

# Scottish Government submission of 8 June 2022

## PE1870/N - Ensure teachers of autistic pupils are appropriately qualified

Thank you for your letter of 13 May 2022, following the Committee's further consideration of the above petition at its meeting on 9 March 2022.

As I set out in my letter of 27 October 2021, the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that all children and young people, including autistic learners, get the support that they need in school to reach their full potential.

As Committee is aware, the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 requires education authorities to identify, provide for and to review the additional support needs of their pupils, including those who face barriers to learning due to autism. To support education authorities, the Scottish Government published our progress report against the [Autism in Schools Action Plan](#) in December 2021, which highlights that the majority of actions are complete.

Turning to the specific questions you have asked in your letter, under current legislation it is for the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) to determine what constitutes a recognised teaching qualification. The GTCS may make such provision about the education and training required to attain such a qualification as they think fit. Their current guidelines for accreditation, updated in September 2019, state that "Student teachers should be exposed to national priorities and pedagogies to develop their understanding and practice in key areas such as additional support needs including Autism". All initial teacher education programmes must align with the Standard for Provisional Registration. That standard sets out professional values that commit to motivating and including all learners, taking account of specific learning needs and seeking to reduce barriers to learning. Student teachers are also expected to plan differentiated learning experiences to ensure learning is accessible for every learner.

As I outlined in my previous letter, the GTCS published revised Professional Standards for all teachers in January 2021, which included reference to additional support needs across all five standards, including specific reference to autism. The GTCS also published a suite of guidance on their Additional Support Needs hub in November 2020. This professional guidance offers practical advice for teachers on meeting the needs of learners who require additional support. As part of this, the GTCS created “Meeting the needs of autistic learners” in partnership with the National Autism Implementation Team (NAIT), National Autistic Society Scotland, Scottish Autism and Children in Scotland.

I, therefore, do not consider that a child rights’ impact assessment of initial teacher education is required at this point in time.

Regarding the committee’s second question, I agree that teachers and support staff play a crucial role in supporting all children and young people to reach their full learning potential. A school’s culture, ethos and values are fundamental to promoting positive relationships and behaviour. There are a range of strategies and programmes which schools can and do use to improve relationships and behaviour in schools. These include good behaviour management and behaviour support teams; solution oriented, restorative and nurture approaches and programmes to help develop social, emotional and behavioural skills. At the heart of a nurture approach is a focus on wellbeing and relationships and a drive to support the growth and development of children and young people. The National Improvement Hub provides all of our practitioners, parents and young people themselves with specific good practice models to review.

The Committee may be aware that the Scottish Government set up a working group to develop new, human rights-based, non-statutory guidance to minimise the use of restraint in schools. This new guidance will replace existing advice provided within Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: Preventing and Managing School Exclusions ([Supporting documents - Included, engaged and involved part 2: preventing and managing school exclusions - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-documents-included-engaged-and-involved-part-2-preventing-and-managing-school-exclusions-2021/pages/1-10.aspx)).

The Scottish Government is currently preparing this consultation for publication. It is anticipated that the consultation will launch prior to the end of the school year in June. I would be happy to update Committee once the publication date has been finalised.

I hope the committee finds the response helpful.