

Additional support for learning: Written submission from Connect, 26 September 2025

Connect's Response to the Public Audit Committee on Additional Support for Learning

Connect is a long-standing independent parents' organisation and the only Scottish charity which is dedicated to supporting parental engagement in education. We provide membership services to Parent Councils and PTAs, as well as offering advice and information to individual parents/carers about any aspect of the education of their child or the wider education system.

We support education professionals in developing their skills and understanding around effective partnership working with families and the wider community. Our evidence-based approaches reflect the recognised significant role of families in the learning of their children and young people, and in their expertise and knowledge of their own child.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Public Audit Committee's investigation of Additional Support for Learning (ASL). We would like to make the following points:

Disaggregating ASL data

- Connect agrees that there is a need for more detailed information within the current ASL categories. In the [Scottish Assembly of Parents and Carers' report on ASL](#), parents reported that there were gaps in understanding, and that a 'broad brush approach' is taken to support needs. 70% of parents surveyed felt the current support systems available are 'inefficient' or 'very inefficient' in addressing individual needs. The gaps in knowledge must be addressed in order to provide appropriate support and build better understanding of the ASL landscape.
- We also agree with COSLA and the Scottish Government's proposal that the data summit could explore linking ASL education data with health & social data. This would provide consistency of terminology, which would both allow for a clearer national picture of ASL across Scotland, and enable children and parents to advocate for support without navigating differences in language used. One parent reported in the Assembly's ASL report 'It feels like a tick-box exercise. Nothing in the data reflects the reality of what supports my child actually receives day to day'. Parents and carers should be provided with clear definitions of each term used, and the support that they can expect to receive to ensure clarity.
- We are concerned by the differences in rates of ASL across local authorities. Although we accept there may be variation across local authorities, it is hard to believe that the current differences can be explained as this. We believe there could be a number of possible causes of this including different recording standards, staffing levels, or incorrect categorisation. There is also a disconnect on use of coordinated support plans across authorities, with some issuing plans for nearly all children with an ASN, and others rarely utilising them. These inconsistencies represent a failure to recognise support needs, and provide support, and where there are irregular recording practices local authorities should investigate this as a matter of urgency. This also requires



exploration at a national level to ensure clarity of recording standards and equal access to ASL where it is needed. The Assembly's ASL report highlighted inconsistencies of support across local authorities, which reinforces the need for consistent national standards. Guidance must be produced and training delivered to all using SEEMiS to record ASL data, with recording standards clearly laid out.

- No data currently exists on what types of support are provided, or crucially whether support is effective, and [Audit Scotland](#) shows a significant attainment gap for pupils receiving ASL. This indicates that more work must be done to understand what support works (and doesn't), and how we can create better metrics for understanding the impact of support. This recording must include the budget allocated and specific details of support provided for each school and local authority, reported by local authority annually. When creating a framework for understanding support outcomes, parents must be included to provide insight into children's experiences outwith the school environment.
- Data recording must include the spend on support at a local level and be reported on regularly. The Scottish Government's additional £28m spend for ASL is a fraction of the total spend, so recording this and evaluating its effectiveness is vital to ensure sufficient funds are allocated to ensure positive impact on those receiving ASL.

Timeline for National Measurement Framework delivery

- Connect is concerned that although there is an agreed timeline for the National Measurement Framework, with the first iteration published in December 2025, the process is not set to conclude until 2028. Parents of children with additional support needs suggested interim measures including annual reporting on current available support, or piloting elements of the framework before 2028. We recommend this approach to ensure a generation of children requiring ASL will not continue their education with their needs unmet.
- As laid out above, we are also concerned that inaccurate recording practices will not be addressed in the meantime, and call for investigation by local authorities into potential under-recording of ASL in their schools.

Mandatory mediation as part of the tribunal process

- The Assembly's report on ASL demonstrates that parents did not feel listened to by school staff and other professionals. Parents can face a power imbalance when voicing a concern to school, and mediation should provide support to overcome this and ensure that parent voices are given weight. Although we agree with COSLA and the Scottish Government that mandated mediation could be counterproductive to achieving resolution, mediation should always be easily available, and should be offered every time a concern or complaint is raised. One parent told us 'mediation was offered, but I felt outnumbered and unheard. Everyone else around the table was from the school or the council.'

Publication of the joint report on pupil support assistants' training and accreditation

- As laid out in the Assembly's report, parents call for ASN training to be embedded throughout the school, not only delivered to support staff. We know that recruitment challenges exist, leading to temporary staff in schools, which is also a challenge to

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delivering ASL support. We call for a high quality national training programme that supports teachers, support staff and others in the school to better understand and serve the needs of those who require ASL. This will require consistent funding to ensure all staff who spend time in schools are able to receive the same training and deliver the same support.

- We highlight that in the same report, 91% of parents surveyed feel that additional support staff would benefit children and young people with ASN. Although training and accreditation are important, they cannot overcome a lack of available staff.

Connect believes in the need for greater depth of understanding, accountability and clarity around additional support for learning in Scotland. Without this, children and young people will not receive the support they need to achieve the goals of education. Although the proposed plan for delivery of the National Measurement Framework goes some way to meeting this need, there are still gaps in the data that need to be addressed before all children and their families can access support that takes into account the unique needs of the individual.

Connect
26 September 2025

