

The Scottish Children's Services Coalition's response to the Scottish Government's Consultation on Excellence and Equity for All: Guidance on the Presumption of Mainstreaming. (Closed 9th February 2018).

1. Do you agree with the vision for inclusive education in Scotland? YES

As a coalition of independent and third sector organisations, The Scottish Children's Services Coalition (SCSC) is very much in support of the vision for inclusive education in Scotland. However, for this vision to be realised, far greater investment and resourcing is required especially to fully support the needs of children and young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN). Additional support for a pupil or young person may be required for a variety of reasons, if for example, they have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, dyslexia, autism, mental health problems, or are care experienced.

As highlighted in the Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee inquiry into additional support for learning, there are major [concerns over the inclusion](#) of some children and young people with ASN in mainstream education. The poor experience many of these have in such an environment is clear evidence that more needs to be done if genuine inclusion is to be achieved.

If we are to deliver genuine inclusion then that means providing the necessary resourcing to ensure the needs of all children, whether they have ASN or not, are met in the classroom. In some cases pupils are being held in a mainstream environment when they would thrive with the additional support and tailored resources available in special schools.

Mainstreaming should not simply mean entering the gates of a local school. It should mean inclusion in the aspiration of a mainstream curriculum with all the positive experiences and outcomes that should entail, regardless of where that school is. It should mean inclusion in a school community that supports real development and growth, not education in a segregated class with alternate break times. It should mean good mental and emotional well-being.

2. Do you agree with these principles? YES

The SCSC agrees with these principles. However, to truly achieve the desires, far greater resourcing is required. It must also be recognised that some children's needs are better met in a special school and there should local authorities should be assisted to increase the number of special school/unit places available, reflecting the rising numbers of children and young people with complex or specific needs. These places may be provided by the local authority or independent sector, on a wider geographic basis.

3. Are the expectations set out under each of the 'present, participating, achieving and supported' principles the right ones?

Since 2012 the number of pupils in mainstream primary and secondary schools with ASN [has risen by 47.3 per cent](#), from 111,058 to 163,594 (24.1 per cent of pupils), while the number of overall support staff in schools, encompassing teachers, ASN auxiliaries and behaviour support staff, has [dropped by 3 per cent over the same period](#), from 16,377 to 15,880.

Moreover, average per-pupil spending by local authorities on additional support for learning (local authority primary, secondary and special education), has [fallen from £4,276 in 2012/13 to £3,817 in 2015/16](#), amounting to £459 per pupil and representing an 11% cut.

Of course we fully support the expectation that “...all children and young people should receive the support that they need to reach their full potential, in learning, life and work”. However, the current system is severely under-resourced and, as a result, many children and young people requiring additional support in school, whether that is because they have dyslexia, ADHD, or autism, are not receiving the support they need to reach their full potential.

The expectation that “...all children and young people should be supported to overcome barriers to learning and achieve their full potential” we of course agree with, however teachers must be given appropriate training and resourcing to be able to realise this ambition.

Again, we agree with the expectation that “...all children and young people should be given the right help, at the right time, from the right people, to support their wellbeing in the right place”. For this to be fulfilled, sufficient resourcing needs to be in place to allow teachers to support the wellbeing of every child in the class, whether they have ASN or not.

4. Are the entitlements and options for provision clear? YES

Yes, the entitlements and options for provision are clear.

5. Is the commentary and the reflective questions on each of the exceptions helpful? YES

Yes, these are helpful, however more resources are needed to first identify children and young people requiring additional support and get a diagnosis if necessary. Children and young people with ASN represent some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised members of our society.

It is our experience that many families face an uphill struggle when trying to get additional support for their child in a mainstream environment. This could be because the school and/or local authority are under the impression that the issues are behavioural and not mental health related, and it can be months or even years before proper a diagnosis is made. Especially for children with ADHD, autism, and Tourette’s, many teachers lack proper training in identifying these conditions and in how best to support the child. Often children and young people are excluded from school as a result.

6. Are there any areas missing, requiring strengthening, or which are not required and could be removed?

The case study for paragraph 47 states “Staff recognise that having children with additional support needs in their school benefits all children as it helps children develop positive attitudes about diversity for later life. It also builds capacity in all staff to support a range of needs across the mainstream and Language and Communication Support Centre (LCSC).”

Having children with additional support needs in a mainstream school can only work if sufficient resourcing and training is in place. A combination of increasing demand on services set against a background of cuts to public services and delays in identification, assessment and intervention,

means that many children and young people with ASN are missing out on the support they so vitally need. As a result, this is impacting on the educational inclusion of the rest of the class.

For young people with ASN it has become a 'postcode lottery' of whether specialist staff have been cut and if their teacher is appropriately trained. To feel the effects of the benefit inclusion brings to all children, greater resourcing including more ASN teachers and pupil-support staff, such as ASN auxiliaries and behaviour support staff, educational psychologists, and mental health professionals, is required. This will help to ensure that the benefits of an inclusive approach are realised.

7. Were the case studies helpful?

The case studies are of course helpful, however when teachers are stretched to their limits it all comes down to resourcing, and a 'one size fits all' case study approach has limited benefit in practice.

8. Overall, is the guidance helpful?

The SCSC supports the aspirations of this guidance, however without increased investment and resourcing it is our belief that the expectations will not be achieved.

9. Are there any other comments you would wish to make about the draft guidance on presumption of mainstreaming?

There currently is a crisis in the education system for those with ASN and more needs to be done now to invest in their futures. Whilst great in principle, due to a severe lack of resources combined with an increase in the number of pupils with ASN in mainstream schools, it is becoming increasingly obvious the presumption to mainstream is facing serious challenges in many of our classrooms.

The needs of some children and young people with complex or specific needs are better met in specialist settings. Special schools should not be seen as a last resort for a child or young person. Local authorities must be assisted to increase the number of special school/unit places available, reflecting the rising numbers of children and young people with complex or specific needs. These places may be provided by the local authority or independent sector, on a wider geographic basis.

There needs to be greater investment in resourcing and in training of mainstream teachers, social workers, health professionals and other practitioners so that they can adequately support children and young people with ASN. This includes continuing professional development and finding innovative ways of sharing information about children and young people with ASN so that the whole staff team are aware of their needs.