

Response to Additional Support Needs (ASN) in Education – a call for views – February 2017

CELCIS (Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland), based at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, is committed to making positive and lasting improvements in the wellbeing of Scotland’s children living in and on the edges of care. Taking a multi-agency, collaborative approach towards making lasting change, CELCIS works alongside leaders, managers and practitioners to break down barriers and forge new paths in order to change thinking and ways of working with everyone whose work touches the lives of vulnerable children and families.

There are approximately 15,500 looked after children in Scotland. These children are individuals who have a range of needs, strengths and vulnerabilities. They live in a variety of circumstances including foster care, residential care, kinship care, and at home with one or both of their birth parents. Children who are looked after have all experienced difficulties in their lives. A significant number will have experienced a range of adversity, including suffering neglect, abuse and trauma. The backgrounds of many children who are looked after feature socio-economic disadvantage, and reduced opportunities in many areas.¹

Educational outcome indicators show that the gap between looked after children’s attainment and achievement, and that of all children, remains unacceptably large.²

We welcome the opportunity to submit our views in response to the call for views on additional support needs in education. We would promote any reform that would strengthen the ability of schools to ensure that looked after children are able to attain, attend and participate at the same rate as all other children.

The [Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#) promotes the interests of looked after children by stating that they are presumed to have additional support needs unless assessed as otherwise. However, there is inconsistency in how local authorities and schools assess and implement this legislation. In 2015, a [freedom of information request](#) by Iain Nisbet (previously of the Education Law Unit at Govan Law Centre, now of Cairn Legal) showed large variations in practice between local authorities. Variations were clear in the rates of assessment. Where an assessment did take place, variations were evident in the proportion of looked after children assessed as having no additional support needs (ASN) (range 0-89%), proportion of those found to have ASN being assessed for a Coordinated Support Plan (CSP), (range 0-100%), and proportion with ASN who have a CSP (range 0-46%). Further to this, data returns to the Scottish

Government would suggest there are differences in recording practices between and within agencies, and in access to assessments:

- The [Children Looked After Statistics](#) (CLAS) show large variations between local authorities in the proportions of looked after children reported as having known ASL needs – from 3% in Falkirk, 5% in city of Edinburgh to 44% in Orkney, 28%. The range seems unlikely to reflect children’s need and more likely to reflect recording practice.
- The CLAS also show a different pattern from the figures generated by the [Pupil Census](#) (PC). In some local authorities, there is a close correspondence, e.g. Aberdeen City (PC 23.4%; Looked After Children 28%), while in other authorities there is a wide discrepancy, e.g. Fife (PC 27.4%; Looked After Children 9%).

These inconsistencies would suggest that looked after children are not receiving the Additional Support for Learning (ASL) that they are not only entitled to by law, but that they require to allow them to fully engage with the curriculum.

Education staff are now more involved in child’s planning in its widest sense. This is a strength of policy and legislation including [Getting it Right for Every Child](#) and the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#); schools are ideally placed to assess and provide for additional needs, given the significant amount of time they spend with children. In order to identify and provide for the ASL needs of looked after children, it is imperative that teaching staff have the necessary skills and abilities to assess children appropriately. Presently, Initial Teacher Education (ITE) does not include any compulsory curricular content around the additional support needs of looked after children. Whilst ITE contains input around Additional Support Needs, it has a general focus and does not provide the necessary depth of knowledge and skills required for the consistent benefit of looked after children.

This creates barriers for teaching staff and furthers the likelihood of inconsistent support. CELCIS recently found evidence of this inconsistency in an audit of 40 child’s plans within one local authority. Main findings indicated that education, and a child’s ASL needs, were not given priority within the child’s plan and that evidence of ASN assessment was not routinely present.

A key role in ensuring the ASL needs of looked after children are met is that of the Designated Manager, a senior member of staff within educational establishments, who is responsible for the needs of all looked after children within the establishment. Effective discharging of the [Core Tasks for Designated Managers](#) can have a profound positive impact on the educational experience and attainment of looked after children³. However this role is not statutory. The role does not exist within all schools and where it does exist, it is often part of a wider pupil support remit without a clear focus on looked after children. This is anecdotal evidence that has been gathered through our ongoing contact with the education workforce; there is currently no national data on the extent to which schools have adopted this role and how it is functioning. Robust data, clearer guidance on expectations of the role, how it will be reported on and where responsibility for support and scrutiny lies would have a positive impact on achieving equity and excellence for looked after children.

Thank you for providing us with this opportunity to respond. We hope the feedback is helpful; we would be happy to discuss any aspect in further detail.

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¹ SWIA (2006) Extraordinary Lives: Creating a positive future for looked after children in Scotland Edinburgh: Social Work Inspection Agency.

² Scottish Government (2016) [Education Outcomes for Looked After Children 2014/15](#), Edinburgh: Scottish Government

³ Scottish Government (2008) [Core tasks for Designated Managers in educational and residential establishments in Scotland](#) Edinburgh: Scottish Government