Submission from the Scottish Children’s Services Coalition (SCSC) to the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Culture Committee call for evidence on spending in primary and secondary schools as per its scrutiny on the 2015/16 Scottish Government Draft Budget.

Background

The Scottish Children’s Services Coalition (SCSC) is a policy-focused collaboration between leading independent and third sector service providers who have come together to work with political and other key stakeholders to help improve the delivery of children and young people’s services.

SCSC members deliver specialist care and education services for children and young people with complex needs, such as learning difficulties and learning disabilities, as well as direct help and support for them and their families. They also provide independent advocacy, advice and representation for children and young people with care experience.

SCSC submission

Given recent trends in local authorities’ spending on schools, what are likely to be the main pressures on education budgets in financial year 2015-16? Will there be any impacts on pupils and families; attainment; teacher numbers; the length and scheduling of the school week; teachers’ terms and conditions; developing and strengthening links between schools, colleges and employers; etc?

Due in part to a greater awareness of conditions such as dyslexia, autism and ADHD, and more significantly changes in the definition of additional support needs (ASN) 20% of the school age population in Scotland are identified with ASN.

This is set against a backdrop of major council budget cuts and a decrease in overall teacher numbers from 55,100 in 2007 to 51,078 in 2013, while classroom assistant numbers have stayed relatively stable. Indeed, according to Audit Scotland’s Councils spending on education reduced by 5% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2012/13, largely as a result of employing fewer staff.

This situation, with increasing numbers of those with ASN, places increased demands especially on teachers and support staff, as well as other pupils. It also challenges the ability of Councils to fulfil the requirements of the Education (Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act 2004 which places a duty on Councils to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of pupils.

Council cuts have also been judged to have a greater impact on those with ASN than those without as demand for growth in special school provision is not accounted for and there is inadequate classroom support for those in a mainstream setting. This ends up disadvantaging all pupils.

We are creating a lost generation of those with ASN, whose cost to society in the longer-term will be far greater than what any increase in adequate support would be. The current situation puts at
jeopardy the notion of early intervention and is a long way off the Scottish Government commitment to “give every child the best start in life.”

While we recognise the pressures being put on Councils and therefore on education budgets, it is clearly vital that there is adequate investment in the education of those with ASN, recognising the increased pressure being put on staff to address this issue.

**How should schools, local authorities and the Scottish Government be preparing to deal with these spending pressures?**

While we recognise the increased pressure that school budgets will be under, it is vital that Councils prioritise spending on schools to ensure that there are adequate teacher numbers and classroom assistants to deal with the increased numbers of those with ASN highlighted earlier in this submission.

The failure to address the requirements of the most vulnerable in our society through early intervention is well acknowledged, leading to established societal costs such as unemployment, ill-health, crime, anti-social behaviour and exclusion. Council cuts are also judged to impact most heavily on those with ASN than those without, although lack of resourcing impacts on all pupils.

In this context the focus by the Scottish Government on a decisive shift towards preventative spending, which includes the Early Years Change Fund, is to be welcomed. Indeed, economic modelling work published by Scottish Government in November 2010 suggests that £1 invested in preventative measures can save £9 on more acute services in later life.

The costs of early intervention far outweigh the increased costs required to address the requirement of those with ASN and failure to invest adequately is not an option.

**Will the allocation to be provided via the 2015-16 Draft Budget be sufficient to enable local authorities to provide a quality education; meet all their statutory obligations in relation to schools; and deliver the Scottish Government’s national educational priorities?**

No. In its current state the Draft Budget ignores the problem of already struggling resources for those children and young people with ASN.

Schools already cannot cope with this strain, which stands to only get worse as improved diagnosis of those, especially with Autism Spectrum Disorders increases as does the survival rates of children with life-limiting conditions. On top of this, we have a growing number of children with disorders arising from alcohol and other substance misuse during pregnancy. Any small increase in children with complex and palliative care needs will have a disproportionate impact on resources.

Thousands of vulnerable children and young people are already missing out on the support that they deserve and the situation will only worsen given the lack of attention it has received in the Draft Budget. This leads us to question the ability of Councils to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of their pupils, a statutory duty under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.
This alone could be self-defeating, leading to a rise in the number of tribunals through Councils failing to provide adequate support to those with ASN through the ASL Act.

It is also important to point out that failure to provide support for those with ASN not only impacts on them, but on all pupils.

- **How will the draft budget advance the preventative spending agenda in relation to school spending?**

  As we have hopefully demonstrated through earlier responses we applaud the Scottish Government’s preventative spending agenda.

  However when dealing with a rising tide of those with ASN, coupled with budgetary constraints and statutory requirements, we are facing a major crisis that will clearly have a major impact on the good work being undertaken through the preventative spending agenda.

**Reference**

1, 2 Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland, No.4 : 2013 - http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/12/4199/0

**Members of the SCSC are:**

- **Falkland House School:** With over 30 years’ experience, Falkland House School in Fife specialises in the care and education of boys who require additional learning support. It was one of the first independent schools in Scotland to be awarded Autism Accreditation by the National Autistic Society and provides 39 week and 52 week residential and day places.

- **Mindroom:** A Scottish charity dedicated to creating awareness of all kinds of learning difficulties. Mindroom also provides one-to-one support to families and offer help, advice and training to individuals and organisations who work with people with learning difficulties.

- **Spark of Genius:** An independent organisation offering residential care, education, autism services, post-16 employability programmes and adult services throughout the UK. It enables children, young people and adults who need a variety of support to achieve their potential.

- **Who Cares? Scotland:** A third sector independent advocacy organisation that provides individual and collective advocacy to children and young people with care experience across Scotland. It has been working with children and young people for 35 years and uses this experience to campaign, lobby and speak out both with them
and on their behalf. This ensures that their views, needs and wishes are being sought, heard and listened to by local and national government.

- **Young Foundations**: Provides a range of services across the UK for children and young people - with or without learning disabilities or mental ill-health - through residential care for teenagers, transition care for young adults and fostering.

- **Kindred**: Provides information, advocacy and emotional support to parents/carers of children and young people with additional support needs.

Further information about the SCSC can be found at [www.thescsc.org.uk](http://www.thescsc.org.uk).

For further information please contact Alex Orr, Policy Adviser to the Scottish Children’s Services Coalition, on 0131 603 8996 or [contact@thescsc.org.uk](mailto:contact@thescsc.org.uk)