



the promise
scotland



#KeepThePromise
Learning Programme

What pupil support staff said

July 2025

Funded by The Promise Partnership, 2023-2025



Introduction

In 2023, Children in Scotland received funding from The Promise Partnership's Keep The Promise Fund to develop and deliver a support and learning programme for pupil support staff in Scotland.

This project provided a unique opportunity to bring together several strands of work Children in Scotland has been involved in during previous years, including our:

- Learning from delivering joint Children in Scotland and Enquire conferences for pupil support staff in 2019 and 2020
- Pupil Support Staff Engagement Project¹
- Contribution to the Independent Care Review – Simon Massey was on the Workforce Group
- Experience of advocating for the educational rights of children and young people with additional support needs.²

Our approach to gathering the views and experiences of children and young people is explored in Children in Scotland's Principles and Guidelines.³

The project aimed to address the limitation in support and learning opportunities for pupil support staff across Scotland, and contribute to systematic change to ensure that "education and schools will know and cherish their care experienced pupils", as outlined in Scotland's Plan 21-24.⁴ This involved a period of engagement work with school-based groups of care experienced children and young people, and engagement with our Pupil Support Staff Advisory Group, to inform the development of the learning programme, which consisted of a blend of in-person events, online practice sharing sessions and a series of eLearning modules.

Throughout our period of engagement with the Pupil Support Staff Advisory Group and delivery of in-person events, we gathered a wealth of information about the views and experiences of pupil support staff in Scotland. In particular, we heard their perspectives on the barriers to accessing learning and development opportunities, and their hopes for the future.

This report will provide a summary of what we heard and recommendations, covered through the following themes:

- Learning opportunities for new staff
- Additional support for learning
- In-service days and allocated time
- Supervision
- Benefits of in-person training.

There is a full list of the recommendations included as an appendix.

¹ Pupil Support Staff Engagement Project Report (2022)

² Enquire / My Rights, My Say / Resolve mediation

³ Meaningful Participation and Engagement of Children and Young People: Principles and Guidelines

⁴ The Promise Scotland (2021). Plan 21-24



#KeepThePromise Pupil Support Staff learning programme

The programme, launched in November 2024, involved a range of in-person and online elements outlined below.

Four in-person training days

Each event included input from a keynote speaker, a workshop on trauma-informed practice and a panel discussion involving speakers with knowledge and experience of supporting care experienced children and young people in a range of settings. The session took place on an in-service day, inviting pupil support staff from the local area to attend:

- Dundee – 15 November 2024
- Inverness – 19 February 2025
- Edinburgh – 6 May 2025
- Glasgow – 22 May 2025



