Education and Skills Committee – Inquiry into the Draft Budget 2020-21

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Committee’s inquiry into the Draft Budget and welcome its inclusion of additional support needs (ASN) provision for the 2020-21 financial year.

As an alliance of organisations who support those children and young people with ASN, we have previously provided input to the Committee’s budget enquiries.

We are using this submission to reinforce our concerns about the increase in the numbers of those pupils identified with ASN, against a backdrop of cuts on the numbers of ASN teachers and specialist support staff. This is especially relevant now that the Scottish Government has announced funding for classroom assistants, which we support but should not be confused with providing specialist support for pupils with ASN.

In this context, we would clearly welcome an increase in funding specifically directed towards those with ASN, including greater special school provision, but recognise the constrains both the Scottish Government and local authorities have in focusing education spend on these services.

We support the Education and Skills Committee call to further explore the basis for underspending in Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) which already took place this 2019-20 year in order to explore whether the level of underspends have decreased and if education authorities are spending in line with the level of need. As previously stated, this financial review should be the starting point for Scottish Government discussions with education authorities on their funding allocations.

We also make a call for a dedicated ASN attainment fund for local authorities, highly-targeted for maximum benefit and additional to current funding. This repeats a call we previously made, highlighted by the Committee in both its 2018-19 and 2019-20 budget scrutiny. This has been made more pertinent given £15 million of ringfencing for the provision of around 1000 Pupil Support Assistants by the Scottish Government in its Programme for Government.

It is currently difficult to ascertain the potential funding requirements per local authority, given the major disparities in the number of those identified with ASN between local authorities. This is an issue we as a coalition have highlighted on a number of occasions and requires to be resolved as a matter of urgency, as this provides significant challenge in ascertaining the level and targeting of funding required.

1. About the Scottish Children’s Services Coalition

The Scottish Children’s Services Coalition (SCSC) – www.thescsc.org.uk – is an alliance of leading independent and third sector service providers that care for and support vulnerable children and young people, as well as their families.

Our vision is for Scotland to become a world leader in the care and support of vulnerable children and young people. We aim to achieve this through campaigning for a while-range of high-quality, well-resourced and quickly accessible services. This is so that they get the best possible care and support, tailored to their individual needs and helping them to achieve their full potential.
Our members deliver specialist care and education services to children and young people with ASN, as well as direct help and support to their families. They also provide independent advocacy, advice and representation to children and young people with care experience.

Members of the SCSC are:

- Falkland House School – [www.falklandhouseschool.org](http://www.falklandhouseschool.org)
- Spark of Genius – [www.sparkofgenius.com](http://www.sparkofgenius.com)
- Young Foundations – [www.youngfoundations.com](http://www.youngfoundations.com)
- LOVE learning – [www.l-o-v-e.org.uk](http://www.l-o-v-e.org.uk)

2. Background

- In 2018, out of the 693,251 pupils in Scotland's local authority primary, secondary and special schools and grant-aided schools, 199,065 were identified with ASN, representing over a quarter of all pupils (28.7%), and a 2.1% increase on last year.\(^1\) The number of pupils with ASN has increased by more than 68% since 2012 (from 118,034 in 2012).\(^2\)

- The increase in the number of pupils with ASN is due to a number of factors, including increased awareness and better identification, and continued improvements in recording those with ASN. Children and young people identified as having ASN are disproportionately from lower income families and areas of deprivation, particularly those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

- Between 2012-2018, the number of pupils identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has increased by 101%, with dyslexia by 60.5%, with mental health problems by 252%, and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties by 86%.\(^3\)

- ASN disproportionately affects children and young people from lower income families and areas of deprivation. If we are to ensure that inclusion is meaningful, close the educational attainment gap and create a more equal society, it is key that we provide the right help, at the right time, from the right people.

3. Spending cuts

A greater demand on services due to an increasing number of those with ASN (partly due to a broadened legal definition of ASN and increased identification), set against a background of cuts to public services and delays in identification, assessment and intervention, means that many children and young people are missing out on the support they vitally need. Indeed, this lack of resources and specialist staff to support those with ASN is one of the greatest challenges facing Scottish education.

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2 Ibid.

Average per pupil spend on additional support for learning by local authority (primary, secondary and special education) has fallen from £4,276 in 2012/13 to £3,393 in 2017/18. This amounts to a cut of £889 per pupil, representing a 26.1% drop in real terms (20.8% in cash terms).

4. Greater resourcing

It is vital that there is increased investment to deliver adequate resourcing and staffing provision, supporting those children and young people with ASN. This is especially relevant given a presumption of mainstream education, which we support, and an objective to improve educational outcomes and close the educational attainment gap.

- Despite a 68.7% increase between 2012 and 2018 in the number of pupils identified with ASN in all publically funded schools as highlighted earlier (see 2. Background), amounting to more than 81,000 pupils, the number of ASN teachers has fallen by 403 over the same period, from 3,840 to 3,437, a drop of 10.5% and a new low. In 2012 while each ASN teacher was supporting 31 pupils, by 2018 this figure had risen to each teacher supporting 58 pupils.

