

### **And/or**

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

As highlighted above, the impact of systemic under-resourcing, both in terms of staffing and funding, and lack of specialism in education and wider support services is impacting not only those children and young people with additional support needs but also others in the same setting.

With the high incidence of additional support needs in a class, teachers have less time to spend with those pupils who do not require additional support and therefore, have less time to build the relational approaches which underpin inclusive education. Often the varieties of pedagogy required to meet all the needs in large classes, without support, is simply not sustainable either in terms of teacher workload, learners' entitlements and maintaining a calm and inclusive learning environment.

The impact of unmet need in those pupils who have ASN, and which can manifest itself in distressed, violent and aggressive behaviour, can also affect pupils in the setting who are witnessing this on a regular basis.

The EIS Violence and Aggression survey was very clear on this point:

- 99.8% of branches asserted that violent, aggressive and disruptive behaviour in schools is having a detrimental impact on pupils' learning

- 97% of branches indicated that 'other pupils' behaviour was adversely affected
- 95% said that it disrupts certain types of pedagogies, such as group work or carousel activities.

One response summarised the impact which their members experienced from this behaviour, arising from unmet additional support needs in their classes:

- *'Affects pace of learning and enthusiasm of other pupils. Affects ability to build relationships with all pupils - less time available for rest of class and may have to be more strict than otherwise. Incidents often spill into corridors and affect other classes.'*

The fact that classrooms were not safe was also frequently referenced in the survey:

- *'environment no longer safe and secure therefore trust in teacher is lost'*
- *'Pupils and staff simply don't feel safe at times. Even incidents in other rooms impact across the school as staff are shifted to fire fight incidents.'*

A significant number of responses indicated the impact on pupils' wellbeing and mental health, referencing that pupils become anxious and fearful of other pupils. In some cases, this has resulted in them missing out on days at school because of their anxiety, and in a small number of examples given some pupils have even changed school as they are so afraid of some pupils.

- *'Negative impact on mental health. Children are scared and do not want to come to school.'*
- *'Lessons are repeatedly interrupted and the pace of learning is affected. It affects staff and pupils' mental health and confidence.'*
- *'We have had pupils that have been so anxious that they have not come to school, in some cases we have had pupils removed by parents and moved to other schools. This is due to children feeling so unsafe in their classrooms.'*
- *'Children are traumatised by regular instances of violence in the class, and no longer view school as a safe place. Children who come from backgrounds of domestic violence can be triggered and re-traumatised when witnessing violence at school. Learning time is lost to resolving incidents, providing first aid, and helping children to feel safe again.'*

Branches raised the issue of 'open plan' schools where the disruption in one class can affect pupils in another class. Furthermore, some comments

referenced damage to their teaching resources, making it difficult to continue teaching the lesson, or future lessons.

- *'Destruction of resources and damage to the classroom environment, additional planning required, sacrifice of space in classrooms.'*
- *'Open plan layout of school, another class could be disruptive and it has an impact in all classes in the area.'*
- *'Pupils not feeling safe because of the 'few'. Gaps in the day if have to evacuate classroom. Trauma of room being trashed. Trauma of experiencing violent behaviour. Resources being broken.'*

Some comments also talked about the knock-on effect on other pupils as staff members are pulled to help manage behavioural issues. This can contribute to increased feelings of anxiety and insecurity but can also reduce the time available for teaching and learning.

There are also pupils who have to leave classes early because of fears about being in corridors, which means they lose learning or staff have to plan differently to compensate for this.

The impact on attainment was also referenced:

- *'Attainment is affected. Overall class and school dynamic is affected. Less time to give other pupils 1:1 focus.'*
- *'The attainment is dropping as teaching time is taken up with the other incidences.'*

Almost all of the branches surveyed identified the impact of violence, disruption or aggressive behaviour on pupils. They stated that pupils are:

- less focussed (98.2%),
- more agitated or nervous (96.5%),
- withdrawn (94.0%),
- less happy (94.8%),
- more likely to be disruptive themselves (95.9%) or
- become angry or upset (92.9%).

There were also a considerable number of comments that suggested that some pupils may copy the disruptive and aggressive behaviour of other pupils, leading to more class time being affected by behaviour.

One response highlighted the impact which failing to resource ASL is having on the school community as a whole:

- *'Inclusion is becoming exclusion at the expense of the rest of the class. Some classes have high levels of ASN making it impossible to effectively teach.'*

The imperative for 'adequate, secure, and sustainable funding' is clear, not only to deliver inclusive education for those pupils with ASN but for all children and young people in our schools.

