

Additional support for learning: Written submission from Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), 3 October 2025

The Educational Institute of Scotland ('EIS'), the country's largest teaching union, representing almost 65,000 members across all sectors of Education and at all career levels, welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Public Audit Committee's request for comments on the Committee's evidence sessions with the Auditor General for Scotland (AGS), the Scottish Government and COSLA.

For some time, the EIS has campaigned for increased resourcing of ASL to bridge the gap between policy and practice in our schools and for a long-term resourcing strategy – including action to reduce class sizes and significantly enhance the availability of specialist ASL support and expertise within schools – to match the scale of the promise to children and families made within the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act almost two decades ago.

The EIS welcomed the Audit Scotland briefing on Additional Support for Learning as further compelling evidence - following the stark testimony from teachers, parents and other stakeholders, heard by the Education, Children and Young People's Committee - of the challenges confronting teachers, families and children and young people in a context where over 40% of learners have additional support needs. This follows an unprecedented [Joint Statement on 'ASN in Scotland's Schools'](#), co-ordinated by the EIS and signed by various stakeholders involved in education including trade unions, parent groups and professional associations who all called on the Scottish Government and education authorities to fully resource ASN to close the gap between policy and the reality faced by young people and all of those who support them. In a call to action, the joint statement emphasised the need for ASN funding to be prioritised as a matter of urgency.

"We call on the Scottish Government and all education authorities to put in place the requisite additional staffing and resources to fully implement the relevant legal duties and commitments in practice for all pupils with additional support needs, and in so doing, improve the quality of education provision and wellbeing for those children and young people, and improve the working conditions, health, safety and wellbeing of the teachers and support staff who work with them." (Joint Statement on ASN in Scotland's Schools)

In one of its recommendations, the Audit Scotland briefing highlighted the disconnect between the rising numbers of pupils with ASN and the level of planning and resourcing required to support those young people. In accepting that supporting pupils with ASN is a core part of what teachers do, Audit Scotland called for a whole scale reassessment of how ASL is funded, planned and implemented.

"However, the Scottish Government has not planned effectively for the potential impact of this inclusive approach to ASL. It is not specifically reflected in funding formulas for education and education planning, such as training for teachers and

support staff, class sizes and the design of school buildings. The Scottish Government and councils need to fundamentally evaluate how education is funded, staffed and assessed to support all pupils to reach their full potential. They also need to consider the continual growth in pupils requiring ASL within their wider approach to improving child development.” (Audit Scotland ASL Briefing, page 5)

In welcoming the Audit Scotland briefing, EIS General Secretary Andrea Bradley, highlighted the scale of the work that will be required to support our young people, their families and school staff in ensuring we do fulfil the rightful ambition of Getting It Right For Every Child:

"The findings of the report dovetail with findings from past EIS research, which confirmed that ensuring an appropriate level of provision for young people with Additional Support Needs is one of the greatest concerns amongst Scotland’s teachers and, also, one of the greatest challenges facing Scotland’s schools."

In response to this Call for Views, the EIS will focus on evidence given in the two Committee sessions by key stakeholders including the Auditor General, his Audit Scotland colleagues, COSLA, Scottish Government staff and MSPs. We intend to draw out some key themes from this evidence and set out the perspective of the EIS in relation to them.

Presumption of Mainstreaming

A key legal development in terms of ASN in Scotland was the introduction of the ‘presumption of mainstreaming’. This refers to the requirement that local authorities provide school age children with education in mainstream schools, a requirement which is contained within Section 15 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000¹. This section of the legislation specifies that where an education authority, in carrying out their duty to provide school education to a child of school age, provides that education in a school, the authority ‘shall provide it in a school other than a special school’ unless specific circumstances set out in the legislation arise.

The specific circumstances described in the legislation, under which an education authority can provide education for the child ‘in a school other than a special school’, are where it

- (a) would not be suited to the ability or aptitude of the child;
- (b) would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education for the children with whom the child would be educated; or
- (c) would result in unreasonable public expenditure being incurred which would not ordinarily be incurred.’

The legislation presumes that ‘those circumstances arise only exceptionally’. If one of these circumstances arises, the authority may still provide education for the

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2000/6/contents>

child in question in a mainstream school, but they cannot do so without taking into account the views of the child and of the child's parents.

In 2019, the Scottish Government produced '[Guidance on the Presumption to Provide Education in a Mainstream Setting](#)', which provided guidance to education authorities on their duty 'to provide education in a mainstream school or early learning and childcare setting unless certain exceptions apply'. The guidance is based on four key principles: present, participating, achievement and support, with 'key expectations' relating to each one. The guidance covers the key features of inclusion and developing inclusive practice; deciding on the right provision for a young person; and how and why exceptions could be applied.

In his evidence to the Committee, Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland referenced the legislative framework that underpins the presumption of mainstreaming and how education policy over the past 20 years has resulted in most ASN needs being met in mainstream classrooms and schools.

