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Your ref: Additional Support for Learning and College Information

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Additional Support for Learning and College Information

Thank you for your letter of 10 November 2016 which followed on from my appearance before the Committee on 2 November. At that time I committed to consider points raised by members relating to additional support for learning and the numbers of students completing college courses. I also thank you for the information that you have provided on the matters which the Committee will consider in December.

Information on pupils with additional support needs

Firstly I should explain that the way in which additional support for learning statistics are collected changed in 2010. Prior to 2010, only pupils with a Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP), Individualised Education Plan (IEP) or who were attending a special school were recorded as having additional support needs. In 2010, this was extended to include anyone receiving additional support, regardless of whether it was under a formal plan. This accounts for the large increase in the number of pupils recorded with additional support needs since 2010. For absolute clarity, the pupils who were formerly not recorded were identified and receiving support, but the statistical collection did not recognise them. The variation between education authorities in the proportion of pupils who are now recorded as having additional support needs reflects changes in local practices and also improvements in identification and awareness of some issues. There is very little variation between authorities in terms of the proportions of pupils recorded as having formal support plans, implying authorities are treating those cases appropriately.

Reflecting this, the information below sets out the number of children recorded as having an additional support need since 2010:



2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
69,587	98,523	118,034	131,621	140,524	153,192

However we are aware that for cases where there is no formal plan, variation is greater. This does not imply that children's needs are not being met where this variance exists. However, to address the issues regarding consistency of reporting, the Advisory Group for Additional Support for Learning will consider as part of their workplan how the Scottish Government can continue to improve the way in which additional support needs statistics are collected. There is the need to review what is currently collected, why that information is collected and how can we move to a more outcomes-focussed collection. As a result of this work the group will then look to improve the current guidance which is provided to education authorities on recording statistical data. The group's membership includes representatives from the Association for Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) as well as a wide range of national key stakeholders including parents and service providers

Following consideration of this matter, the group will report directly to me on their proposals to address this issue going forward.

In addition, it is intended that a revised 'Supporting children's learning' code of practice will be consulted on in 2017 to provide advice and good practice to education authorities on the 2004 Act. Specific areas of the revised code of practice will focus on the identification and assessment of additional support needs which will bring further clarity to the reporting issues outlined above.

Despite differences in recording practices I believe that, overall, the additional support for learning system is being well implemented in Scotland. We have a positive picture of children with additional support needs consistently achieving more each year. Our most recent report to Parliament on the implementation of the legislation indicates that attainment levels continue to improve.

- 59.5% of 2013/14 school leavers with additional support needs leaving school with 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 5 or better. An increase of 10% since 2011/12.
- 84.7% of 2013/14 school leavers with additional support needs left school with 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 4 or better an increase of 5.6% on 2011/12.
- 86.2 per cent of pupils with additional support needs are transitioning to a positive destination. There has been a continuing positive trend in these areas in recent years. (85.4% in 2012/13 82.3% in 2011/2012)

Resources

As I have noted above, it is clear that since we changed the method of collection of statistics in 2010, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils reported as having additional support needs. This has become much more stable since 2012. I reiterate that those children who were not recorded within the statistical collection prior to 2010 were receiving support for their additional support needs, but this was not recognised by the statistical collection at that time.

On the question raised on resources, I am aware of the concerns regarding levels of school education staff. I am also aware that since 2007 the levels of teachers in mainstream education recorded as having additional support for learning as their main subject has decreased. However, it should be acknowledged that the context has changed significantly -

in 2015, 95 per cent of children and young people with additional support needs were recorded as learning within a mainstream school and received support from a wide range of teaching staff across a range of subjects, beyond those who have additional support for learning as their main subject.

Guidance to education authorities on the duty regarding mainstreaming also impacts on this issue. In December 2015 the Scottish Government committed to review the guidance on the duty to provide mainstream education. We want to enable children and young people to reach their full potential wherever they learn. The review will refresh the current guidance to draw together the requirements on authorities to get it right for every child, the presumption of mainstreaming and the need to tailor support for pupils to meet their individual learning needs. This will ensure that the decision to place a child either in mainstream or special school considers all of the factors around the child in making that decision. The review will be undertaken in partnership with key stakeholders and will seek the contributions of a wide range of interested individuals and organisations, including parents. We want all of those who have an interest to have their views heard. It is our intention to establish a working group on this review with a view to consulting on draft refreshed guidance next year.

It should be noted that the Local Government Finance Statistics 2015 indicated that education authorities spent just over £4.8bn on education in Scotland. Of that, £579m was spent on additional support for learning, an increase of £24m on 2014 expenditure.

Parental Involvement

Currently, under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended) education authorities have a range of duties to ensure that the parents' view is considered as part of planning for their child's learning. The statutory Code of Practice also provides detailed guidance on good practice in communicating with parents in support of these duties. The Scottish Government funds two organisations to ensure that parents are supported and represented in relation to their child's additional support needs. Those are:

- Enquire, the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning; and
- Let's Talk ASN, a free of charge, national advocacy service which can be used by any parent who has the right to make a reference to the Additional Support Needs Tribunals for Scotland.

I believe that outcomes from the governance review will impact on the points raised by Fulton MacGregor about parental involvement and will inform future policy and practice.

College Withdrawal Rates

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) have provided data on Further (FE) and Higher Education (HE) college students' retention, successful completion, and withdrawal rates:

Retention, Successful Completion and Withdrawal Rates for full-time FE and HE students 2008/09 to 2014/15

	FT FE students			FT HE students		
	Retention	Successful	Withdrawal	Retention	Successful	Withdrawal
2008/09	72.1%	58.8%	27.9%	78.7%	63.9%	21.3%
2014/15	74.6%	64.0%	25.4%	82.7%	71.3%	17.3%
<i>Difference from 2008-09</i>	<i>2.5pps</i>	<i>5.2pps</i>	<i>-2.5pps</i>	<i>4.0pps</i>	<i>7.4pps</i>	<i>-4.0pps</i>

Source: Scottish Funding Council, College Performance Indicators

NOTE: SFC changed the way student outcomes are recorded in 2008/09 which means Performance Indicator (PI) data on retention/completion published before then are not strictly comparable with more recent data

It is important to clarify that the 36 per cent figure, referenced as drop-out rates in FE during the Committee session, includes 10.6 per cent of students who had completed but failed to gain the award within the academic year. Therefore, the actual drop-out rate was 25 per cent.

It is encouraging to note that retention and successful completion rates have increased for both full-time FE and HE students, when compared to 2008/09 (the earliest comparable year). These figures demonstrate that a considerably higher percentage of students are now completing their courses than in the past. You will also note that fewer students are withdrawing given the reduction in withdrawal rates since 2008/09.

Students can drop out of college for multiple complex reasons, including moving into employment and hence it is difficult to collate this information centrally in a coherent manner. Colleges will collect information for students who withdraw and this will help inform local decisions to improve future student provision.

From 2017 onwards as part of the Scottish Funding Council's Outcome Agreement guidance, colleges will provide an Access and Inclusion Strategy to define their inclusive practices and the impact they have on students and positive destinations. SFC expect colleges to use funds to deliver a parity of intake and outcome for their students so that all have an equal chance of successfully completing their learning and progression.

I hope that this information is helpful for Committee members.

JOHN SWINNEY