**For Children with Additional Support Needs, in your experience:**

- *Can you provide details of how these additional support needs were recognised and identified initially? Was there any delay in the process which followed the identification of additional support needs and formal recognition which leads to the accessing of the additional support? If so, what was the delay?*

This is covered in the sections above.

- *Where the child is being educated in specialist settings, can you give examples of where their needs are being met, and examples of where they are not being met?*

We have provided comment on the challenges facing special schools and units above.

- *What specialist support does the child receive and what support do you get in accessing this support? Are there any gaps in the specialist support provided either because the prescribed support is not available or extra support not formally prescribed is not being provided?*

Although this question is not directly applicable to our members, we have provided comments above in relation to the significant challenges in accessing specialist support services.

We would also observe that where there is delay in accessing specialist support, parents and carers will understandably look to the school for assistance. However, with the resourcing issues in schools, this can add to the workload and pressure which school staff and management feel, contributing to stress and anxiety around meeting needs.

- *On balance, do you view the presumption of mainstreaming as having been a positive or negative development for your child or in general, and on balance, do you view the presumption of mainstreaming as having been a positive or negative development for other children in Scottish schools?*

The EIS would again caution against the inference that the presumption of mainstream in itself has resulted in positive or negative influences on children and young people. As is evident from the commentary above, the

issues are not with the policy of mainstreaming but rather the failure of the Scottish Government and Local Authorities to implement it appropriately in practice.

### **Impact of COVID-19 on additional support for learning**

- *In what ways has the pandemic impacted on the needs of pupils with additional support needs and the meeting of those needs, both positively and negatively?*

We have highlighted the impact of the pandemic in a separate section above and would refer to that for the purposes of answering this question.

- *How successfully have local authorities and schools adjusted to meet these needs?*

See above.

### **The Use of Remedies as set out in the Act**

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

The opportunity for parents, carers and young people to engage in planning processes around the provision of ASL is a key feature of GIRFEC policy. Child planning meetings are now well embedded in educational practice and allow all those supporting the child to meet and plan for future provision.

However, the paucity of resourcing which we have cited above is not only having an impact on the number and range of professionals who can commit to these meetings but is also have an impact on the types of support which can be put in place. Parents, carers and young people may be involved in the discussions but if there is a lack of resourcing to support the identified intervention, then this can add to their anxiety, frustration and distress.

As is referenced above, teachers are also increasingly having to attend these meetings and to manage the associated high levels of bureaucracy in their own time. GIRFEC policy is premised on joint working in a culture of co-operation and communication between professionals, working in partnership with children, young people and their families. For this approach to operate effectively, practitioners must be given time to develop relationships, to engage in meaningful planning and reflective practice and to assess the impact of interventions. Unless the time and resource is allocated to support this practice, then the effectiveness of GIRFEC engagement processes will be impacted.

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

Yes.

- *If you have experience of any of these processes, do you have any comments on your experiences?*

The EIS has no specific comments to make in this regard.

- Any other comments?

#### *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.

We have world-leading legislation and policy frameworks to support the presumption of mainstreaming and inclusive education. At this crucial time, when children and young people are facing so many challenges, as we emerge from the pandemic and witness them struggling to cope with the societal and global pressures associated with conflict, climate change and rampant poverty, we cannot ignore the evidence manifest through mental health statistics and increased levels of violence and aggression in our schools.

The narrative that 'mainstreaming' entails class teachers delivering to meet the needs of all through their standard planned differentiation of materials and pedagogy and that teachers' extant professional standards should equip them to meet the level and panoply of needs apparent, without additional resource, must be quashed. 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 respond to the now even more urgent and larger scale need.

Despite the range of reviews which have been commissioned to consider the delivery of ASL in our schools and the subsequent working groups created to implement recommendations, we continue to witness efforts to evade discourse around the crucial issue of resourcing. To continue to dodge this issue and to tinker around the edges of fixing the problem, does a huge disservice to many.

It is letting down the children and young people with additional support needs, including those who are care experienced, whose wellbeing, learning and associated outcomes are negatively affected by a 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 who do need extra help, yet only one teacher and insufficient numbers of 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 either, where they have capacity, forced into advocacy activity that they should not have to engage 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 not met 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.

The Scottish Government must listen, must act and must invest in Scottish Education to deliver the promise of inclusive practice made to young people and their families almost twenty years ago.

December 2023