"Children have a legislative right to receive a mainstream education in Scotland's schools, which is reflected in the language used. Educationists talk about a "presumption of mainstreaming". The statistics that we have set out in the briefing show that that objective has been achieved. Most children and young people who are identified as needing additional support for learning now receive the support in a mainstream setting." (Stephen Boyle, Public Audit Committee Official Report 19/3/25, column 3)²

Not only are most children and young people receiving ASL in their mainstream classrooms but this support is predominately being delivered by classroom teachers. The [Audit Scotland briefing](#) (para 46 & Exhibit 5) highlights the extent to which mainstream classroom teachers are supporting young people with ASN. Since the data was first captured in 2019 it shows a 347% rise with no significant change in other categories of support.

The presumption of mainstreaming was also referenced in evidence during the session with Scottish Government and COSLA on 7th May 2025. Laura Caven, COSLA Chief Officer for Children and Young People cited the benefits of mainstreaming for young people.

"On the impact on the wider class, we know from the international evidence that it is beneficial for everyone in the classroom if there is a presumption in favour of mainstreaming and having a diverse mix of children and young people in a classroom learning about how other people live, acceptance and all that side of things. There is evidence to show that mainstreaming is beneficial on the citizenship side of things." (Laura Caven, Public Audit Committee Official Report 7/5/25, column 29)³

The EIS is absolutely clear that Scotland's legislation in this area is world-leading and provides the bedrock for an educational system whose ethos is founded on inclusivity and equity and which aims to support the holistic development of all

² <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=16335>

³ <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=16410>

learners as set out above. However, the EIS has consistently highlighted that the gap between the ambition of policy in this area, and the implementation of policy in practice is stark. Citing statistics, the Auditor General states that the 'objective [i.e. the presumption of mainstreaming] has been achieved'. Whilst this is indeed true, it does not follow that the aims of inclusion through a mainstreaming approach have been achieved, or that the figures translate into an inclusive and equitable school experience for all learners. Indeed, the EIS has argued that the failure to adequately resource ASN policy and to properly support implementation in schools has placed incredible and unsustainable pressure on the system as a whole.

Most significantly for teachers is the added stress, the extra workload and the additional complexities surrounding learning and teaching which result from this increased level of support for children with ASN, without a corresponding increase in resource. Statistics gathered by the Scottish Government from 2014-2024⁴ ⁵ show the increasing range and complexity of need and how the level of ASN support has not kept pace:

- Number of pupils with ASN – Increased by 64%
- Number of Special Schools – Decreased by 26%
- Number of ASN Teachers (FTE) – Decreased by 8%
- Statutory Co-ordinated Support Plans – Decreased by 61%
- Non-statutory Child's Plan's – Increased by 254%

Furthermore, the EIS All Member Survey 2025 identified that nearly 80% of members either agreed or strongly agreed that there are insufficient resources to support the effective implementation of mainstreaming in their setting. Remarkably, 99% of respondents agreed that the under-resourcing of support needs arising from the presumption of mainstreaming has had a negative impact on all learners. The same proportion (99% of respondents) agreed that the under-resourcing of additional support needs arising from the presumption of mainstreaming has negative impacts upon teachers because it increases workload, decreases job satisfaction, impacts negatively on teacher health and wellbeing, and contributes to teachers not feeling safe in their setting. Furthermore, only just over 1% of respondents said they could access front line support services at the point when the need was identified, 'all the time'.

These findings are mirrored in the conclusions of the independent Teacher Workload Research Report 2024, commissioned by the EIS, which stated that *'the presumption to mainstream education requires teachers to enhance their professional skills to provide responsive and targeted support for individual needs. In the context of declining access to support for learning experts and classroom assistants, this commitment increases teacher workload'*⁶.

Further evidence from our members shows how insufficient funding and staffing means that many schools struggle to provide the necessary support for pupils with ASN in mainstream settings due to a lack of protected time to engage with other

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-5-2014-edition/pages/16/>

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-for-schools-in-scotland-2024/>

⁶ <https://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/Campaigns/QualityEducation/WorkloadResearch.pdf>

agencies and participate in staff training; limited resources, including specialist staff and equipment; and a paucity of appropriate facilities such as break out rooms/nurture spaces.

The EIS supports the presumption of mainstreaming policy but it is clear that years of systemic underfunding have led to significant impacts upon teachers and learners. This manifests in teachers working on average 11 hours above their contracted hours as highlighted in the 2024 EIS Teacher Workload Research Report⁷. Further testimony from the report gave examples of teachers dealing with large classes, a wide range of needs and abilities, where on average eleven pupils out of a class of thirty could require support for their ASN.

The tensions between the increasing level of need within classrooms and the resources and time available were highlighted by this main grade secondary teacher in the report.

"We don't have enough money for young people who need extra support and are in mainstream education just muddling along as best as they can. Without smaller class sizes, more teachers and more learning support, the government is just putting plasters over a gaping wound." (EIS Teacher Workload Research Report, page 27)

The EIS is clear that 'the presumption of mainstreaming' as set out in Scotland's legislative framework, does not in any way imply that learners should be educated in settings which are not appropriate in meeting their needs. It follows, therefore, that Special Schools, base units and tailored provision, where more bespoke arrangements can be adopted to support the needs of some children and young people are integral to our system; it is further clear that mainstream settings are not appropriate to meet the needs of some learners.

