

Fife Council

Fife Council Education Service makes educational provision available to all children in Fife, through Early Learning Centres, primary and secondary schools, and additional support needs provision. It also runs a number of central services to support schools and staff in supporting all children who have the need for additional support.

Implementation of the presumption of mainstreaming

The presumption of mainstreaming is central to children's rights, and to ensuring the ongoing development and improvement of teaching and learning practices which support better access to education for all, including those who do not need additional support and those learners who are academically able and need an extended curriculum.

We have good outcomes in terms of children and young people's progression in learning, attainment, and effective transitions from N-P1, P7-S1 for most learners who have ASL and are supported across our continuum of ASL provision. We also have a good level of satisfaction from most parents about how their child's needs are met in our provisions. We have a directorate ASL strategy and workplan building on the recommendations from the Morgan review

Both school staff, and central services who support these children and their families, work hard to listen to their concerns, ensure that assessment of educational needs is thorough and relevant, and therefore that plans that are put in place in our provision meet children's needs well.

However, there are challenges, which include

the physical environment – some of our school buildings are limited in their scope to provide the necessary breakout spaces and access to space for play, learning in alternative spaces, and outside areas that many children with additional support needs would benefit from

increasing numbers of children who need additional support, particularly those who are pre-verbal, with social and/or communication difficulties, who may or may not have an identified diagnosis such as ASD, in our early learning and early primary years

providing the support necessary to ensure the development of skills and confidence in local school staff to meet the needs of this increasing population is challenging

more families seeking support for their children both within and outwith school, putting pressures on existing family and school support services

issues of anxiety, social and relationship difficulties which have been exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19

transition into sustainable post-school destinations for our learners with additional support needs

What are the barriers to supporting this provision?

balancing the needs of an increasing population of children with additional support needs, with finite funding for supports both within schools (e.g. staff training, provision of PSAs, provision of outreach support from specialist provision into local schools) and in central services (Educational Psychology Services, Support for Learning, English as an Additional Language, ASD support etc)

increasing requests from parents to support issues within the family or to complete referral paperwork to access health pathways (e.g. ADHD, ASD) and/or health services (e.g. CAMHS) is demanding of education staff time

recruiting and retaining appropriately skilled and trained staff to work in central services and/or ASL provision, to directly support these children

recruitment of school leaders with the skills and experience in this area

any examples of good practice in this area;

adoption of Fife Core Approaches to relationships, wellbeing, and behaviour: a long-term plan to skill up the whole education workforce in both Trauma-informed and De-escalation skills, supporting schools to effectively implement these in their own establishments and evaluate impact over the long term

piloting new approaches to supporting families whose children may be neurodivergent, to ensure that support is in place while they are on any assessment and diagnosis pathway

support for our ASL establishments to quality assure their provision and identify what they need; support from central services to work with them to develop their skills and confidence (the Inclusive Practice Team)

A continuum of support including small group enhanced support provision available in every local secondary school and accessed by a local cluster group decision making forum

Impact of COVID-19 on additional support for learning

The impact of Covid-19 on families and young people has exacerbated additional support needs which already existed, and has impacted in terms of increased anxiety in families and yp, disrupted education depending on their learning experiences during Covid, and the extent to which their schools effectively supported their ongoing education and any support needs.

This has led to increase requests from families for strategies to be put in place, and specifically additional adult support for young people in school which is tricky at a time of increasingly diminished resources.

Schools and local authorities have been responsive and have a good awareness of the range of needs, but are limited by the financial resources they can put towards solutions.

The use of remedies as set out in the Act

How does the authority support good relationships with parents and young people, especially where there are disagreements around the provision of additional support for learning and reach collaborative agreement.

School leaders are encouraged and supported to intervene early when parents have concerns about their child's needs and/or how they are being met in school. We encourage schools to fully include parents in the discussions and planning around this, being open to hear their worries and concerns.

We have clear guidance for school staff on Assessment and Planning processes within the authority which emphasises the importance of taking a person-centred approach and involving young people and their families at all stages within these processes.

Central staff such as Educational Psychologists play a key role alongside school staff in supporting parents to participate, and in supporting schools to problem solve issues that concern parents, building in pupil voice at all times, when this can be achieved.

Despite this, relationships between parents and schools can sometimes break down, in which case the Educational Psychologist and Education Manager are often key in supporting problem solving.

Mediation services are available for parents when any dispute proves difficult to resolve. Parents often also turn to advocacy services, and school and central staff will try to work collaboratively with parents and these services to find mutually suitable solutions, which meet the needs of children and young people.

