

# Midlothian Council

Please find Midlothian's response to your question below.

- 1. What parts of Additional Support for Learning provision are working well and what are not, and any reasons they can provide which might help to explain why aspects are working well or not.**

## **1.1 What parts of Additional Support for Learning provision are working well?**

Midlothian is committed to providing the best possible education and range of opportunities to all children and young people. Children and young people with additional support needs are supported in a number of ways to ensure that they are supported to reach their potential. These include, but are not limited to:

- A clear commitment through the Single Midlothian Plan to promote and support inclusion at all levels;
- A dedicated ASN team which provides a strategic overview and support to schools, outreach teams and colleagues working within the field;
- A locality model which provides dedicated officer support to schools within geographical areas, providing targeted support, advice and guidance, and encouraging the promotion of peer support and advice between settings;
- A Locality Provision Allocation which aims to keep children and young people within their communities wherever possible;
- A model which provides dedicated complex needs provision within all six secondary school settings; and similar provision within eight primary schools, catering for pupils with complex support needs;
- The development of new ASN provisions including significant investment in the expansion of Midlothian's ASN estate to build new bespoke provisions;
- A programme of improvement to existing provisions, including expansion and refurbishment projects to cater for increasing need;
- A focus on Multi-Agency working through a range of specific groups, designed to respond to need in a timely manner;
- The voice of young people is a key part of our strategic planning;
- Commitment to professional learning from induction through to more targeted support to ensure high quality learning and teaching is developed and maintained;
- Good practice in partnership working with Edinburgh College and Newbattle Abbey College to develop specific provision and new pathways for young people with additional support needs, including a focus on appropriate apprenticeship pathways and recognised qualifications;
- Involvement of parents through our ASN working group and Parent Council Chairs;
- Proposals for dedicated facilities for profoundly deaf pupils;
- Expansion and enhancement of the central ASN team to include a targeted focus on workforce reform, identifying areas of staff expertise and skills, and providing support and training through the Midlothian Professional Learning Academy aimed at upskilling staff in all settings. The recently established Professional Learning Academy provides professional learning opportunities for all support staff, teaching and non-teaching, including whole-day events on in-service days.

Staff within all Midlothian settings and across the central team work well together to identify and support the additional needs of children and young people in Midlothian. We are committed to ensuring that provision for these pupils is of the highest quality, and a commitment to ensuring that individuals and agencies are enabled to work in meaningful partnerships in order to support this aim. This collegiality reflects good practice across local authorities in Scotland.

## **1.2 What parts of Additional Support for Learning are not working well?**

In common with local authorities across Scotland, Midlothian is experiencing a significant increase in numbers and complexity of need, including a rise in the number of children and young people being diagnosed with ASD;

Midlothian is one of the smallest mainland local authority areas in Scotland but has the fastest rising population, with notable increases in the 0-15 age range. This presents challenges not only in the rise in numbers of children and young people presenting with additional support, and increasingly complex, needs, but also makes planning for capacity difficult. The welcome rise in awareness and understanding of additional support needs by parents and the public in general is helping to drive the journey towards inclusion and acceptance. However, this is partnered with an increasing level of frustration on the part of parents and carers when the support they feel is needed cannot be provided.

The increase in numbers of children and young people with additional support needs, both as a result of greater awareness and diagnosis, and a rapidly expanding population in the local authority, places significant pressure on specialist, provision-based places. Placement requests by parents and early years settings are subject to increasingly high thresholds, which places a potentially onerous burden on mainstream classes to include pupils with increasingly complex needs, who would once have been able to access specialist provision. The presumption of mainstreaming is a hugely positive aspect of education in Scotland, but without investment in environmental adaptations and significant staff training and support, there is a risk that inclusion of pupils with complex needs within mainstream classrooms will actually lead to their exclusion by default. Midlothian is committed to ensuring that all children and young people in the local authority have the best possible experiences and outcomes to their learning, but the pressure on central budgets means that there are risks to how this presents in reality for the young people who require additional support for learning.

