

29 March 2024

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Education Children & Young People Committee
The Scottish Parliament
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By email to ecyp.committee@parliament.scot

Dear Ms Webber

Thank you for your letter requesting input to this important area of discussion on the provision of additional support for learning. I would like to reiterate my apologies for the administrative error leading to our delay in responding to you.

I am aware that the Committee met on 20 March 2024 and that further discussion took place with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in that session. We will continue to work with Scottish Government officials on the matters raised in the Committee.

We would also like to take this opportunity to contribute as originally requested.

The role of Scottish Futures Trust

Scottish Futures Trust works with Scottish Government and a wider range of industry partners to deliver the Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) and similar programmes.

The SFT team consists of a small number of infrastructure specialists with commercial, technical and programme management backgrounds, and, working with Scottish and Local Government has developed and delivered programme approaches to joint investment in the learning estate. This has included developing innovative funding mechanisms, investment linked to policy outcomes and supporting metrics to assist local authorities in engaging and contracting with their delivery partners to invest in the learning estate.

The provision of schools in Scotland is the responsibility of each local authority who assess, plan and deliver infrastructure in response to the specific needs of communities. While there are overarching national statutory requirements covering basic parameters related to the learning estate such as the School Premises Regulations, local factors such as demographics, employment needs, approach to pedagogy and environment are decided by local authorities.

Design and the Learning Estate Investment Programme

The Learning Estate Strategy co-published by Scottish Government and COSLA in 2009 incorporated overarching guiding principles. These included the imperative that “Schools are well-designed, accessible, inclusive learning environments that inspire and drive new thinking and change and

which support the delivery of high quality educational experiences". This was reiterated in 2019 when the strategy was updated with the first two principles being:

1. Learning environments should support and facilitate excellent joined up learning and teaching to meet the needs of all learners
2. Learning environments should support the wellbeing of all learners, meet varying needs to support inclusion and support transitions for all learners;

The provision of appropriate space and facilities is essential to support the needs of every learner. There is a very wide range of need depending on factors specific to every person, and often these needs can change over time or potentially even within the course of a day. Schools, local authorities, Scottish Government and the designers of learning spaces work continuously and collaboratively to understand these needs and endeavour to ensure that spaces are created to respond to these broad needs in the most appropriate way feasible.

Scottish Government has worked alongside local authorities to provide additional funding support over the last 15 years through Scotland's Schools for the Future Programme and currently the Learning Estate Investment Programme. This has helped local authorities to provide a range of spaces to support the nuanced needs of individuals, both within or alongside mainstream schools and also in separate specialised facilities. For some learners this may mean being included alongside their peers, others may require nurture or retreat spaces, and for some learners separated environments may be best.

Through its programme management roles the SFT team has helped support a range of projects in government funded investment programmes, examples of which are noted below.

Scotland's School for the Future Programme

Standalone specialist schools: These facilities are often provided to support learners with the most severe and complex needs. They tend to have a high space provision to accommodate large equipment and high staff/pupil ratios, and in some instances the care provided also includes medical support which places extra demands on space. The programme approach allowed for additional support for the costs to recognise the specialist environments required. Examples of these types of facilities are Carronrange School in Falkirk and Riverbrae School in Linwood.

Specialist within mainstream: For many children and young people, maximising their opportunities for inclusion whilst recognising the potential need for separation is important. Many schools have opted to co-locate specialist facilities alongside mainstream schools to support this approach. This is typically designed as an integral part of the mainstream school but with the capability to operate separately as necessary. Examples are Elgin Academy, Jedburgh 3-18 Campus, Dumfries North West 3-18 Campus.

Nurture spaces within mainstream: To support learners with moderate support needs, some of the projects incorporate a range of spaces where an individual can tailor their environment in response to their varying need. This could include for example quiet spaces, nurture rooms, smaller scale dining spaces or dedicated low stimulus external environments. Examples of this approach are at Baldragon Academy in Dundee or the Dalbeattie 3-18 Learning Campus.

Learning Estate Investment Programme

Building on the lessons learned from previous projects, LEIP continues to support a wide range of learning environments for a wide range of learner needs. For example, the new Beatlie school in West Lothian which opened in 2023 provides state of the art spaces and assistive technology and is also co-located with the NHS to provide specialist support.

The LEIP programme is also supporting the extension to the Carrongrange School in Falkirk, itself a school built originally with Scottish Government support through the previous programme.

Further new specialist facilities are also under development in Lochies School in Alloa which is co-located with a wellbeing hub to maximise learner opportunities. In Kirkwall a dedicated ASN school is also under development through LEIP and these projects are being developed collaboratively to ensure that knowledge is shared to create the best learning environments.

Many other projects follow the “specialist within mainstream” approach, with examples at Rosehill High School in Wallyford, Dunfermline Learning Campus and the East End Campus in Dundee.

Sharing Learning to support Local Authorities

SFT engages with each project in LEIP at key stages from briefing, design, construction and into operation. We use a series of workshops to understand the key drivers and issues and provide a “critical friend” role to challenge and support project development. This can range from macro site strategy through building concept design and into more detailed issues such as energy strategy, space layout and materiality. Our role is not to instruct any approach but rather to share experiences and knowledge from other projects to help inform bespoke local solutions.

The programme approach managed by SFT encourages knowledge sharing across local authorities, and we have facilitated discussions between specific projects, across all authorities through Shared Learning Events and nationally through the annual Learning Places Scotland Conference. We will continue to learn from these and other projects and seek feedback from users to help inform the design of future learning spaces to support the needs of every learner.

We welcome collaboration from experts within this field to support Scottish and local government to further enhance inclusive learning environments across learning estate investment programmes.

I trust the Committee finds this information useful. Please do contact me if you have any questions on SFT input in this area.

Yours sincerely

Peter Reekie
Chief Executive