

CPG on Children and Young People

Additional Support for Learning (ASL) – call for evidence

Summary paper for the consideration of the Education, Children and Young People Committee

December 2023

Background

The Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Children and Young People exists to ensure that issues affecting children and young people are recognised and discussed throughout the working of the Scottish Parliament, in order to ensure that the needs and rights of children and young people throughout Scotland are met.

The following summary provides evidence from the recent CPG on Children and Young People meeting on the Committee's call for evidence on Additional Support for Learning (ASL).

What is needed to deliver inclusive education in Scotland

General observations

Members were clear that systematic change needs to happen to ensure that inclusive education is delivered for all learners in Scotland.

One member pointed out recent concluding observations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which stated that there is a need to adapt the delivery of education to ensure it is inclusive. There was a feeling that the recommendations made by the committee should drive our action going forward.¹

They Members of the CPG highlighted the “mismatch” between the needs, understanding, willingness and the volume of existing good practice on the ground and the policy narrative and slow pace of systems change. They highlighted that this is a discussion those working in this area have been having “for decades” and their desire to see consistent change.

One member of the CPG also highlighted that conversations around inclusive education have been ongoing for ‘decades’ and stressed the need for a faster pace of change.

Resourcing

The urgent need for greater financial support and resourcing of additional support for learning was highlighted throughout the discussions.

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<https://www.csie.org.uk/inclusion/crc-alphabetical.shtml#uk>

Members spoke about issues with staff turnover and how young people build relationships with a member of staff and can feel lost and unsupported if that staff member moves on to a new role. It was felt that improved pay would help retain staff in their roles and improve consistency of support for pupils.

Training and support for staff

It was emphasised that teachers need greater support to deliver inclusive education. There was a desire for further training and also the need for resources to deliver high-level support.

Members also spoke about how training needs to be available to staff at all levels, not just available to certain teachers. This would help ensure that inclusive practice is adopted more consistently.

There was also a feeling that school leaders need training which has equity, inclusion and social justice at its heart to affect necessary culture changes in school settings.

Working with families

Members pointed out that achieving inclusive education needs to include whole families. Children and young people do not exist or learn in a vacuum and home environments are often a key place for supporting learning.

It is important that decision-makers recognise that education takes place beyond formal education settings. There needs to be improved support and engagement with parents and carers to build their skills, confidence in supporting children's learning.

Taking a wide view of learning

An inclusive education means accepting that formal environments do not work for some children and young people. Members stressed the need for a clearer narrative that education happens in places out with the school or classroom – such as youth work and community learning and development settings.

They also highlighted the need for stronger relationships between schools and third sector providers to support the delivery of additional support for learning. There was a feeling that often alternative forms of support for learning are only considered when issues have developed.

Some members discussed the option of moving away from learning in classrooms and offering access to education online for those who cannot be in school for a variety of reasons. There was the potential for learning from the pandemic, where some children and young people benefitted from being able to learn from home. However, any decisions to support children to access alternative routes to learning like this need to be taken on an

individual basis and be about the best interests of the child, not the needs of the school.²

They also raised the idea of recognition of others who deliver quality learning and accreditations – not just schools. They also said that education staff should continue to learn from inclusive approaches and adapt their practice.

Early years

Members recognized the importance of this in achieving inclusive education and welcomed an increasing recognition of this. However, there was a recognition of the challenges of delivering additional support for learning within early years settings, despite its key role.

Some members highlighted that ELC services are under existing pressure and there are considerable workforce development needs to provide additional support.

Members also discussed the vital importance of the transition from early years to primary school, we know there is existing good practice in supporting this. However, there was a feeling that this transition is not always prioritised.

Good practice to be learnt from, built upon, and replicated

Members highlighted how peer support models are greatly beneficial to creating inclusive learning environments. They spoke about the positive impact befriending programmes have on making pupils feel included in school.

One member also shared how the availability of Transitions Officers in primary schools who help pupils cope with the change from primary to secondary school. Learning from these approaches should be considered more widely.

The Inclusion Ambassador's Success Looks Different awards provide examples of inclusive practice from early years, primary, secondary and special school settings that could provide inspiration and development for other schools.³

For example, the winner of the secondary school category in 2022, Alva Academy, have worked to ensure that inclusive education and practice is built into the ethos of the school and all teaching staff have the skills and confidence to support every pupil. There was an example given from young people who feel there are teachers and support for learning staff who are

² This point has been echoed in the joint response submitted by Enquire (<https://enquire.org.uk/>) and My Rights My Say (<https://myrightsmysay.scot/>).

³ <https://childreninscotland.org.uk/inclusion-ambassadors-success-looks-different/>; https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/IA_SLD-Case-Studies_FINAL.pdf.

unable to respond appropriately to particular behaviours and the need for this to change by learning from available good practice.

Reflections on the impact of COVID-19 on the delivery of ASL

Many members stated the mental health impact and increased stress, trauma and anxiety in children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

They highlighted how children and young people entitled to additional support for learning struggled when they were not able to access the support they need and are entitled to. This was particularly acute for young carers, were often excluded when it came to accessing hubs. It was emphasised how the hours of caring responsibilities of young carers caring for family members increased substantially, yet these young people were not able to access much-needed respite.

Several members spoke about how the decreased opportunities to connect with nature, practice physical literacy and physical activity had a substantial knock-on impact on those who receive additional support for learning.

One member highlighted the benefit of the pandemic in which those who did not attend school prior to COVID-19, were able to access quality learning online. However, they stated that this has since been removed, the individuals who found this helpful have been left feeling devalued. They spoke about how COVID-19 brought flexibility and agility in approaches and that education staff should be carrying forward the learning from this.

As we have highlighted previously, there was some potential learning from online learning that has not been utilised to support the learning of children who are out of school.

Next steps

We would strongly encourage all members of the Committee to utilise the evidence shared here in your work undertaking the inquiry and to use this to consider how the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 has been implemented, how it is working in practice and what needs to be done to bring about inclusive education for all of Scotland's learners.

We also encourage the committee to take a rights-based approach to its consideration of additional support for learning, recognising that children have a right to an education which meets their individual talents and skills.

The CPG on Children and Young People will monitor the developments made regarding the inquiry and may revisit the issue depending on specific issues members would like to raise.

For further information

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