In 2014 there were 145 Special Schools in Scotland and the most recent statistics show that number decreased to 107 in 2024.⁸ This reduction in specialist provision compares to a 102% increase in pupils with an identified ASN over the same period. Whilst the rise in identified ASN does not necessarily entail an expected commensurate rise in required spaces for specialist provision, it defies credibility to suggest that the marked decline in specialist provision at the same time as a massive increase in identified ASN does not manifest in learners whose educational needs are currently unmet.

This reduction in specialist provision whilst ASN needs are increasing has led to increasing pressure on teachers and school staff to support young people in their current mainstream setting. The impact of such increasing pressure was

⁷ <https://www.eis.org.uk/teacher-workload/research>

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2019/07/pupil-census-supplementary-tables/documents/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics-2024/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics-2024/govscot%3Adocument/Pupil%2Bcensus%2Bsupplementary%2Bstatistics%2B2024%2B-%2BMarch.xlsx>

highlighted by our members in our 2023 Violence and Aggression Survey Report⁹ which surveyed EIS branches across Scotland about their experiences of violence and aggression in their schools.

Some branches highlighted the impact which the reduction in the number of Special Schools and support-based units in mainstream settings is having on the delivery of inclusive education for children and young people who are now having to spend significant periods of time in mainstream without the support they were previously getting.

"So many young people receiving minimal support for conditions that can lead to emotional dysregulation (for example) and being expected to manage this in a class of 30 without any additional support in the class. Not enough PSAs to go round. Teachers not having the time or space in their timetable to offer individualised support themselves. Lots of young people with undiagnosed conditions due to NHS waiting lists for CAMHS." "More and more ASD pupils who cannot cope in busy classes are being expected to integrate in mainstream without support."

This may have an impact not only on the pupil with ASN but also on the learning of others in the class.

"Mainly due to the fact that children who would previously have been placed in a base school are now in a mainstream school where ASL needs cannot be met due to larger numbers of children with ASN across the school. This is having a significant impact on the learning of all others in the classroom."

Our report on violence and aggression also indicated a significant increase in persistent low-level disruption with 99% of EIS branches surveyed reporting this having an effect on pupils' learning. Also, the increasing level of need and associated differentiated learning planning were highlighted as key workload drivers. On the occasions when support in the classroom is available, members highlighted, that pupil support workers were often redeployed at short notice to help manage acute behaviour issues. Members report that this has presented significant challenge. Branches were asked what actions would best support all pupils and teachers in dealing with violent and aggressive behaviour. Increased support staff to support pupils with ASN was the most commonly recorded answer for both primary (75.5%) and special education branches (65.4%). 67.3% of Secondary branches also cited increased support staff as helping to address violent and aggressive behaviour in schools.

Data Recording

Another theme raised in the evidence sessions was around the data collected on ASN within schools. This focused on the consistency of data collected, perceived gaps in data collection and the use of data.

"We found it difficult to locate the evidence that would allow us to fully assess the impact of those legislative changes because of the gaps in the data. The data that is available is limited and not always consistent, and, significantly, robust and well-developed data is lacking on the outcomes of individual children and young people in the system." (Alison Cumming, Public Audit Committee Official Report 19/3/25, column 4¹⁰)

The answer to many of the questions raised in Committee about data were linked to the proposed National Measurement Framework (NMF) which is within the remit of the ASL Project Board. The first iteration of this framework was presented to the Project Board at its last meeting on 20th August 2025. It is important to state where the genesis of the NMF came from and the rationale for gathering such data.

Angela Morgan's 2020 report 'Support for Learning: All our Children and all their Potential' contained a recommendation that there should be the establishment of a national measurement framework to ensure *'no reduction in the aspiration and ambition for all children and young people to achieve to the maximum of their learning potential'*¹¹.

Despite concerns which the EIS had that the remit of the ASL Review did not extend to resourcing of ASL, the EIS was supportive of the recommendation in relation to the creation of a National Measurement Framework, as a means of recognising and celebrating the achievements of all learners. This rationale behind the recommendation was clear. It provides that any measurement framework *'...must be rooted in improvement methodology and assist in reinforcing a culture of improvement rather than compliance'*. For the avoidance of doubt, the EIS views this as an acknowledgement that the wider educational system has been hobbled by an obsession with big data leading to unhealthy competition, performativity and compliance; and an exhortation to the system that such counter-educational practices do not extend further in the work of the NMF. We have seen over recent years how data collection has led to increased pressure and workload for teachers with data collected relating less to improving teaching and learning at classroom level and more to comparisons between schools and authorities, leading to performative changes to practice and priorities. To be inclusive of all young people, the EIS supports data collection that is broad, quantitative and qualitative and which celebrates a wide range of achievement as opposed to the system's current narrow and disproportionate focus on attainment and simplistic yet potentially misleading metrics such as initial leaver destinations. This is especially important in relation to young people with ASN where the traditional assessment and qualifications system in schools, to a large extent, built around high stakes external summative exams, does not fully acknowledge their breadth of achievement and the value of their contribution to the life and success of their school, community and themselves. The Morgan Review supported a measurement framework that would give recognition to individual achievement

¹⁰ <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=16335>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/review-additional-support-learning-implementation/documents/>

and this could be done by ‘...creating **equally valued** alternative pathways and ways of measuring individual progress.’

