

Education Committee, 5 February 2019

Advisory Group on Additional Support for Learning

23 Jan 2019, 10:30 – 3:30, COSLA

Summary of key points

- AGASL intends to become a more strategic forum and to report/make recommendations to the Scottish Education Council in future.
- AGASL expects closer scrutiny of its work in future, especially by Parliament, and will begin publishing minutes etc.
- The Chair proposed that AGASL ask Scottish Government to conduct a strategic review of ASL provision but views on this were mixed and members agreed to take soundings from colleagues/members etc. and for a written proposal to be circulated to inform these discussions.

Meeting report

National Officer Jenny Kemp attended for the EIS. Many organisations were present, including COSLA, ADES, ASPEP, the office of the Children's Commissioner, Mindroom, Children in Scotland, and Enable. Jan Savage from Enable remains the Chair. Several civil servants were in attendance.

1. Scottish Government updates

- Updates on various ASL matters were provided primarily via a paper.
- There was brief discussion of various autism charities' '*Not Included Not Engaged Not Involved*' report; it was reported that the DFM will hold a roundtable meeting on autism on 21 Feb, with a focus on good practice; invites to that are going out this week.
- SG is engaging with all LAs on ASL implementation, and spending a half day at each one; thereafter, the DFM is hosting a summit on ASL Implementation on 2 May 2019.

2. Education and Skills Committee scrutiny of ASL work

- SG reported that the Parliament's Education and Skills Committee is particularly interested in ASL matters at present, and recently has been focused on ASL data, especially pupil support staff data.
- AGASL had been updated on this by email on 5th December.
- E&S Committee perception is that the data has been recollected rather than quality assured – impression that a second collection was done; whereas SG did quality assurance on data they had, as it was wrong.
- There are implications from the focus on this data and the evidence sessions held in terms of the level of scrutiny of AGASL's work.
- There will be a further evidence session on 27th February at E&S Committee.

- Laura Meikle is clarifying with the committee that AGASL wasn't consulted on/informed about the decision re: the data.
- The Chair of AGASL proposed suggesting to the committee that they have a roundtable session with AGASL members and asked for volunteers to attend such a session to notify her by email.
- The Chair shared her general sense that AGASL hasn't been good at providing advice to SG and has been more receiving updates and commenting on those (hence minutes being largely focused on Laura Meikle's updates) and her hope that the group can offer more solutions, as narratives about the general policy of ASL in the press etc at present are not helpful, in her view.
- ADES suggested that part of the raised profile for ASL is because of an excessive focus on attainment and a reaction by stakeholders to that – e.g. NIF initially excluded ASL etc. and there has been a generally 'unhelpful environment'.

3. Role and remit

- The group discussed its role, remit and membership at length. This appears to be a recurring discussion at AGASL.
- The Chair is keen to slim down the membership and make the group more strategic.
- SG is keen for AGASL to have a discussion with David Leng, (SG), maybe at the next meeting, about how AGASL fits with other educational groups/boards/committees.
- SG provided a paper and talked through it, centred largely on the relationship between AGASL and the Scottish Education Council.
- The Chair and SG colleagues will develop a possible new model to be discussed next time, of a main board and working groups.
- It was stressed that for organisations represented at both AGASL and SEC a consistent position must be taken.

4. Future topics

AGASL held small group discussions on future topics for AGASL, which included:

- Visibility of disabled children in wider educational policy
- Data and outcomes – data that tells you something about children's journeys
- Transitions between different stages – destinations, planning etc
- What are positive sustained definitions for young people with the most complex ASN? Do they exist? If not, why not?
- Post-school ASL education and training
- Monitoring implementation of new Presumption of Mainstreaming guidance
- Commissioning of services (Doran)
- Addressing resources and funding
- How members of this group network with each other
- Quality assurance of all educational provision for all children, keeping that to the forefront – beyond kids who achieve Nationals and Highers

- Awareness of inclusive practice
- Preparation for incorporation of UNCRC
- Mental health and links to services
- Whether the ASL framework pays adequate attention to children not in school? (E.g. home educated, travellers)
- Children with ASN are not really 'the few' as described at points during the meeting – what is the trajectory? Can we forecast what learning population we will be looking at in next few years? Likely impact of child mental health crisis?
- Is the mainstream offer right? If a large minority or a majority of children end up needing something additional does the core offer still make sense?
- Class sizes
- School infrastructure/learning environments
- Workforce development – ITE content and coverage of ASN
- CPD – difficulties accessing due to cover
- The impact of the cover crisis on strategic leadership on inclusion (SLTs in class rather than leading strategic work)
- Management information systems e.g. SEEMIS and Insight – fit for purpose?
- It was noted that despite this plethora of pressing issues, there had been very little discussion time focused on ASL provision at the meeting, with most time taken up by operational matters.

Strategic review of ASL Provision

- In the final five minutes of the meeting, the Chair proposed that AGASL ask the DFM to do a strategic review of ASL provision.
- COSLA expressed concern that it could divert LAs (if they have to engage with that/respond to it) and that there have been many similar things recently to which they have had to respond (e.g. E&S Committee Inquiry, Children's Commissioner report on restraint and seclusion, Not Included...etc.)
- The Chair suggested that these all having been done by agencies other than the Scottish Government, there was still a need for something that pulls together what is out there, and reviews provision at a strategic level; she posited the risk that if SG doesn't take control of the agenda that misinformation continues about e.g. the value of inclusion.
- Several members noted that the landscape is constantly changing and were cautious about this review at this time.
- JK noted that the forthcoming summit was an opportunity to assess progress; and wondered if there could be another vehicle for progressing this agenda where agencies' views overlapped? E.g. developing a joint statement on the principle of inclusion without committing anyone to commenting on implementation. This didn't gain traction.
- COSLA stated that they couldn't sign off this suggestion without asking others and asked for the proposal in writing – this was agreed to.

- One member noted that reports published 10 years ago said same thing as reports now and said there is a need to find out why there has been so little progress.
- ASPEP were cautious: would this be more work for LAs/more 'LA bashing'? They noted there is no benchmark, where we came from/no framework for what successful implementation of ASL looks like.
- It was pointed out that any worthwhile review would need to be properly done and resourced, and independent of SG.
- NB: ADES had left the meeting at the point when the proposal was made.
- Jenny agreed with COSLA that this could not be pursued without taking soundings from members/colleagues.
- The Chair agreed to circulate a proposal in writing to be discussed by correspondence, and potentially at the next meeting (February 2019).