



Inclusion Ambassadors Response to the Implementation of ASL Review February 2020

Giving all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish is at the heart of everything we do. By bringing together a network of people working with and for children, alongside children and young people themselves, we offer a broad, balanced and independent voice. We create solutions, provide support and develop positive change across all areas affecting children in Scotland. We do this by listening, gathering evidence, and applying and sharing our learning, while always working to uphold children's rights. Our range of knowledge and expertise means we can provide trusted support on issues as diverse as the people we work with and the varied lives of children and families in Scotland.

Children in Scotland currently supports the Inclusion Ambassadors with Enquire. The Inclusion Ambassadors are a group of 20 young people representing 13 local authorities. The members attend a variety of school provision and have a range of additional support needs. The group was created to ensure that the views of young people with additional support needs are heard in discussions about national education policy.

At our meeting on 28 January 2020, we were joined by Angela Morgan as part of the ongoing review of additional support for learning. This response summarises points raised at this meeting for inclusion within the review.

At the meeting we used templates developed by the My Rights My Say team to support children and young people to feed in to the review. It provided five questions for people to respond to, covering what was working well, what had not worked well and recommendations for change. These were used to frame discussions and conversations at the meeting. Our submission will answer these questions in turn and detail the responses given by the participating young people as a whole group rather than as individuals.

In summary, members of the group identified:

- **Good relationships between young people and staff are important for learning.**
- **A willingness to adapt methods and vary pace helps learning.** Using technology can be really helpful here.
- **School needs to be a safe place.** Having a calming / sensory areas in all schools would help facilitate this. Pupils should be able to choose when they want or need to access these spaces.

- **All school staff need to have more knowledge and understanding** of additional support needs to they can meet everyone's needs.
- **Pupils with additional support needs often felt teachers underestimated their ability and capability**
- **More understanding and empathy from peer** would improve the learning experience.
- **Support for young people with additional support needs must be consistent.** It should be available when ever people need it and all staff should make sure they support a young person in the same way. At present there are multiple examples of neither happening.
- **Communication needs to improve.** Primary and secondary schools need to talk to each other. There also needs to be more communication between schools, other organisations that provide support and young people
- **Additional Support for Learning needs to be adequately funded** to ensure everyone gets the support they need, when they need it.

Question 1: "Something that works well to support me learn is..."

We asked the Inclusion Ambassadors to identify something that has worked well for them in terms of support they had received.

We heard that good relationships with support staff was important for supporting young people with additional support needs to learn. Pupil Support Assistants were described as being helpful as they could explain tasks in a way that could be understood.

Having nice teachers was identified as something that helps people learn. It is important to work at an appropriate pace, be mindful of abilities and challenges. Members of the group said they did not enjoy being put on the spot, or individually selected. We were also told that young people often felt nervous they would not be able to keep up with the fast-pace of the class.

Not having the right support can make young people with additional needs feel worse.

We heard that technology can be important for young people with additional support needs. Technology such as ipads were mentioned as a good learning aid. However, it was noted that some subjects such as music or physics can be harder to use this type of technology. Laptops were also identified as helpful, assisting with writing and moving through work more quickly. Members of the group felt that access to technology in class and during exams would be helpful.

Young people also told us different methods helped with learning. Working with friends, practical lessons and listening to music were all seen as good ways of doing this. Teachers also need to provide feedback in an appropriate way. One example given was marking written work with a colour code to help aid understanding.

We were told school should be recognised as a safe place, with designated spaces pupils could go to when they need to calm down. This should be a calm, welcoming and safe environment. Some members of the group felt it was important for these spaces to have cushions or beanbags. Access to these spaces should be

determined by the young person, who should be allowed to identify when they need to or want to use them. We were told currently some people have exit passes which allow them out of class when required. People appreciated having this control and choice over when they needed a break.

Some young people also want to have a place where they can let their anger or frustration out when needed.

Young people told us they wanted choice over their time in school. For some, choosing their own subjects was important, others felt it was important to adapt timetables to meet their needs. An example given was that young people with additional support needs may need a tailored PE programme.

Communicating information between teachers was also raised as a key point. Some specifically mentioned the transition period between primary and secondary school can be an issue for communicating information. Others said that schools (both primary and secondary) need to get better at using the information available on each pupil to support them.

Finally, a key element for learning was fun; in particular going on trips and attending clubs was felt to help people learn.

Question 2: "Something that hasn't gone well for me is..."

We asked the Inclusion Ambassadors to identify where their support has failed to meet their needs, or has had a negative impact on their learner journey.

Some of the Ambassadors told us they are treated unfairly. This included being treated like they cannot 'function properly' and they get overly restricted in school. This included not letting young will with additional support needs voice their opinions on their own. People also mentioned that they feel they don't get encouraged to be independent and restrictions would be placed on movement during lunch/break, such as going to the shops.

Some people said this feels like they are treated differently from other children and young people but they should be treated the same.