We welcome the comments made by Audit Scotland that the intention behind better data collection is to fill current gaps and to ensure any underreporting of equality issues can be improved.

"Our intention is not for people to start making league tables; we just want to understand and try to fill in any current data gaps, as they might also link to the under-recording of some equality issues." (Yoshiko Gibo, Public Audit Committee Official Report 19/3/25, column 8)

Furthermore, at Committee session on 7th May 2025, Stella Smith from the Scottish Government stated that the NMF should celebrate achievement.

"Part of the purpose of the national measurement framework is to capture the wider achievements of children and young people with ASN who may not achieve in the traditional academic sense." (Stella Smith, Public Audit Committee Official Report 7/5/25, column 31)

We support this approach, which is in line with Angela Morgan’s recommendations, as the NMF must not add to the already excessive workload of teachers across Scotland. The 2025 EIS Workload Survey¹² identified that only 1% of respondents said they have sufficient time in a typical working week to complete paperwork, liaise with colleagues and external agencies, and attend meetings in relation to supporting pupils with Additional Support Needs. This stark finding shows that teachers are already struggling to find time for activities related to supporting the ASN needs of the young people in their class.

In the 2025 Programme for Government, an ASN Data Summit was proposed this calendar year¹³. In their 27th June letter to the Committee¹⁴, COSLA and the Scottish Government gave more details about the summit, in particular, references to engaging with stakeholders. We welcome this promise as it is vital that the views of teachers and school staff, who are on the front line of inputting and gathering data related to ASN, are heard and fully involved at the start of this process. As the largest teaching union in Scotland, we will hold both COSLA and the Scottish Government to these commitments of engagement.

Waiting for an ASN Diagnosis

The discussion at the Committee sessions in relation to data also raised issues in terms of the number of young people waiting for a diagnosis and those not captured in the data due to an unmet need. The Audit Scotland Briefing (para 16) stated that,

'Some categories of additional support needs can require a diagnosis involving a specialist before they can be formally recorded...Delays in accessing specialist

¹² [https://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/Campaigns/QualityEducation/2025%20Survey%20-%20Workload%20Briefing%20\(June%202025\).pdf](https://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/Campaigns/QualityEducation/2025%20Survey%20-%20Workload%20Briefing%20(June%202025).pdf)

¹³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/programme-government-2025-26/pages/5/>

¹⁴ <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/public-audit-committee/correspondence/2025/additional-support-for-learning-sg-cosla-to-pac-27-june-2025.pdf>

support for a diagnosis mean that needs may be under-recorded, and that national data is unlikely to provide an accurate national picture of additional support needs.'

This view was further supported through oral evidence given at Committee by Ruth McLeod from the Accounts Commission and Yoshiko Gibo from Audit Scotland.

'If somebody is not receiving additional support for learning because they are waiting for a diagnosis, that will not be captured in the data, which creates additional problems. There is also frustration when people wonder whether they need to wait to access support. They should not have to wait, but it might be the case that that is happening in certain parts of the country.' (Ruth McLeod, Public Audit Committee Official Report 19/3/25, column 11¹⁵)

"A diagnosis is not required— that is really clear. However, if a child does not have a diagnosis, they might not be recorded as having a mental health issue in the national data. Something like a medical diagnosis might be required to say that it is a mental health issue. We highlighted that in paragraph 16. The data might not be an accurate picture, because those needs might be under recorded." (Yoshiko Gibo, Public Audit Committee Official Report 19/3/25, column 11)

The continued misunderstanding that ASN support can only be provided with a diagnosis is concerning and will add to the number of young people with unmet ASN needs in mainstream classrooms. The consequence of delays in providing support means that these unmet needs are having a real impact on the learning of those young people, the ability of already over-stretched teachers to fully support them and the equity of young people in different parts of the country receiving support quicker compared to their peers in a different local authority.

Our members have also highlighted issues in relation to accessing support services and their ability to support young people with ASN in our 2024 All Member Survey which asked:

'To what extent are children and young people in your setting able to access frontline support services at the point when their support need is identified?'

- 45% Occasionally
- 28% Sometimes
- 12% Never
- 9% Frequently
- 1% All of the Time

The additional comments in relation to this question further emphasised our members' views that waiting for support is having a negative impact on that young person.

"We have a significantly high number of children in our school with additional needs and the amount of referrals we have to write and manage is very difficult."

¹⁵ <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=16335>

Most of these are then rejected and the process then has to start again to another service.”

"Resources are fewer than I have ever experienced. Partnership agencies have either closed waiting lists, have higher thresholds or have lengthy wait times. In house supports are also fewer in number.”