Pupil support staff attend the Inverness training day

Eight online practice sharing sessions

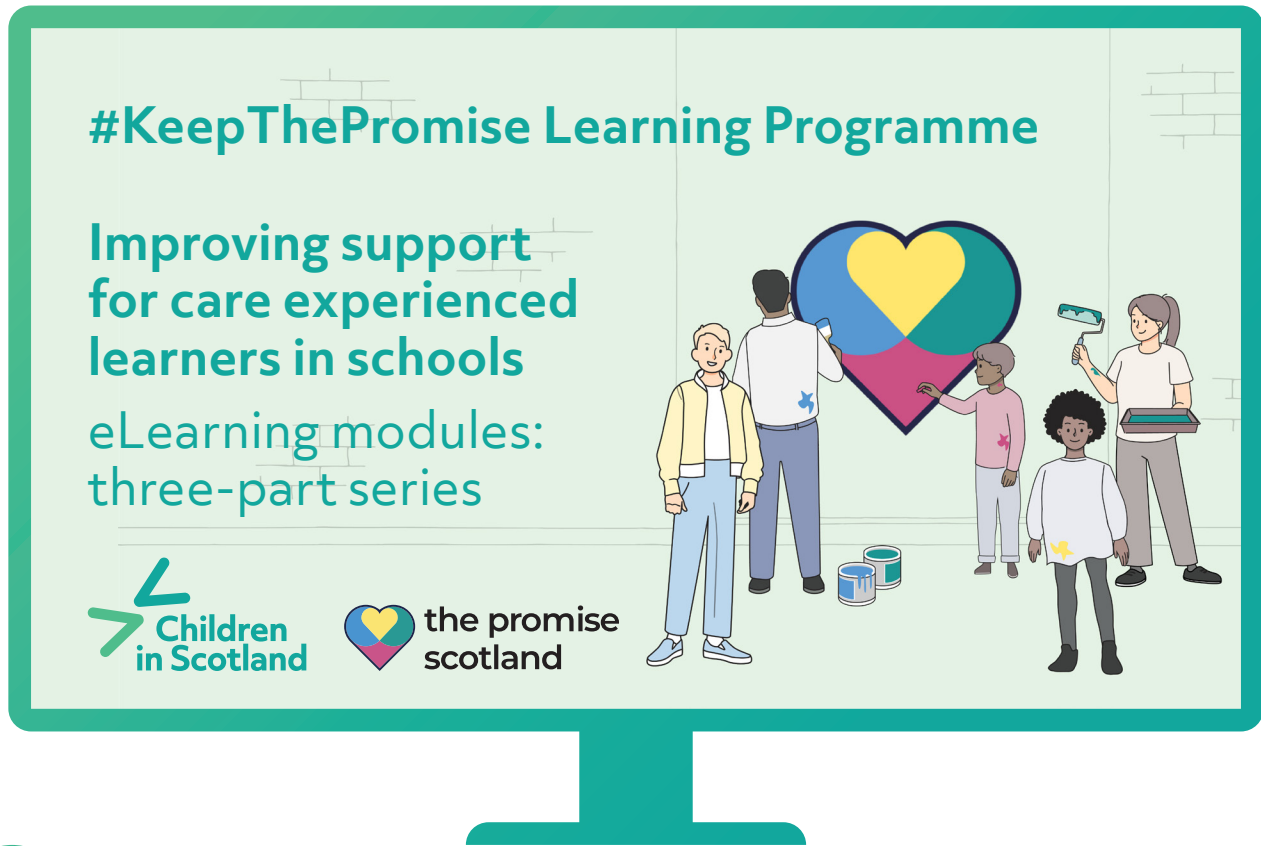
These sessions allowed pupil support staff to share practice centred around the following themes:

- Making the voices of care experienced children and young people heard in schools
- All about relationships: building trust with care experienced children
- Pupil-led approaches to empower care experienced children and young people
- Supporting the educational rights of care experienced children and young people

Three eLearning modules

A three-part series designed for pupil support staff available on our eLearning Hub.⁵

1. Understanding care experience and the role of pupil support staff
2. Practical approaches for supporting care experienced pupils
3. Creating positive care experienced communities within schools.



What we heard

The Independent Care Review established that teachers and school staff must be supported to be aware of the issues facing care experienced pupils, to allow them to offer the right support.⁶ As previously outlined, Children in Scotland's Promise Partnership Project aimed to raise awareness of these issues, recognising the limitation in support and learning opportunities for pupil support staff across Scotland. In our engagement, we learned more about the lack of learning and development opportunities for pupil support staff, and the impact this has on their ability to carry out their role.

Learning opportunities for new staff

When asked about training they had engaged in since starting in their role, many pupil support staff told us they had little or no training opportunities.

"We've had nothing"

Attendee at an in-person training session

"I had no induction or basic training"

Member of the Pupil Support Staff Advisory Group

⁵ Children in Scotland eLearning Hub

⁶ The Independent Care Review (2020). *The Promise*.

Some staff members shared that they were deployed into classrooms on their first day of work without being provided with any information about key policies held by their school or local authority, such as Getting it right for every child, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, or the Promise. Some pupil support staff also told us they did not receive any information about safeguarding procedures on their first day.

Without access to key information, pupil support staff are not well supported to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of children and young people. This could impact the quality of support for all children and young people, but in particular, presents a risk for those who are care experienced or on the edges of care, who may benefit from additional support in school.



Recommendations:

1. School and local authority leaders should review processes for induction and supporting new members of pupil support staff, to ensure that key policy information is accessible and adequate time is given to understand approaches to supporting and safeguarding the wellbeing and rights of children and young people.
2. By 2030, training must be accessible for all school staff to support them to play their part in Keeping the Promise.

Additional support for learning

We also heard from some pupil support staff that they were expected to provide one-to-one support to children and young people with identified additional support for learning needs, without being given the opportunity to learn about how to best support them.

