

THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

EIS submission to the Scottish Parliament

Education and Skills Committee, Feb 2017

Additional Support Needs in School Education

The EIS welcomes the opportunity to comment on ASN provision in schools. We have serious concerns about ASN provision in Scotland at present. The EIS wishes to highlight three key issues in this submission: the impact of cuts to ASN provision, teacher morale, and attainment narratives.

We note the wide range of circumstances from which additional support needs can stem. A child is said to have 'additional support needs' if they need more, or different, support to what is normally provided in school to children of the same age. Children can need support for many reasons, including being a young parent or carer, experiencing abuse or neglect, having English as an additional language, or having long-term learning difficulties or disabilities.

The impact of cuts to ASN provision

Cuts to school budgets, and to teacher numbers, which despite protection for the past two years have declined quite significantly overall since 2007, are very problematic. So too is the decline in support staff numbers. Teacher census data tells us that the number of support staff in primary schools in some roles (e.g. Behaviour Support) has declined since 2010, (a 57% reduction), and the number of ASN assistants in 2016, while similar now to the 2010 figure, has declined by 730 (FTE) since 2013, when it peaked.

The number of teachers with additional support for learning as their main subject fell by 166 between 2007 and 2016, a fall of 5.4%. The reduction since 2009, when the number of such teachers peaked, is starker – a fall of 14.8%. ASN teacher numbers also fell in 16 out of Scotland's 32 local authorities over the period 2007 to 2016.

Teachers with additional support needs for learning as their main subject

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
3,062	3,301	3,402	3,363	3,258	3,249	3,157	2,963	2,936	2,896

Source: Parliamentary Question (S5W-05579)ⁱ

The data on changes to support staffing levels is as follows:

Support staff in primary schools (FTE)	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistant	3,096	3,016	3,396	3,826	3,458	3,091	3,091
Behaviour Support	19	25	33	27	38	45	45

Source: Teacher census, <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/PubTeacherCensus>

In secondary schools, although there are similar numbers of Behaviour Support staff now as in previous years, and slightly more than in the years 2013-2015, there is a huge reduction in ASN staff compared with the situation in 2011. There are now 374 FTE fewer support posts than in 2011 - a reduction of 20%. This has had a huge impact on teacher workload.

Support staff in secondary schools (FTE)	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
Additional support needs auxiliary or care assistant	1,485	1,606	1,545	1,716	1,800	1,859
Behaviour Support	112	96	86	92	115	117

This is particularly concerning in a context where the range of learners' needs in the classroom is becoming ever wider, with the presumption of mainstreaming (which the EIS supports in principle) meaning that schools now have learners with a very wide range of support needs, including (but not limited to) sensory impairment, autism spectrum disorders, physical disabilities, experience of the care system, and emotional and behavioural issues. However, there is less resource to meet those growing and very diverse needs. Some schools no longer have any one to one support for pupils with additional support needs, or have no specialist services. Some EIS ASN Network members have described the current approach as "mainstreaming on the cheap".

Data from the Scottish Government confirms that the number of pupils with additional support needs has vastly increased. In 2016, 170,329 pupils (24.9% of all pupils), were identified as having additional support needs and 95% spent at least some of their time in mainstream classes. In 2011, the overall number was 98,523. The increase over those five years is 73%. It is hard to see how it is possible to 'Get it Right for Every Child' when so many children now have identified needs, and schools are operating within austerity budgets.

We are also concerned about the lack of resources for professional development and training, which ASN teachers wish to undertake so that they can better meet pupils' changing needs. Schools lack funding for CPD courses or to cover the cost of supply staff to enable release from the classroom of teachers wishing to undertake relevant professional learning.

The cuts in staffing resources also mean that ASN teachers have busier workloads and less time to complete incident reports, which can mean under-reporting of violent incidents. We also have concerns about the reduction in educational psychological services. The number of educational psychologists practising in Scotland fell by a tenth in the three years from 2012 to 2015. There were 370 trained educational psychologists practising in Scottish local authorities in 2015 - 10% fewer than the 411 practising in 2012. These staff provide valuable support to children with additional needs and can be of assistance to teachers in meeting children's diverse needs.

Cuts to English as an Additional Language services are also of concern.ⁱⁱ As a consequence of the lack of availability of financial resources, EIS members are reporting that the additional support for learning needs of many pupils are simply not being met sufficiently to facilitate their progress either in terms of their curricular achievements or their health and wellbeing. As one might expect, this issue is particularly acute in areas of the country where there have been significantly high levels of migration of families for whom English is an additional language.

Teacher morale

Members have reported that the current climate is very challenging and having a serious impact on their morale. ASN teachers have large workloads and have reported that they feel unable to meet pupils' needs as they would wish to. There is also an under-valuing of ASN teachers' skills and experiences, and we have anecdotal evidence that ASN staff are often used as supply, especially as the cover crisis worsens.

Many ASN teachers report feeling under-valued or not fully supported by senior management. For example, when violent incidents have occurred, ASN teachers have been told that "it's part of the job". We have further concerns about ASN roles becoming de-professionalised and assumptions being made that this is work that any teacher can do.

Our members working with children with additional support needs report that their daily work can be very rewarding, but it is also difficult and stressful. ASN teachers can experience serious violence and disruption from pupils, including being bitten, spat on, scratched and grabbed. Many colleagues report behaviour management concerns as their biggest difficulty, and don't feel safe at work.

Our members also report concern about large class sizes, and their impact on teachers' ability to meet all learners' needs, which further depletes morale. EIS policy is that no class should exceed 20 pupils, while a range of circumstances might justify smaller groups (e.g. composite classes, classes featuring pupils with additional needs). We regret the Scottish Government's failure thus far to meet its target of reducing class sizes. In fact, average class sizes continue to edge upwards. Evidence clearly indicates that smaller class sizes are better for pupils, and have a significant impact on the quality of the learning experience, the ability of teachers to respond to the needs of individual pupils and on achievement and attainment. Given the Scottish Government commitment to tackling the attainment gap, the trend of rising class sizes is an issue that must be tackled

through greater investment in a greater number of qualified teachers, including teachers with a specialism in additional support needs.

Attainment narratives

We would also wish to note that the current debate about attainment in Scottish schools, which has had a focus on achievement of CfE levels, SQA exam results and standardised assessment data, has not visibly taken account of the types of achievement that matter to pupils with additional needs, or even engaged with what achievement means in this context. The Delivery Plan for Excellence and Equity in Education contained very little content on this. This narrowing of the debate around what achievement means is concerning for EIS members working with learners with additional support needs. We also hope to see further elucidation of the connections between poverty and ASN. For example, children with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty. In 2014/15, 27% of households in Scotland with a disabled child were in poverty, compared with 18% of those without.ⁱⁱⁱ The attainment debate, and all pedagogical developments in Scotland, should take account of this.

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<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-05579>

ii <http://www.eis.org.uk/public.asp?id=2835>

iii <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/02/5028/1>