There were also comments from members in rural parts of Scotland and in island communities who felt that services had become overly centralised and, as a result, that was making it challenging for parents and their children to attend appointments.

This lack of equity across Scotland is further reinforced by the latest Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) waiting times figures which show differences between the largest urban health board (NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde) and the largest rural one (NHS Highland). The table below illustrates the difference in waiting times from referral to first appointment with CAMHS.

	0-18 weeks	19-35 weeks	36-52 weeks	53 or more weeks
NHS Highland	63.7%	20.3%	12.2%	4.5%
NHS GGC	99.5%	0.5%	0%	0%

Whilst we welcome CAMHS meeting the Scotland wide 90% 18 weeks treatment target¹⁶, there are clearly still variances between health boards. This creates a 'post code' lottery for young people, their families and schools and is an obvious equity issue. Furthermore, comments from our All Member Survey indicate that gaps between appointment times can be long and more support is needed at a school level to support young people and school staff, in this interim period.

Not all additional support needs are medical or diagnosable in nature, but many are. In those cases, early diagnosis is helpful. The current delays between the different stages of support, highlighted by our members above and caused in part by the shortage in specialist staff within Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Educational Psychology Services, are unhelpful to the child or young person, their family and teachers and school staff. With reports also highlighting the falling numbers of 27 month checks being completed by Health Visitors as a result of system capacity, opportunities for the early identification of needs will continue to be missed unless urgent action is taken.

GTCS registered teachers in nursery also play a key role in identifying and supporting children who require additional support for learning, in co-ordinating this support with the relevant agencies and in contributing to the multi-disciplinary team for GIRFEC purposes. We believe that the 55% decrease in the number of GTCS registered teachers in nursery since 2010 will also have contributed to this delayed identification of need.

¹⁶ <https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-camhs-waiting-times/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-camhs-waiting-times-quarter-ending-june-2025/>

Impact of the Pandemic

The COVID pandemic was raised as having significant impact on young people during the evidence sessions. In evidence to the Committee, the Auditor General and Ruth McLeod both referred to the impact which the pandemic had on young people.

"I re-emphasise the Auditor General's point about the impact of Covid, which I think has been really significant. We have seen above-average increases in interrupted learning as one of the categories for pupils receiving additional support for learning, and there have been above-average increases in mental health, bereavement and communication issues, too. All those things clearly link back to that period from 2019 on." (Ruth McLeod, Public Audit Committee Official Report 19/3/25, column 14)

All children and young people have been affected in some way by the pandemic. Confinement, restricted social interaction, illness, bereavement, poverty and food insecurity will all have made their mark to varying degrees on individuals, families and communities.

For children in the early stages of primary, they would have missed, over the periods of lockdown, the opportunity to attend Early Learning and Childcare settings; to make friends with children of their own age; and to develop vital social skills, such as sharing and even how to play cooperatively. They would also have missed the opportunity to participate in vital transition opportunities, as they prepared to enter primary education.

EIS members from various local authorities have reported an increase in the number of children presenting with delayed development or minimal speech and language acquisition on arriving in primary 1. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that there has been an increased level of distressed behaviour in this cohort of children as they struggle to communicate an underlying need verbally and in socially acceptable ways.

These communication difficulties were mirrored in a 2022 survey by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists Scotland (RCSLT Scotland) in partnership with Early Years Scotland where 89% of respondents signalled that they had seen an increase or a significant increase in the numbers of children with and complexity of, communication needs. This was further evidenced by comments from respondents who felt these communications issues were linked to the pandemic and lockdowns.

"The main theme that emerged from responses proposing a rationale for the increasing numbers and complexity of children's communication needs was the COVID-19 pandemic and impact of lockdown on children's communication and interaction skills, with reference to children's interaction, confidence, attachment, independence and resilience."¹⁷

¹⁷ <https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Early-learning-and-childcare-Speech-Language-Therapy-extended-summary.pdf>

We also know that families living in poverty were amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic and reports highlight the growing numbers of children who are now attending school with serious health concerns, such as malnutrition and rickets.

Furthermore, an entire generation of young people in our Secondary schools have had their personal, social and emotional development seriously inhibited during repeated lockdowns and many struggle to express their feelings, with anger, confusion and frustration manifesting itself through violence and aggression. It is no surprise that almost three quarters (72%) of the responses to our 2023 Violence and Aggression National Branch Survey reported that violence and aggression had 'increased significantly' over the last four years.

There have been numerous reports of the increased level and severity of additional support needs since the pandemic. The Report on Children and Young People's Health and Wellbeing, published by the Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sports Committee, on 13th May 2022, outlines the negative impact which the pandemic has had on the mental health of children and young people and suggests that the full extent of this impact and how long-lasting it will be, have yet to be fully understood.

In setting out its recommendations in the report, the Committee sought assurances from the Scottish Government that the long-term impact of COVID-19 would form an integral part of the future design and development of mental health services and support for children and young people. Whilst there has been investment in CAMHS and counselling services, to address the delays in accessing provision, its impact has yet to be fully seen. These delays, however, have a direct impact on learning, behaviour and attendance and place even greater pressures on school staff, particularly those in pastoral care and management, who are left to respond to young people's needs in lieu of the specialist support needed. They do this, whilst also delivering on their core remits, which include supporting the wellbeing of all learners.