Unfortunately, if this problem solving is not successful, we have an increasing number of parents, supported by advocacy services, who make Placing Requests to independent educational provision, which often results in a reference to Additional Support Needs Tribunal. Being involved in the process of an ASN Tribunal is enormously expensive to local authorities in terms of officer time and can be expensive in terms of ongoing costs if the ASN Tribunal decision is to place the child in the independent provision. In our experience this decision can often be costly to the child's education if the placement does not then go well and the child returns to an educational placement in the local authority, having had their education significantly disrupted and interrupted by this process.

How many placing requests have been made over the last 5 years by parents or carers wishing that their children be educated in a specialist Additional Support Needs (ASN) unit or school.

We do not have a way of gathering this data over 5 years, and so cannot provide it definitively for this question, but that we have small numbers of parents making PRs for places in Fife Council specialists ASN unit or schools, but much larger numbers making PRs for independent provision such as Falkland House School.

Between November 2021 and November 2023, we have had 23 Placing Requests for ASN provision – 21

of these have been for independent provision such as Falkland House School or Donaldsons etc, and two have been for Fife Council special schools.

And how many placing requests have been made by parents or carers wishing their children to be educated in a mainstream setting as opposed to a specialist ASN setting. The Committee would be grateful for the total numbers, along with the numbers of requests refused and agreed.

We do not have a way of collating this data, but this would be a very rare occurrence and is not a regular issue for Fife Council.

How does the authority ensure that parents and young people are aware of the rights to various remedies under the 2004 Act?

Fife Council provides information for parents about Additional Support Needs on its website. Specifically in terms of informing parents and young people of their rights in terms of the ASL Act 2004, there is a link directly to the Enquire website, which provides excellent and clear information about their rights to support etc.

The Committee is aware that there can be variations in approaches to identification of ASN across local authorities and between primary and secondary schools. The Committee would be grateful if you could briefly set out how you ensure that children's additional support needs are identified and Seemis records are updated to ensure accuracy of the data.

There is a consistent approach to support and planning across all sectors in Fife. The process and documentation are made available to all schools. Clear roles are set out for classroom teachers, support staff, support for learning staff, and school leadership. In addition, every educational provision in Fife has a link Educational Psychologist who will support this process, and there are a number of other central support services who can also work with schools to ensure support for assessment for specific learners, e.g. those with ASD, those from a Gypsy and Traveller community, those who have English as an Additional Language, those with sensory needs etc.

Additional support needs, when identified through contextualised assessment or diagnosed through Health Partners, are recorded on SEEMiS. Comprehensive guidance has been developed and shared as part of an ongoing effort to present an overview, that reflects the school community, on this platform.

How does the authority ensure staff have adequate training on Additional Support for Learning provision?

There is ongoing work in relation to professional learning, and to provide a baseline of knowledge for all staff. This is a specific action within our current ASL Strategy.

Specific training is provided on the basis of a needs analysis at school level, and identification of priorities through school improvement plans. This process is then supported by Education Managers, Quality Improvement Officers, and Educational Psychologists.

There is a range of central and school-based training available, depending on need, and a Professional Learning website for Fife staff. There is a programme of support available for all Probationer Teachers in

Fife.

If parents/carers have a concern about the ASN provision in a mainstream school, what process can they follow to try and get it resolved?

Parents would in the first instance raise their concern with the school; the HT of the school would take the lead in supporting resolution of the parents' concern, involving other support staff as necessary e.g. those in the Team around the Child such as Learning Support, Educational Psychology, other support services both within education and in partnership e.g. Social Work.

If this does not resolve the issue, there is a complaints resolution process managed centrally within Fife Council. This is likely to involve the Education Manager for the school in supporting to find a resolution to the concern.

Where the provision of ASN is not working in specific cases in schools, what can teachers do about that? Is there support that can be accessed? What happens if the matter cannot be resolved?

Through the agreed process of assessment and planning, teachers would raise concerns with either Learning Support or a member of the school leadership team. They would work with the teacher to support assessment and identify strategies and resources which could be put in place, and evaluated to identify what is working. If necessary, other services such as the Educational Psychology Service, or Supporting Learners Service etc can be accessed, and/or partner services. Education Managers may become involved in supporting the situation if requested by the Head Teacher. If necessary, application can be made to involve one of our ASN support provisions on either an outreach or inreach/placement basis.

Throughout this process, parents/carers would be consulted and kept informed of all developments. Teachers could also access a range of professional learning or support services as referenced above to develop their own practice.