



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01747

Name of petitioner

Alison Thomson

Petition title

Adequate funding to support children with additional support needs in all Scottish Schools

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide adequate funding to support children with additional support needs in all Scottish Schools (Primary, Secondary and Special).

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

I have written to the First Minister and other MSPs about the issue of inadequate funding in schools for Children with ASN.

I have written to Edinburgh Council via our Parent Council.

Petition background information

The Scottish Government want children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) to be included in mainstream education more than ever. Whilst this is to be encouraged, it is certainly not suitable for all children with ASN and indeed not for any without the required support and staffing in place.

We do not doubt that part of this "inclusion plan" is actually to do with saving money as placements at Special Schools are costly with a much higher staff to pupil ratio. The presumption of mainstream has not been sufficiently funded. Its implementation by many councils is damaging to very young children with complex needs.

Children with Additional Support Needs

Statistics gathered from the Pupil Census' show:

2012 ASN Pupils in Primary 62,546, Secondary 48,434, Special 6,976

2018 ASN Pupils in Primary 101,530, Secondary 90,554, Special 6,823

A rise of 62% in Primary, 87% in Secondary and interestingly a reduction of 2% in Special School.

It is unclear if these figures will include the many children who are on part-time

timetables, children who are being utterly failed by the system that cannot support them in a full time programme. These figures also may not include children who are currently not in the education system at all as a suitable placement cannot be found for them.

The falling numbers in Special Schools reflect the massive growth in children with ASN in the mainstream environment and also the hugely limited places in – and closure of some – special schools. Some parents find the only option is to move their children to private schools to ensure they are getting the support required. This comes at a great cost to parents/carers wellbeing in addition to the child and legal costs to the council in already dwindling budgets. Staffing in Special Schools is also changing, with specialised Learning Support staff being replaced with PSAs to save money. Whilst the PSA role is crucial, in this environment where children with the most complex physical and behavioural needs are placed, specialised support is vital to the success of their education.

Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs)

PSA numbers have reduced, in real terms, in all local authorities. Just recently the City of Edinburgh Council initially refused to consider 250 applications for pupil support in 2019-20. Following some negative press articles, a halt on further cuts and a review process was promised. However, the initial decision that 250 children whose needs were not even being considered was shocking, and no doubt the reconsideration was only due to the bad press received.

We previously obtained statistics relating to City of Edinburgh Primary Schools and from 2014 pupils with ASN had risen by 25% but PSAs in Edinburgh Primary Schools had only increased by 16.5% since 2014-5. So we can clearly see that funding has not increased in proportion to the rapidly rising number of pupils requiring additional support.

Education throughout Scotland needs adequate and ring-fenced funding specific to additional support for learning to be able to effectively cope with rising numbers of children with identified needs.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) states that education:

Is child-focused - It ensures the child or young person – and their family – is at the centre of decision-making and the support available to them.

Is based on an understanding of the wellbeing of a child - It looks at a child or young person's overall wellbeing – how safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included they are – so that the right support can be offered at the right time.

Is based on tackling needs early - It aims to ensure needs are identified as early as possible to avoid bigger concern.

To quote from the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 “Your education authority must provide your child with “adequate and efficient” additional support so that they are able to benefit fully from their education.” The local authorities do not have the budgets to offer anywhere near the correct level of support and so cannot meet the objectives of GIRFEC or the Education Act.

With the inadequate funding, families compete against each other for support. There is simply not enough to go around. This is a battle every academic year and one that should not have to be fought. With the numbers of children with ASN attending mainstream rapidly rising, these children may receive lots of support there but this is to the detriment of other children at the mainstream school who require less support (but who still have additional support needs). There are children being failed daily, not because the school staff don't want to help, but because there are simply not the human resources. The PSA role was originally brought in to be of assistance to the teacher and the whole class. With the gap of Pupils with ASN to ASL Staff widening, the PSAs available for the rest of the class is limited and potentially non-existent. PSAs would also not be able to support the teacher as per the original intention. The effect is a negative one on the whole school.

We feel the role of the PSA is not now what it was planned to be when first introduced. PSAs in mainstream schools are dealing with children with the most complex needs and challenging behaviours, carrying out tasks set by professionals such as Occupational Therapists, Speech Therapists, Psychologists etc. Additionally, there are so many PSAs on temporary contracts, which means high turnover of staff. This is not ideal for any of the children involved, where routine and consistency is a major factor to successful learning. We need to be able to provide permanent posts with salaries that reflect the skills and importance of this role, to attract and retain more quality staff to these posts.

In special schools there has also not been a relative increase in staffing and resources, and some of the special schools therapy rooms are now used as additional classrooms, so it is difficult for therapies to take place in the schools.

There has been much in the media recently with serious concerns regarding the Mental Health of young people and also the immense stress that teachers are constantly being put under by having to support children with a wide variety of additional needs. With the figures for Autism alone standing at 1 in 100 children affected, there is an argument that nearly every school needs a special unit, adequately staffed with professionals such as Occupational Therapy, Educational Psychologists, and Pupil Support Assistants. There are nowhere near enough language units attached to mainstream schools, and again with the most in need taking these places, those who would still require this option are unable to access them. There really is no such thing as mainstream anymore. It is a complex mix of children from all backgrounds with all abilities.

We urge you to see the future picture here: to reduce the strain on our teachers, allow our ASN pupils the support they deserve, allow all the children to reach their full potential and reduce the impact and cost to our future Health and Social Care services by acting now to provide the necessary support for our future generation.

Unique web address

<https://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/asnschools>

Related information for petition

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

16 / 09 / 2019

Comments to stimulate online discussion

What is your experience of ASL/ASN provision?

Do you have any suggestions on how to improve service provision?