The EIS had been clear with the Scottish Government that Education Recovery would need significant investment to meet these needs, not the 'business as usual' approach which we quickly saw emerge.

Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) & Pupil Equity Fund (PEF)

The issue of funding and how current ASL funding is being spent was another significant theme of the Audit Scotland Briefing, and was in addition, also raised at both evidence sessions at the Committee.

Under the wider umbrella of the Attainment Scotland Fund, SAC funding was introduced in 2015 where it targeted 'Challenge Authorities' and 'Challenge Schools' which were calculated by using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and selecting the fifth most deprived areas of Scotland. PEF funding was introduced in 2017/18 and given to the relevant schools, based on the proportion of children eligible for free school meals. In 2022, the Scottish Government announced that the criteria for SAC funding would change with the removal of Challenge Authorities and Schools, with the funding now split across all 32 local

authorities based on Children in Low Income Families data for the 2019/20 financial year.¹⁸

In evidence to the Committee, Neil Rennick of the Scottish Government cited SAC and PEF funding as the way that schools have been able to support young people with ASN.

"Other sources of funding exist in addition to the general local government grants. For example, several schools that I have spoken to about the Scottish Attainment Challenge have said that they have used their pupil equity funding, which goes directly to schools, for services that not only respond to deprivation but specifically benefit children and young people with additional support needs." (Neil Rennick, Public Audit Committee Official Report 7/5/25, column 17)

The EIS does not believe that SAC alone, even now that all local authorities are in receipt of it, or PEF is the best means by which to support ASN in schools or to close the poverty-related achievement and attainment gap. There must be dedicated, long-term investment in core education funding to meet the level and complexity of needs of children and young people. Funding formulas must give local authorities and schools certainty when planning in the short, medium and long term.

It is important to note that there is a clear intersection between poverty and pupils with ASN. The Scottish Parliament's Information Centre (SPICe) was clear in its briefing for the Education, Children and Young People Committee about the link between ASN and Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

"There is a correlation between the number of pupils identified with ASN and deprivation measured by SIMD. There is a very similar correlation between those assessed or declared as disabled and deprivation measured by SIMD." (SPICe Briefing on ASL, June 2023)¹⁹

The links between ASN and poverty were referenced in the Audit Scotland Briefing highlighting the stark difference between the levels of ASL in the most and least deprived areas of Scotland.

"Just under half (46 per cent) of pupils from the most deprived areas receive ASL compared to just over a quarter (27 per cent) in the least deprived areas." (Audit Scotland ASL Briefing, para 18, February 2025)

One in four children in Scotland lives in poverty, with the numbers rising to one in three in some areas, resulting in many learning communities having high concentrations of additional support needs. The Growing Up in Scotland study found that there was a notably higher prevalence of additional support needs amongst children living in the two most deprived quintiles. This was apparent for both boys and girls, with boys in the most deprived quintiles reporting rates of nearly twice the average.²⁰

¹⁸ <https://bprcdn.parliament.scot/published/ECYP/2022/8/2/c33c7780-50fe-47d8-99fc-84807b85f2df/ECYPS62022R8.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.parliament.scot/~media/committ/6314/20230628-ASN-Pack>

²⁰ [Growing Up in Scotland: Early experiences of Primary School \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/growing-up-in-scotland/early-experiences-of-primary-school/pages/10/)

One study found that 7.3% of children from the most deprived areas had mental health difficulties at the start of school, rising to 14.7% in primary three. The Mental Health Foundation reports that children in the lowest income quartile are 4.5 times more likely to experience severe mental health problems than those in the highest.²¹

The link between poverty and poor mental health has been recognised for many years and is well evidenced.²² The Mental Health Foundation Report, 'Tackling Inequalities' considers the relationship between socioeconomic inequalities and mental health issues, highlighting growing evidence that supports a link between Adverse Childhood Experiences ('ACEs') and poor physical and mental health outcomes. ACEs have been found to account for 29.8% of mental health disorders. They are thought to create chronic stress, which then leads to problems with child development; these problems, in turn, lead to health-harming behaviours and poor mental health.

Often it is children and young people suffering the impacts of poverty who most require specialist support services such as Educational Psychology, mental health support and Speech and Language Therapy. Yet such vital services have been decimated by cuts, reducing these services to consultancy models, with teachers being relied on to implement strategies out-with their sphere of professionalism.

The EIS's position is clear: we believe that core national education provision cannot be replaced, nor the deleterious effects of its erosion masked or minimised, by SAC, PEF and ASF funding. The EIS has repeatedly called for permanent ring-fenced education funding arrangements, outside of PEF, SAC and ASF, which would go some way to addressing the attrition of core educational provision in Scotland's schools and settings.

Furthermore, an increase in core funding would enable schools to support all learners including those with ASN by reducing class sizes to 20 pupils per class; to increase teacher numbers and employ more specialist ASL teachers and support staff; to reverse cuts to English as an Additional Language (EAL) provision and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) teacher provision; and to ringfence funding to support the presumption of mainstreaming, with additional funding for specialist provision.