There is a continuing need to provide further financial investment in the school estate and learning environments, both in specialist provisions and in mainstream classrooms, in order to ensure that the environment meets the needs of learners,

Pupil Support Staff find it more challenging to access training and liaison time with class teachers because their paid working hours do not generally allow for this. Working with the most vulnerable pupils, these members of staff tend to be amongst the lowest paid. This can lead to a sense of being undervalued and prevents these members of staff from opportunities for upskilling, and career progression. Reports including "Pupils with Complex Additional Support Needs: Research into Provision (19/9/23)" highlight the esteem in which support staff are held by pupils, parents, teachers and school leaders, but existing staffing structures and budgetary restraints mean that recruitment is challenging, and retention rates are low.

The rise in numbers of children and young people presenting with increasing complex support needs requires staff working with them to be highly skilled at recognising and responding to specific needs. This provides a challenge in terms of training, especially within mainstream classrooms, where pupils may present with highly specific needs which require expert understanding and curricular adaptation. The rapidly changing nature of needs presenting in mainstream classrooms requires access to high quality training and support, which is challenging in a time of budgetary and time pressures in schools.

A significant rise in the number of children and young people presenting with SEBN particularly in the wake of the Covid crisis, contributes to the pressure on specialist places to support their needs and on the skill and wellbeing of staff team around the young person. This has a knock-on effect on other pupils, who have already been disadvantaged by disruption to their learning during COVID period, where specialist placements cannot be provided due to pressure of numbers. Structures of support and supervision for staff need to be further developed, overcoming barriers of time pressures on class teachers and support staff.

Multi agency working and partnership working in Midlothian is a particular strength, but there are specific challenges in education which relate to other services, including reductions in access to NHS health services and appointments, and waiting lists of around 800 children and young people for a CAMHS neurodevelopmental assessment. This leads to increased anxiety for pupils and parents, particularly where there may be a need for medication, and additional challenges to education staff awaiting guidance from such services.

The pressures on education budgets are well recognised, and reductions in services providing a virtual 'team around the school' impact on all learners, regardless of their level of need. We are lucky in Midlothian to have a dedicated and determined education staff body who go above and beyond to ensure that children and young people are impacted as little as possible by the pressure on budgets and services, but with increasing numbers of pupils presenting with complex support needs, it is becoming increasingly challenging to support them and the staff who work with them.

## **2. What are the barriers to supporting this provision?**

### **2.1 Estate**

The increasingly complex needs presenting in schools have an impact on the physical environment and need for adaptations. Some schools, due to their age, are not suitable for certain pupils with physical or sensory needs, and this can prevent those pupils from finding suitable placements within their own communities.

Research suggests that an environment-first approach to inclusion and supporting additional needs can be highly effective in ensuring that children and young people reach their potential. This requires planning, an understanding of how environments impact on learning (the Classroom as the Third Teacher, for example) and associated training, and, of course, investment in buildings and resources. Whilst the issues surrounding funding for school estate are well known and understood, there is an additional barrier where, as in Midlothian, significant investment has been made available to expanding and enhancing the estate, in accessing labour and resources in a timely manner. Children and young people with complex support needs which require adaptations to the physical environment, are not able to wait for resource and labour to be available in order for them to access their right to education.

Placement requests for complex needs provision have shown a sharp increase. With increasing numbers of pupils requiring access to specialist provision within mainstream settings throughout the age groups, there is a negative impact on the availability of placements for the youngest pupils entering the school system. Forward planning based on trends in needs, birth rates and projected population growth from people entering the authority area can help to establish likely need, but meeting this projection requires greater levels of investment, and does not help the pupils who currently face the likelihood of no placement.

