

### Exclusion from Education: Autistic Children and Young People

According to the most recent figures <sup>3</sup>, there are 25,855 autistic learners in schools in Scotland run by local authorities. That means that autistic learners make up 4% of our total school population in Scotland, with 11% of all children and young people recorded as having Additional Support Needs (ASN). Of those in mainstream schools, some of these learners will be within a specialist base attached to a mainstream school. There will also be significant numbers of autistic children or young people whose autism is undiagnosed and not recorded.

There are growing concerns in Scotland about the educational experiences of learners with ASN, and in particular of autistic children and young people. A number of reports <sup>4</sup> have highlighted the challenges faced by educators in meeting the support needs of autistic learners, despite all children and young people being entitled the support they need via the *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004*.

The *Review of the Additional Support for Learning Implementation*, by Angela Morgan, concluded:

*"...the evidence that emerges from this Review affirms that Additional Support for Learning is not visible or equally valued within Scotland's Education system. Consequently, the implementation of Additional Support for Learning legislation is over-dependent on committed individuals, is fragmented and inconsistent and is not ensuring that all children and young people who need additional support are being supported to flourish and fulfil their potential..."* <sup>5</sup>

In 2017, the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee published a report examining implementation of the ASL legislative framework, which included (in part) a focus on autism. The report states that:

*"...the pressure on the education system in relation to this condition and also the danger that children with additional support needs like ASD can be perceived socially by children and parents as 'the problem'. It is undoubtedly the case from the evidence received that some disruptive behaviour is a direct result of being in an educational setting where children receive insufficient support due to insufficient resources..."* <sup>6</sup>

This is supported by our joint report on exclusion with Scottish Autism and Children in Scotland – *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved* <sup>7</sup>. Of the families who responded to our survey, 71% said their child had missed school for reasons other than a common childhood illness. When asked about specifics, 34% said the child had been *unlawfully* excluded, 13% said that the child had been formally excluded, and 28% said their child was on a part-time timetable. For the majority of pupils experiencing these unlawful or formal exclusions, they had happened more than once – 74% and 85%, respectively. Of those who had experienced part-time timetabling, 55% said that it had been going on for more than 6 months.

For many parents who responded, the impact of their child being excluded from education either on a full-time or part-time basis resulted in their being unable to work or being forced to leave their employment. Parents highlighted the financial impact of not being in employment or training, or having to reduce their working hours. For some parents, their child being off school meant losing their only source of income.

*“Devastating. I have had to take two months off work to care for him. When he was on part time timetable I had to reduce working hours and I’m a single parent with another child.”*

*“As I am currently self-employed it has meant that I have been unable to work and earn any money whilst he's been off school. So, the impact is financial mostly.”*

*“I have lost my job, am on anti-depression medication, cannot find employment as I never know if she’ll be at school or if I will get a call to collect her. I cannot imagine how bad it will be at high school. I can’t get a job until she’s older and we face losing our home.”*

*“I have severe anxiety caused by the stress of him not going to school. I can’t go out to work as I need to be at home for him. This causes us extreme financial pressure.”*

*“I have had to leave my job and if I’m at college and they phone I have to leave and pick him up. Because of this my mum doesn’t go out so that I can go back to college, and he stays with her.”*

*“Had to plan our working hours around his reduced timetable.”*

The National Autistic Society Scotland wants to see an end to the exclusion of autistic children and young people from education. While autistic children and young people continue to be excluded because of a lack of resources and support, many families will continue to experience poverty as parents are forced to leave employment, education and training or unable to take up such opportunities in the first place.

**National Autistic Society Scotland**