

**Provision for learning support in Scotland: a survey of local authorities**

**Report to Educational Institute for Scotland**

**University of Aberdeen**

**Executive Summary**

This study was commissioned by the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) to examine changes in, and variations of, provision of learning support for pupils. The project investigated the different criteria currently used by Local Authorities (LAs) to establish students' entitlement to learning support. It explored changes to these criteria over time, and the reasons for these changes. It also looked at potential impacts of these variations for both pupils and staff. In discussion with the funding body the research team was commissioned to address the following research questions:

- How do LAs identify and support children with Additional Support Needs (ASN)?
- How and why has this this changed over time?
- How do the above factors vary between and within LAs?

**Methods**

This was a mixed methods study, involving an online questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The study concluded with a focus group with representatives of the EIS's ASN network.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Aberdeen and consent was sought from the Director of Education (or equivalent) in all of Scotland's 32 LAs. Twenty-six LAs consented to participate, and an online questionnaire was distributed to the member of staff with responsibility for ASN/Inclusion in each LA. Fourteen respondents completed and returned the questionnaire. Although this number is lower than we had hoped, there was a mixture of rural and urban LAs, and a geographical spread throughout the country. This provided a range of interesting responses that allowed us to address the research questions in depth.

Following the analysis of questionnaire data, six LA respondents were invited to take part in telephone interviews to explore some of the issues that were raised.

Finally, when all the research data had been collected and analysed, invitations were issued to members of the EIS's ASN Network to participate in an online focus group to discuss the implications of the findings for their work. Two participants were involved in this activity.

## 1.1 Findings

The changes that have taken place in identification and support of children with additional support needs have been driven by the changes to the national legislative and policy framework, as outlined in section 4. Scotland has developed a distinctive rights-based approach to inclusion, with a presumption of mainstreaming, and a focus on provision of appropriate support for all children. This is aimed at moving work with children with ASN away from deficit driven models of need towards an understanding of the rights of all children to participate in the life and learning of the school. This policy shift has demanded new ways of working in LAs across Scotland, and this report will show that there are differences between LAs in how far they have travelled along this route, and some differences in how they have chosen to enact the policies.

- There are variations between LAs in terms of how readily they use diagnostic criteria to identify ASN, with some LAs seeing these as unhelpful and static, as they locate the difficulties and potential solutions within the child.
- In describing how children were identified as having ASN, many LAs preferred to describe the process of identification, rather than specifying criteria. These answers invoked various aspects of the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) process such as staged intervention, wellbeing indicators, resilience matrix, Team around the Child (TAC).
- Decisions about which children were deemed to have ASN, and how best to support them were made collaboratively by teams including teachers, head teachers, Educational Psychologists, and other specialists where appropriate, for example speech and language specialists.
- These collaborative processes in line with GIRFEC have the advantage of responding to the particular needs of children in the specific circumstances that apply to them. This allows for professional judgement to be the main currency in determining who needs support, which may lead to variation between LAs in terms of the numbers and types of ASN that are identified and reported.
- Mainly LAs described devolved budgets for ASN that were allocated to schools based on formulae that took account of factors such as level of deprivation and the size of the school. Under these models, resources were not allocated to children, but they were allocated to schools, with the expectation that schools would meet the needs of the children as they saw appropriate. In one case the resources were allocated at school cluster level and schools could then share resources if appropriate. Only one responding LA described funding decisions made on a child by child basis, by a local authority 'screening' team.
- The main changes over time relate to the roles of ASN staff and classroom teachers. LA respondents argued strongly for the role of classroom teachers in making environmental and pedagogical changes. The role of specialists in providing limited targeted support coupled with capacity building for the teachers was common, although LA respondents acknowledged considerable variation at school level with this development.

- Support for teachers to take on these new roles was variable within and between LAs. The most extensive support was provided by an LA that had a well-established framework, available online, that teachers were expected to use to analyse the difficulties experienced by children and the possible changes to the classroom climate and teaching approaches that would be supportive of the children in the classroom. This provided an ongoing tool to support decisions about classroom inclusion.
  - In the questionnaires, LA respondents rarely mentioned budget as a reason for changes over time. In the interviews, respondents largely commented that budgets for ASN had remained fairly static. However, the level of need was recognised as increasing by all respondents who commented on this issue. Reasons for increased need were unclear.
  - There was also a recognition that staff shortages affected ASN provision. Particularly in rural areas, where there was a shortage of staff generally, ASN staff were sometimes deployed as classroom teachers where there was no one available to take a class.
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