### **2.2 Staff**

Staff working with children and young people with additional support needs are our greatest asset, and as already mentioned, we are extremely fortunate in Midlothian to have a staff body who are dedicated and experienced. However, as also discussed, there are significant

issues with recruitment to low-paid support posts, and high levels of turnover which can negatively impact children and young people for whom the development of meaningful and stable relationships is key to removing barriers to learning. Staff require increasing amounts of training to support their understanding and practice, which in turn requires additional investment in terms of training costs, cover and paid time.

For teachers joining schools from ITE programmes, there is concern about the level of training and education provided in these programmes in terms of additional support needs. Reports suggest that input on ASN is very limited, and this leads to the possibility of needs not being met in the classroom for children and young people, and the risk of disillusionment and burn out for newly qualified teachers taking responsibility for the learning of children with needs they have not been trained to support.

### **2.3 Curriculum**

The inclusive nature of the curriculum as espoused by Curriculum for Excellence is laudable. However, there is potential for understanding of meaningful differentiation for pupils with additional support needs to be inconsistent within and across settings, where there is a lack of guidance or training to support teachers and leaders of learning. Opportunities for celebration of achievement tend towards a recognition of nationally recognised qualifications and this can be exclusionary for pupils with additional support needs who are unable to access these. The curriculum as it stands, with a justifiable focus on attainment in literacy and numeracy in particular, can mean that the experience of children and young people with additional support needs does not match that of their mainstream peers, and this is, of course, not then inclusive. In Midlothian, we are exploring exciting new pathways for high school pupils through close collaboration between all six high schools and our associated colleges. The development of learning journeys which support and enhance the learning of pupils with ASN should provide a vehicle for celebration of success beyond that of narrowly defined school-based national qualifications. However, there is work to be done to ensure that the curriculum offer throughout a pupils' school career reflect adequately their needs, interests and expertise, offering ongoing opportunities to celebrate success more widely, and providing an irresistible learning experience which prevents disengagement.

### **2.4 Budget and resources**

The challenges facing schools and local authorities in terms of budget and resources are well documented. Each of the barriers outlined above, and the aspects discussed earlier around what is not going well, have at their heart the need for greater levels of investment in all aspects of education. Suitably qualified staff, our greatest and most valuable resource, cost money, and in order to ensure that all children and young people are properly supported in their learning to be the best they possibly can be, there needs to be adequate recompense for, and funding to support the training of, all members of education staff. Local authorities often bear the brunt of understandable frustration and anger about services and provision in education, and whilst it is the remit of LAs to prioritise their budgets according to the needs of all the people who reside in the area, the overall pressure on LA budgets necessarily impacts on the experience of children and young people and their learning.

### **3. What any examples of good practice are there in this area;**

Midlothian has committed to substantial investment in all six high schools to ensure that they have dedicated Complex Needs provisions or classes, allowing young people to remain

within their communities, building relationships with peers, and accessing mainstream provision as appropriate in a seamless manner. For those schools where this provision has been in place for a number of years, there is evidence of higher numbers of pupils with additional support needs achieving recognised qualifications than was previously the case.

Midlothian is part-way through a review of its ASN service to ensure that we can better meet the needs of learners. This review led to the re-structure of the central team, establishment of new and planned specialist provision and review of all policy and processes. Currently, we are reviewing our workforce strategy to explore the differing roles now required to support the range of needs.

The dedication and determination of staff across the authority, as reflected across the country, contributes to the quality of outcomes of children and young people within Midlothian. The majority of our learners are well supported and cared for by staff who demonstrably have their best interests at heart. Reports from Quality Improvement visits and HMIE inspections have highlighted the good practice which goes on in our schools. The ongoing review of ASN workforce, skills and expertise will help to share good practice more widely, and to develop and promote peer learning and support networks as a way of ensuring that expertise is shared and that staff do not feel as though they are working in silos.

There is evidence of particularly good practice in Early Years ASN provision, with high numbers of staff from nursery setting attending training, clear programmes of support and shared procedures for the early identification of additional needs. In reviewing ASN workforce provision, this good practice will contribute to the design of a cohesive training and support offer for schools and settings.