It was mentioned that sometimes teachers would talk down to children and young people with additional needs. It was identified that teachers should talk to young people to help identify their strengths. It was also suggested teachers need to learn more about additional support needs as their knowledge can be inconsistent. An example was given that this can be seen in how teachers engage with those in their class, perhaps putting pupils 'on the spot' which can be especially hard for some young people with additional support needs.

Other people also mentioned that it can feel like there can be a lack of understanding from teachers. This included not knowing how people like to work or taking a general lack of care. Some people felt this could affect how they perform in class and in exams.

Young people also told us not having consistent rules in class, or different rules in different classrooms, made it hard. Rules need to be clear for everyone so that they are easy to follow.

A lack of consistency around support was also identified. Some at our meeting spoke about not always receiving the help that they need and identified differences between teachers and the support they give. Some felt they didn't get support with both their work and how they feel. It was highlighted the lack of consistency meant young people did not always get support at all the times they needed it. This could mean they miss out on support in exams despite getting receiving in the classroom.

A lack of understanding from peers has a negative effect. We heard that this can lead to confusion and frustration, both from young people with additional needs and their friends or classmates. In some cases this also resulted in malicious or bullying behaviour. Some of the young people talked about their experience of having rumours spread about them and how this made them feel. It was felt teachers should do more to encourage understanding and empathy amongst peers.

Question 3: "It helped me when..."

We asked the Inclusion Ambassadors to identify specific examples where provisions had been made which directly improved their educational experience.

Much of this had been covered in question one, however, new suggestions given included going to a support base to work and prepare for tests or exams. Using personalised support like a reader or scribe was also said to help people.

Question 4: "If I could change one thing about the support I receive, I would..."

We asked the Inclusion Ambassadors to consider what they would most like to change, or see improved, about their current support or experience of education.

Staffing and support were the two most consistent things mentioned that they would change.

Members of the group felt it would be helpful if support staff had specialist subject knowledge. They asked the support they get in class to be available during exams, including working with staff they know, and for support to be consistent in how it was delivered. The young people said every teacher should be aware of pupils' support needs.

The Inclusion Ambassadors were clear that support for one person should not be at the expense of others. They wanted to ensure there was enough funding to support everyone in the school, both in monetary and resource terms. We also heard that more funding was required to help ensure buildings were physically safe and an inclusive environment.

We heard from one of the Ambassadors how they had less support in primary years. They would want this to change.

One of the members of the group told us more time to work on things you wish to improve or need help with, as well as more chances to reflect on school work, would be beneficial.

It was also mentioned that it would be useful to have a better link between support organisations and schools so they can communicate with each other. Others would make sure there is more time to talk to their own teachers and create a more open dialogue. Staff were expected to take the lead on this.

Confidentiality was raised as key. One young person told us of their experience where young people with additional support needs were identifiable on a board in the staff room. This breached confidentiality and trust.

Question 5: "It is important that the adults that support me are..."

We asked our Inclusion Ambassadors to think about what they felt were the most crucial traits of adults who were supporting them.

We were told understanding was key. A lack of understanding, or a need for young people to constantly repeat themselves, was frustrating. Young people also wanted adults to understand their desire and need to be independent. Adults should help young people reach their potential.

Young people told us it was important that adults have clear boundaries and are trustworthy. They should be patient. The Ambassadors also said it was important for adults to be fair but firm, setting clear boundaries and guidelines but also prepared to have fun and listen. They asked to be treated equally to their peers.

Preparation was highlighted as helpful. If staff were prepared for class it assisted in pupils doing their work quickly.

We were also told adults who support young people with additional needs should be able to identify and understand how to engage them in a particular topic or piece of work; they need to help make it interesting. Real life examples, or practical work, were highlighted as being helpful here.

Young people told us adults need to be mindful that they may need to have breaks from the work they are doing.

Some of the Ambassadors identified knowledge of school subject areas to be helpful, meaning adults can help with school work and talk through any issues.

There was agreement across all our discussion groups that adults should not shout. One Ambassador told us of an instance when they were told to be "thankful for the support you get". Pupils, with additional support needs or not, should be treated with respect.

Finally, we were told it was important to feel comfortable with the adults providing support. For example, if a female pupil requires support during a swimming lesson (PE), this may be required to be a female staff member.

Question 6: “I think it’s really important for the review to know that…”

We asked the Inclusion Ambassadors for any final points they wished to make to Angela Morgan and the review.

Young people told us it was important for teachers to have control over their classes and pupils' behavior, otherwise the school and classroom do not feel safe. Feeling safe in school was really important for members of the group.

We were told teachers need to have a better understanding of different additional support needs with some saying they had had their feelings hurt or even felt humiliated by teachers. Teachers need to be more empathetic.

The importance of sharing information about a pupil's additional support need and how best they can be supported was highlighted.

One member of the group also said that it was important to support the whole family and not just the young person with additional support needs.

Finally, members of the group wanted to know if the recommendations from the review will affect their experience of school – eg will they be implemented during their school years. All agreed it was important that things are put in place to support future generations.