

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Additional Support for Learning - informal participation session with Inclusion Ambassadors

Monday 19 February 2024

Note of discussion

Committee member attendees

Sue Webber MSP (Convener)
Ruth Maguire MSP (Deputy Convener)
Michelle Thomson MSP

Discussion on ASL with Inclusion Ambassadors

Children in Scotland hosted a meeting with the Committee and young people, Inclusion Ambassadors, on ASL. The Convener gave a brief outline of the inquiry prior to the start of the discussion. The following summary is intended to provide an overview of the main themes that emerged from the discussion.

What does it feel like when school gets your support right?

- Pupils feel really good when the support provided is correct and suits their needs
- It can be hard to understand when someone doesn't give you the support you need
- It makes you feel special when teachers and staff check in with you to see if you are ok

- Teachers are very kind and understand when you are upset which makes me feel supported and happy
- It is important that teachers take time to ask you what you need rather than assuming what you need as sometimes your needs are not obvious
- It can be tiring having to explain your additional support needs repeatedly
- It is so positive when you feel that staff care about you and give you proper support
- Things don't work well when there are not enough support staff to cope with the number of pupils who need support which can cause frustration
- One Inclusion Ambassador shared that in their experience, it is "rare" that school gets their support right because of low numbers of staff.
- Sometimes when you get older the support can become less and would be good to feel happier when you get the support more often
- It can be hard to access support for transitioning to college and university due to a lack of staff
- It can be hard when support staff change or retire and replacements are not organised
- Sometimes loud noises such as fire alarms and school bells can be confusing and ASN staff can help you in these instances which makes you feel happy and supported
- Friends can also be good source of support

- Although support in class lessons is often good however, support for exams is not always there which can be frustrating
- One Inclusion Ambassador shared that they receive a different level of support in class than what will be available to them in their upcoming exams
- It is really good when all staff make a connection and you have a relationship with all staff, not just support staff

Please tell us something your school does well to support you?

- Schools have offered transitioning advice on what support at university will look like, which is really helpful
- There were different experiences of support for transitions to university. One member spoke about school providing support for this, but another member said they have not been supported with this
- Organisations working together is important and provides invaluable support when moving from primary school to secondary school and onto further or higher education
- Allowing you to talk about your disabilities is really helpful
- Helping with reading and scribing is so useful
- School feels a safe place with staff being trustworthy
- It is important to raise awareness for other pupils who do not have additional support needs. This is helpful and improves your confidence

- Understanding your needs and providing compromises and solutions is really helpful
- Allowing you to leave the class, or draw is crucial if you become anxious
- Regular meetings about your support needs is useful
- Parents often provide valuable support to pupils

If you were headteacher for a day, what would you change to make school a better place for people with additional support needs?

- Make support more accessible for people who need it the most
- Ask pupils who look like they are struggling if they need additional support
- Arrange visits to colleges and universities to ease transitioning
- Maintain support for pupils who need it
- Provide the correct resources for pupils who need it, such as blue light glasses, where required
- Ensure the other pupils and staff are aware of issues pupils with additional support needs and what issues they face
- Reduce the taboo surrounding disabilities
- There were mixed views on school uniforms

- Inclusion Ambassadors discussed some of the problems that people with additional support needs experience with school uniform policies. Specific problems identified were:

Some pupils experience sensory issues from wearing specific items of clothing, such as collared shirts and blazers

Individual school's uniform policies are sometimes inflexible and individual needs of pupils are not always considered