- Analysis also shows that there has been a substantial fall in the number of specialist support staff for those with ASN between 2012 and 2018 in key categories. This includes behaviour support staff and educational psychologists, as outlined in the table below.

- The figures show how varied the picture can be in individual local authorities e.g. 16 local authorities have no behaviour support staff in their schools; 18 have no school nurses or other medical staff; while 6 have no home-school link workers.

Support staff:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Change (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour support</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>-58</td>
<td>-32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-school link worker</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>+176</td>
<td>+97.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School nurse or other medical</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>+14</td>
<td>+23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational psychologist</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>-43</td>
<td>-10.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This fall in the number of specialist staff due to local authority budget cuts means that many of those with ASN are not receiving the type and level of support they need and to which they are entitled. This is seeing many of

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them ending up poorly supported or excluded from school altogether and having a major impact on the objective to close the educational attainment gap.

Budgetary cuts are putting increased pressure and enormous stress on a reducing number of specialist teachers supporting those with ASN as well as pupil-support staff. This is denying pupils specialist help and also increasing the work burden on class teachers, many of whom are inadequately trained, with implications for both them and other pupils within the class.

Pupil Support Assistants

The First Minister’s announcement in the Programme for Government of a £15 million investment to deliver 1,000 pupil support assistants is to be welcomed. However, we support the Education and Skills Committee call for further detail on how the government arrived at such a figure. It is also key to know whether such funding will be recurring and the details of whether this is sufficient funding for 1,000 additional staff.

It is equally important to specify how this will affect funding allocated for specialist provision, as pupil support assistants should not replace ASN staff and be asked to support pupils with complex needs without the appropriate training.

This concerning trend was already observed between 2012 and 2016, where despite a 44% increase in the number of pupils identified with ASN, the support staff had slightly dropped 0.8%. Whilst this was not a substantial fall, the number of ASN assistants dropped 15.8% whilst the amount of classroom assistants grew accordingly 15.9%.

The Scottish Government’s decision to stop publishing the number of ASN assistants in schools since 2017, and to combine this information with ordinary classroom assistants under the category of pupil support assistant instead, means it is no longer possible to identify how many support staff working specifically with pupils with ASN. This does not reflect well on the transparency of the government, especially after such decision was made following the release of the aforementioned figures for 2016.7

It is therefore vital that there is transparency in the number of those staff that are trained to support those with ASN, identifying changes in staffing levels over time.

5. Disparities in ASN figures between local authorities

There must be a clearer guidance from the Scottish Government to local authorities, ensuring consistent and meaningful identification and recording of children and young people with ASN.

There is a significant variation between local authorities in the number of pupils identified with ASN. It is not clear what is driving this considerable variation but different interpretations of the legislation and local contexts, including key learning support staff, may well be behind such variation.

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This data will help to ensure that children and young people with ASN are equitably supported across Scotland, uphold the presumption of mainstreaming, and ensure that progress is being made with attainment for those who face the greatest challenges in terms of their learning.

The 2018 figures from the Scottish Government pupil census indicate these substantial differences between local authorities.

Primary school: Glasgow City reports 31.8% of pupils with ASN v North Lanarkshire - 13.7%; Aberdeenshire - 41.8% v Aberdeen City - 28.8%; Angus – 10.2% v Perth & Kinross - 31.7%. Secondary school: Glasgow City reports 42.8% of pupils with ASN v North Lanarkshire - 17.2%; Perth & Kinross - 35.8% v Angus - 27.1% (24.5% for all local authorities).

6. Recommendations

Increased funding: There must be a greater investment in services that care for and support children and young people with ASN. This includes an adequate provision of ASN teachers, support staff, educational psychologists, mental health professionals, school-based counsellors and other specialist support services. This will improve educational outcomes, support the closure of the educational attainment gap, and ensure the statutory requirements are fulfilled.

- We support the Education and Skills Committee call to further explore the basis for underspending in Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) which already took place this 2019-20 year in order to explore whether the level of underspends have decreased and if education authorities are spending in line with the level of need.

- There should be a dedicated Scottish Government ASN Attainment Fund for local authorities, highly targeted for maximum benefit and additional to current funding. This reflects the committee’s support for this in its budget scrutiny for 2018-19 and 2019-20.

- There must be clearer guidance from the Scottish Government to local authorities to ensure the consistent and meaningful identification and recording of children and young people with ASN, ensuring the delivery of effective and equitable support to children and young people with ASN across Scotland.

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8 Scottish Government, Pupil Census 2018 supplementary data, 14th March 2019, Table 6.10 for primary pupils and Table 7.5 for secondary pupils. Available at: https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/dspupcensus/dspupcensus18 (accessed 14th March 2019).