



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

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**By email**

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Dear John

As I mentioned last week, I am writing to highlight two issues raised in evidence with you at the Committee meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> November that you suggested merited further consideration by the Government.

Specifically, you undertook to consider a number of points raised by Members on additional support needs and also to look into the basis for the 36% of people who start a college course but either do not complete the course or do not achieve a qualification. I attach the specific exchanges on additional support needs below for your reference and some detail on where the 36% figure raised with you in relation to colleges is derived from.

I also wanted to take this opportunity to inform you of the decisions of the Committee in relation to its work programme. In addition to pre-legislative scrutiny on any bill resulting from the Governance Review, the Committee also agreed to hold an evidence session with representatives of local authorities in relation to the implementation of Scottish Government policies.

The session with local authorities will include a focus on their roles as education authorities, with some focus on ASN. It is provisionally timetabled to take place in December.

I should be grateful if you could provide the Committee with details of your further scrutiny in relation to additional support needs and your position on the college figures by Thursday 1 December.

Yours sincerely

**JAMES DORNAN MSP  
CONVENER**

## ***Additional Support Needs – extracts from evidence***

### ***Exchange with Ross Greer MSP***

#### Ross Greer:

There seems to be an issue with diagnosis for young people with additional support needs. There is quite a lot of disparity among local authorities on that. I will not get the numbers exactly right but 35 per cent of the young people in West Dunbartonshire have been identified as having an additional support need, whereas I believe that that the figure for North Lanarkshire is now 5 per cent. The committee has heard concerns from the Scottish Parent Teacher Council that parents' requests for diagnosis and support are sometimes going unheard.

Does the Government believe that significant numbers of young people with an additional support need are not receiving the support that they need because their need has not been diagnosed, perhaps because of a lack of support due to constrained local authority budgets?

#### John Swinney:

Statute is crystal clear on the matter: the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 requires education authorities to identify, provide for and review support for pupils who need support to overcome barriers to learning. There can be little debate about whether the assessment should be carried out because young people should be protected by the act. The act should ensure that their needs are met appropriately by local authorities, which carry that statutory duty.

#### Ross Greer:

What work is the Government undertaking to ensure that there is a bit more consistency and that support is available to local authorities to ensure that they identify, diagnose and support all young people with additional support needs?

#### John Swinney:

The Government reports annually to Parliament on the implementation of the additional support for learning provisions. The most recent report and the forthcoming report indicate that attainment for pupils with additional support needs has increased by 4.3 percentage points since last year and that 86.2 per cent of pupils with additional support needs are now in positive destinations. That has been a continuing trend. Obviously, we will work with local authorities to ensure that we continue in that direction, but there is some encouragement that that is happening.

My constituency experience tells me very directly that some assessments of the relevant support needs of young people are not straightforward processes. However, in dealing with the complexity and challenge, a very clear statute has to be followed to ensure that the needs of young people with additional support needs are met in all circumstances.

#### Ross Greer:

We can all agree that that is a positive trend, but it relates to young people with identified additional support needs. My point is that it seems that a significant number of young people out there have unidentified additional support needs.

#### John Swinney:

I go back to my point about the statute. There is a duty on education authorities to ensure that assessment is undertaken. There are various interventions to assess the capacity and capability of education authorities in fulfilling that obligation. I will certainly look carefully at the issues that Mr Greer has raised to ensure that I am satisfied that the needs of young people are being met in those circumstances.

[Ross Greer:](#)

Thanks.

### ***Richard Lochhead MSP***

[Richard Lochhead:](#)

One thing that I have learned in this committee is what the term “Es and Os” stands for—I hope that the rest of the world understands it, too. I used to think that it was a pop song by Pulp.

I commend the cabinet secretary for wanting to tackle teachers’ workload, because that is important.

Tavish Scott and Ross Greer raised issues about additional support needs. As politicians, we have to do our best to put ourselves into teachers’ shoes and understand the 21st century classroom environment and the pressures that teachers face. Between 2011 and 2015, the number of pupils with additional support needs increased by 57.2 per cent, which is a significant increase. The modern classroom environment involves inclusive education—which is the right thing to do in getting it right for every child—and is different from the environment 20 or 30 years ago. If the level of resources to support teachers who deal with pupils with additional support needs does not match the increase in demand over that period, there will clearly be a lot of pressure on classroom teachers.

Is the Government willing to look at the correlation between the increase in the number of children with additional support needs and the level of resources available to deal with that? A headteacher who gave evidence to the committee a few weeks ago said that a small number of pupils with particular support needs can take up quite a large amount of resource and time, which is an obvious and understandable statement. Are you willing to look at the balance between the level of resources and the number of children who require those resources, which has increased?

[John Swinney:](#)

I am certainly prepared to look at that. The issues that are raised are genuine. When Parliament passed the Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc Act 2000, it built in the presumption of mainstream education for all children. There are of course a couple of caveats to that, one of which is that there must be an appropriate assessment of the educational environment in which a young person should be educated to ensure that their needs are met. Obviously, a range of provision is then available within schools.

I have seen a range of the approaches that are taken. At the weekend, I was at Preston Lodge high school, which is in Mr Gray’s constituency, where I observed a workshop led by one of the additional support for learning teachers in the school, who went through the developments in the school over a period of years. In essence, those changed the focus of the facilities that are available for young people with additional support needs to ensure that their needs are better met.

That is a good example; of course, there will be many examples of a similar character around the country.

The question that Mr Lochhead raises requires further scrutiny, and I will certainly undertake to do that.

### **Fulton MacGregor MSP**

#### [Fulton MacGregor \(Coatbridge and Chryston\) \(SNP\):](#)

I have a quick supplementary question on the points that Richard Lochhead and Ross Greer made about children with additional support needs. Quite a lot of constituents have come to me about the issue and one thing that has come up consistently is that parents feel that, when they are dealing with the local authority, their views are not being heard and they are not treated as the experts. Under the attainment agenda, might parents' views be given more weight when they deal with local authorities?

Before you answer that, I want to put on record my thanks to you for your recent visit to my old school, Coatbridge high school, which was very much appreciated by the staff there.

#### [John Swinney:](#)

I was there to visit a literacy festival, which was a fantastic example of innovation in the school. It was a great experience.

The whole question of parental involvement in education is central to ensuring the strength and effectiveness of our education system. It is therefore really vital that there is effective dialogue. There are obviously challenges in there in terms of addressing fully parents' views on their children's needs. That has to be the subject of active discussion with parents to ensure that schools are properly meeting the needs of all young people, regardless of what those needs are.

### **College figures**

The 36% figure was raised in evidence to the Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2016 by NUS Scotland, the link to the *Official Report* is available below.

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=10506>

The SFC's most recent Colleges Performance Indicator Report includes outcomes for Further Education students on full-time courses and also Higher Education students.

[http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical\\_publications\\_SFCST012016\\_CollegePerformanceIndicators201415/SFCST012016\\_College\\_Performance\\_Indicators\\_2014-15.pdf](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical_publications_SFCST012016_CollegePerformanceIndicators201415/SFCST012016_College_Performance_Indicators_2014-15.pdf)

In addition the figures can be seen in the SFC's Learning for All 2016 publication, [http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical\\_publications\\_SFCST062016\\_LearningforAll/SFCST062016\\_Learning\\_for\\_All.pdf](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical_publications_SFCST062016_LearningforAll/SFCST062016_Learning_for_All.pdf) - the figures relate to 2014/15 entrants, these are the most recent figures available.

Table 17, page 25, shows the success rates for college FE students – the 36% refers to all those who either withdrew altogether or only had partial completion (i.e. didn't achieve a qualification).