That said, in the absence of such funding arrangements, SAC, PEF and ASF have contributed some benefits, but there can be no doubt that Scotland's teachers are currently operating within a challenging context of increased demands, declining per capita budgets and reductions in overall resourcing, with inevitable impacts on all learners, but disproportionately upon those most affected by poverty.

Tribunals

Audit Scotland's Briefing (para 42) noted that since the pandemic, there had been a 67% increase in the number applications to the Additional Needs Support

²¹ <https://www.mentalhealth.org/statistics/mental-health-statistics-poverty>

²² [MHF-tackling-inequalities-report.pdf \(mentalhealth.org.uk\)](#)

Tribunals from 2019/20-2023/24. Furthermore the briefing stated (para 43) that of the 22 tribunals held in 2023, 16 found in favour of parents and young people.

The most recent casework data from the ASN tribunal²³ shows that in 2023 the total number of references and claims received were 244 in 2023 compared to 202 in 2022 which is an increase of 21%. Of the 229 references received in 2023, 204 were related to placing requests which is 89% of the total number of references that year. Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was the highest reported additional support need in 2023, reported in 75.4% of applications, a total of 184.

The increase in the number of applications to the Tribunal highlighted by Audit Scotland's briefing and by the Tribunal's own data requires further investigation to understand what has influenced the rise. There are legitimate questions to be posed around the increase, and it would be helpful to understand if the rising number of applications is an indication of demand outpacing the availability of provision, and whether procedures are in place supporting clear communication, mediation and resolution before reaching the Tribunal.

Mediation, in particular whether it should be compulsory or not, was highlighted in both the Committee session of 7th May and in the 27th June letter to the Committee from the Scottish Government and COSLA. We believe well-resourced and supported relationships at school-family level are key in ensuring the needs of children and young people are met. Furthermore, clear communication and information about defined processes of escalation/resolution would assist in ensuring there is greater understanding about the rights of children and their families in questioning the level of ASN support that is being received.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Teacher Training

In the Committee meeting of 7th May, Colin Beattie MSP questioned if teachers are able to be trained to meet the range of ASN needs as listed within the ASN categories that Councils use to record on the SEEMiS system. Neil Rennick, Scottish Government Director-General Education and Justice responded,

"The important thing to say is that responding to additional support needs is not an add-on to what teachers do; it has always been part of what they do. Over time, the training that teachers receive in their initial teacher training and the codes of practice that they follow have focused on taking an inclusive approach in responding to the needs of all children and young people. That has always been the case in classes." (Neil Rennick, Public Audit Committee Official Report 7/5/25, column 9)

We know that teachers across Scotland support children and young people everyday with a range of ASN needs across various settings. As was mentioned previously in the Audit Scotland Briefing (para 46), the majority of young people with ASN receive additional support for learning within a mainstream setting. The challenges for probation/early career teachers are reflective of those faced by experienced teachers, yet intensified as they have not had the comparable

²³ https://judiciary.scot/docs/librariesprovider3/judiciarydocuments/scottish-tribunals-publications/scottish-tribunals-annual-report-2023-2024.pdf?sfvrsn=a8355e43_1

teaching experience of their colleagues who have been in the profession for longer, had more time to acquire knowledge and skills relating to meeting the needs of ASN pupils and engaged in more professional learning.

A 2023 report, [Measuring quality in initial teacher education: Final report](#) by Strathclyde University did highlight that those involved in delivering ITE courses reported that some students felt an area of further need was in meeting the needs of children and young people defined as having ASN.

The EIS believes that high quality, fully resourced and accessible professional learning should be available to all teachers in Scotland throughout their careers to support them in meeting the needs of young people with ASN. Unfortunately there are many factors limiting teachers' ability to fully explore their professional learning interests due to budget constraints from local authorities, increasing workload pressures and the diminishing ability of teachers to attend professional learning courses during their working day as a result of staff and cover shortages and/or the inadequacy of staff cover budgets.

It is important for all professionals working with children and young people to have appropriate, recognised qualifications. Regrettably, access to specialist qualifications in ASL has been eroded over the past two decades. In the past, teachers had access to funded post-graduate learning, with cover provided by the employer and time provided to enable the course of study to be completed successfully. Such opportunities rarely exist now. Teachers who engage in professional learning about ASL matters often do so in their own time (on top of already excessive workloads) and at their own expense.

Schools lack the staffing capacity – including funding to cover the cost of supply staff where required – to enable release from the classroom of teachers wishing to undertake relevant professional learning, and where funding may be available for cover, the requisite teachers may not be. In our 2025 EIS All Member Survey, around a third of members reported that one of their biggest workload drivers beyond teaching, preparation and correction was 'covering other classes because of staff shortages/lack of cover/unfilled vacancies'. The survey also highlighted the extra workload and time pressures schools face when supporting student teachers due to the lack of additional staffing or protected time to work with a student. Schools support probationer teachers on the Teacher Induction Scheme who are entitled to be given protected time out of class and the support of a mentor. The mentoring role is a vital part of the scheme as they guide and support the probationer teacher through their induction year. However, a lack of staffing capacity can mean additional workload and the time pressures placed upon mentors.