#### **4. 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**

Good relationships with parents and carers are an essential aspect of building a supportive and progressive service for children and young people with additional support needs. These relationships are built through regular communication and active listening approaches. Communication takes a range of forms, including face-to-face meetings, email, phone calls and home visits. The locality model ensures that parents and young people can build meaningful relationships with known people over time.

We have recently formed an ASN parent group, who will meet regularly with our central ASN Team. This group will provide parental representation in the development of policies and improvement plans. It will also provide a confidential space to hear the views of parents and their experiences so that we can continue to support and develop our relationships. We are committed to working with our parents to get it right for every child.

Where disagreements arise, these are approached according to need, with officers taking swift action to reassure and establish the cause of concerns, using conflict resolution techniques to come to collaborative agreement.

#### **5. 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. 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.**

The presumption of mainstreaming in Midlothian means that numbers do not exist for parents requesting placement in a mainstream setting. Placement requests are made for schools outwith catchment or for specialist provision.

The table below details the number of placement requests into our provisions and Saltersgate, the number granted and the number declined.

Academic Year	No of placement requests	Granted	Declined	Other Outcomes
2019/2020	162	100	50	12
2020/2021	203	107	32	64
2021/2022	198	136	16	46
2022/2023	129	82	12	35
2023/2024 (Aug-Dec)	74	28	25	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>766</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>178</b>

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

Documentation is available to all schools with information as required by the 2004 Education (ASL) Act, and this is freely shared with parents and young people.

When the outcome of placing requests is shared with parents, further information regarding their rights to remedies under the Act are also shared. A digital platform is currently under construction which will provide access to parents, carers and young people to explore the support available to them and to provide information about their rights under the auspices of the Act. Our ASN parent group will provide support, guidance and information sharing about the 2004 Act and their rights.

**7. 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.**

The Midlothian Learner’s Plan supports needs identification, and provides information about appropriate strategies and interventions to meet the identified needs. A four-stage approach to intervention is in place across all school settings in Midlothian.

The CIRCLE document is used to support schools to identify and meet needs. All early years settings use Up, Up and Away documentation to identify needs at the earliest stages and to plan provision accordingly. This is well established across EY settings and there is a programme of training and support available via the Professional Learning Academy to support staff in implementing this.

Recently, several members of staff have undertaken SCERTS training to further enhance identification of needs and appropriate strategies. Support for Learning Networks can be accessed along with a range of training, through the Professional Learning Academy.

Partnership working with colleagues in the Health service help to ensure that up to date diagnostic information is shared appropriately. The Educational Psychology Department works closely with the ASN team to support schools in identifying needs and strategies.

All schools are responsible for keeping SEEMiS up to date with the guidance provided by the Scottish Government and enhanced with training in Midlothian. This is Quality Assured by our central ASN Team.

Midlothian would question the terminology used to describe need on SEEMiS and would welcome a working group to look at updating this.

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

Training requirements are identified through the PRD process on an individual basis, and through consultation with staff in settings and localities. Attainment data and identified trends related to specific learning need are used to inform professional learning planning. The Midlothian Professional Learning Academy provides a platform for training, including online and bitesize modules. The PLA promotes and facilitates training provided by in-house and external providers. We held a support staff summit on our recent in-service day in January which provided a range of workshops and training for all of our support staff. This included training on Neurodiversity supports in the classroom, positive transitions, dyslexia support in the classroom and trauma informed practice. We also delivered a full day's training in partnership with the National Autism Implementation Team and Speech and Language on an Introduction to SCERTS for all staff working in our ASN provisions and Special School.

A wide range of training is provided by outreach workers, the EP service, ESOs and the Quality Improvement Team. This takes the form of both generic and bespoke training and support. A review of the ASN workforce is planned, to identify areas of expertise and skill, providing opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and practitioner enquiry approaches, and to identify core learning needs, establishing mandatory and supplementary training offers for staff across settings.

### **9. 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 and pupils are encouraged, as a first port of call, to speak directly to their school or setting. Planning meetings are supported, where requested, by locality ESOs who know schools and families well. From these meetings, information is shared with the central ASN team to inform planning for training needs or support.

The GIRFEC pathway provides a clear route for parents, children and young people to request support and advice. Information regarding GIRFEC is made freely available to all parents, children and young people, and schools and LA officers are well placed to support the navigation of this.

### **10. 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?**

Initial concerns are addressed within schools and settings through their own internal processes. Where further support needs are identified, schools can access this through the Education Support Officer (ASN) team, who can provide bespoke support and guidance, or make a referral to the Educational Psychology Service.

A range of other teams are also available to offer support and guidance, including:

- Team Around the Child – Third Sector Support for the Child/Family
- Therapeutic Interventions
- Education Support Group for outreach support or provision placements
- ASN Outreach Team
- Early Years Team (ASN)
- Deaf Support Team

## **11. In Summary**

There is much to be celebrated both across Scotland, and, we believe, within Midlothian regarding provision for children and young people with additional support needs. There is wide acknowledgement and understanding of the rights of children and young people, and a dedicated workforce helps to ensure that these rights are upheld. The Morgan Report has provided a clear baseline from which to work, identifying what good practice looks like and what needs to be done to ensure that all children and young people are given every opportunity to succeed and reach their potential. The idea that inclusion is not a department, as described within the Morgan Report, is a key driver to ensuring that all members of staff across all settings recognise their responsibilities in creating inclusive and personalised spaces for the children and young people in their care.

But there are issues and concerns as well. Post-Covid, the numbers of children and young people presenting to early years settings and schools with significant and complex needs, with mental health issues which impact on their ability to access learning, and with increased understanding of diagnoses and the limitations of the education system to tackle these, have increased exponentially. The infrastructure and funding to cater for this extraordinary rise in need in our schools and EY settings has not always matched need. The cost of living crisis, the pressure on public services and this increase in need combine to present a picture across Scotland and beyond which causes concern for everyone who is committed to ensuring that children and young people have the best possible opportunities.

Acknowledging the challenges faced by those children and young people, by their parents and carers, and by the huge workforce in schools and other education settings who are dedicated to providing the best possible learning experience for all pupils in a holistically and meaningfully inclusive manner, is essential, as is the provision of a clear roadmap towards the development of a world class inclusive education system for all children and young people in Scotland.

The National Discussion has underlined that some radical changes are needed to deliver the transformation required for the future. We feel education reform appears to be more focused on role of new agencies, future of qualifications and not heeding the statements in the report that 'The need for timely attention to, and resourcing for, appropriate ASN provision is now urgent.' and that there is a need to revisit and address the key findings within the 'All Learners Matter' report and the calls for action with regard to inclusion and diversity as a priority.

To place Scotland at the forefront of outstanding inclusive provision, there needs to be:

- A clear and widely shared commitment to inclusive practice from central government and beyond, with clear definitions and examples of what true inclusion looks like;
- Inclusion to be the guiding force and presumption across all public services;
- An acknowledgment of the challenges facing children and young people, parent,



carers, education staff, and others who work with them in the current post-covid , high cost period;

- A commitment to meaningful and appropriate additional funding to support infrastructure, training and resourcing which best serves the needs of the children and young people accessing services;
- A sharp focus on learning at the centre of what schools do – and provision of support to ensure that this focus is not lost amidst the myriad of additional responsibilities and challenges which come with true inclusive practice;
- A constant promotion of the child/young person at the centre of planning and delivery of education services, where “what works for this individual” leads decision making, rather than “what works in this situation or setting”
- The wide promotion and celebration of success which does not always find itself reflected in academic testing and qualifications, demonstrating that ALL children and young people have value to all of us.