The EIS is aware from our professional learning offering, that courses in covering the topic of ASL are routinely over-subscribed with a waiting list pending. Furthermore, even if professional learning on ASL were to be available, teachers should be given protected and extended preparation time to reflect on their learning and engage with colleagues in collegiate dialogue about its relevance of the learning for their particular context. Time and space are crucial if professional

learning is to impact inclusive practice and outcomes for children and young people.

Professional learning is an integral and continual part of being a teacher in Scotland from entering ITE to retirement. To enable teachers to fully engage in quality professional learning there needs to be time and resource given to allow this important learning and reflection to take place. We are working with colleagues and stakeholders on the Strategic Board of Teacher Education who are looking to develop a Framework for Continuous Professional Development recognising that a teacher engages with professional learning continually throughout their career.

Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs)

PSAs play an important role by supporting young people and their teachers across all school sectors in Scotland. As mentioned previously, EIS members acknowledge the contribution of PSAs through their close working with young people with ASN in collaboration with teachers. As reported by our members, the support PSAs provide has too often been adversely affected by insufficient numbers and the draw on their time in supporting the increasing numbers of pupils with dysregulated behaviours.

The issue of the varying job roles and the titles of PSAs across the country was raised during the Committee session of 7th May and accreditation was part of the 27th June written response from the Scottish Government and COSLA to the Committee. Both responses highlighted the ongoing work between different stakeholders in creating a pathway for further training, inductions and possible accreditation for PSAs. The EIS would expect that the relevant trade unions who represent PSAs across Scotland are fully involved in any discussions relating to decisions impacting their members.

We recognise that the level of training available to PSAs during their contracted time is inconsistent across schools and authorities, a position which obviously impacts the young people and teachers they support. Furthermore, it is important that the specific roles and remits of PSAs, accredited or not, in supporting learners and teachers, is defined and delineated clearly.

Conclusion

The EIS continues to believe that the Scottish Government and Local Authorities need to be honest about the size of the challenge that we face with regards to ASN provision and about how we address it. The achievement gap and negative impact on those young people who require ASL compared with their peers was laid out in stark terms by the Auditor General at Committee.

"Existing outcome measures show that the gap between pupils who receive ASL and other children and young people is wide. For example, pupils who receive ASL are likely to do less well in exams and are more likely to experience exclusion or

be absent from school." (Stephen Boyle, Public Audit Committee Official Report, 19/3/25, column 3)

We have world-leading legislation and policy frameworks to support the presumption of mainstreaming and inclusive education. At this crucial time, when children and young people are facing so many challenges, dealing with the long lasting impact of the pandemic, and education staff witness them struggling to cope with the societal and global pressures associated with conflict, climate change and rampant poverty, we cannot ignore the evidence manifest through mental health statistics and increased levels of violence and aggression in our schools.

The erroneous narrative that 'mainstreaming' entails class teachers delivering to meet the needs of all through their standard planned differentiation of learning and teaching materials and pedagogy, and that teachers' extant professional standards should equip them to meet the level and panoply of needs apparent, without additional resource, must be quashed. Scotland needs an honest, transparent, long-term resourcing strategy – including action to reduce class sizes and significantly enhance the availability of specialist ASN support and expertise within schools – to respond to the now even more urgent and larger scale need.

Despite the range of reviews which have been commissioned to consider the delivery of ASL in our schools and the subsequent working groups created to implement recommendations, we continue to witness efforts to evade discourse around the crucial issue of resourcing. To continue to dodge this issue and to tinker around the edges of fixing the problem, does a huge disservice to many.

It is letting down the children and young people with additional support needs, including those who are care experienced, whose wellbeing, learning and associated outcomes are negatively affected by a lack of appropriate support.

It also does a disservice to the children and young people in our schools who do not have additional support needs and whose daily educational experiences are impacted by the classroom dynamics which emerge from the fact that there are very large numbers of young people who do need extra help, yet only one teacher and insufficient numbers of ASN teachers and support assistants to give that help and respond to their needs and entitlements as learners. Furthermore, the stress impact of these conditions for teachers has a negative effect on the learning environment for all learners. OECD research shows that where teacher wellbeing is sound, learning outcomes for young people are enhanced.

The inertia around ASN resourcing is also letting down families who see the damage that the lack of support does to their children, who are upset by it and either, where they have capacity, forced into advocacy activity that they should not have to engage in; or, where they do not have capacity, continue to be distressed by their child's struggle.

It is letting down the teachers and other school staff who are left to respond to an array of increasingly complex support needs and to the distress of children and families that emerges when needs are not met as a result of insufficiency of resources, on a daily basis.

And it will lead to failure of the collective mission to close the poverty related attainment gap.

The Scottish Government must listen, must act and must invest in Scottish Education to deliver the promise of inclusive practice made to young people and their families almost twenty years ago.