“I came in on my first day and was just told, ‘you’ll be working with a boy with autism, on you go’”

Member of the Pupil Support Staff Advisory Group

Our experience of supporting and advocating for the educational rights of children and young people with additional support needs has highlighted a need to raise awareness and understanding of inclusive approaches. Members of the Inclusion Ambassadors⁷ have told us that a lack of understanding about neurodivergent conditions from school staff can be a barrier to getting the right support in school. To remove this barrier, pupil support staff should be allocated time and directed to trusted sources to develop their understanding of additional support needs.



Recommendation:

3. School leaders should ensure that pupil support staff are given opportunities to review pupil’s support plans, and allocated time to develop an understanding of additional support needs and strategies to support them.

⁷ Inclusion Ambassadors, Children in Scotland.

In-service days and allocated time

Members of the Pupil Support Staff Advisory Group and many pupil support staff who attended events shared the feeling that in-service days are a key opportunity for pupil support staff to engage in learning and development alongside teachers. However, we heard that too often this opportunity is not utilised. We heard from many pupil support staff that their senior leadership team asked them to direct their own learning on in-service days and asked to seek out resources based on their own development needs online. A member of the Pupil Support Staff Advisory Group shared that they have used the Pupil Support Staff Framework, an online learning resource developed by Education Scotland, to help them direct their own professional development. However, as of July 2025 the framework does not include input relating to issues faced by care experienced young people or The Promise.

Some pupil support staff told us they were not expected to engage in learning and development opportunities at all during in-service days, and were expected to carry out administrative tasks, such as organising bookshelves and updating wall displays.

“I was told to bring a book to read on my last in-service day because there wasn’t anything planned for us”

Attendee at in-person event

Across most local authorities, pupil support staff are not entitled to regular time outside of the classroom to engage in planning or learning and development within their working hours. This means that in-service days are the only opportunity for most pupil support staff to engage in learning and development. For that reason, it is especially important that schools and local authorities ensure that pupil support staff learning and development time is valued on in-service days.

We recognise that any learning and development opportunities offered to new pupil support staff are often determined by individual schools, guided by local authority policy. We found in our engagement with staff that pupil support staff perceptions on the depth of training needed to effectively meet the expectations of their role was varied, however, most members of pupil support staff we engaged with felt that even their most basic training needs were not being met.

Some local authorities have taken steps to recognise pupil support staff training needs, building in time for staff to engage in training and learning during their working week. Whilst this is a relatively new development and is not widespread, we did hear from one member of pupil support staff who has benefitted from this.

“When we were told we were getting time out for training, it felt like I was being taken seriously. Like we are worth investing in”

Member of the Pupil Support Staff Advisory Group



Recommendations:

4. School and local authority leaders should use in-service days as an opportunity for pupil support staff and teachers to engage in training and development opportunities together, and share learning from their practice.



5. Local authority leaders should allocate regular, ring-fenced time for pupil support staff to engage in self-directed learning, development and planning activity.

Supervision

In discussions relating to one-to-one support and supervision from more senior members of staff, we learned that experiences varied widely and were often influenced by staff capacity and attitudes. In some cases, pupil support staff shared that opportunities for one-to-one conversations about their learning and development occurred less than once per year, with many more sharing that they had not had any meetings of this nature.

“In my seventeen years in the role, I have not once been given an opportunity for my development”

Attendee at in-person event

We did, however, hear from a small number of pupil support staff who reported having positive experiences of supportive conversations with their line manager about their learning and development. In these cases, pupil support staff also presented as feeling more optimistic about their role generally.



Recommendation:

6. School leadership should monitor implementation of supervision to ensure that pupil support staff are given opportunity to seek support and identify their development needs.

Benefits of in-person training

Following the in-person events delivered as part of the #KeepThePromise Pupil Support Staff learning programme, we asked for feedback from attendees on how the training will help them create a supportive environment for care experienced children and young people in their school. Survey respondents shared their plans, ranging from specific actions they will undertake to shifts in their approaches.

“Having the knowledge and skills to support care experienced children/YP by having a positive nurturing approach with them as their key adult”

Attendee at in-person event

“Ensuring solid meaningful relationships are built and using various strategies to help children regulate, such as sensory, transitional objects and using restorative language”

Attendee at in-person event

“Raised my confidence to speak up about the things I believe in, particularly making each learning space in the school inclusive”

Attendee at in-person event

A number of pupil support staff also shared that attending the training reinforced the value of their work, and the role they play in supporting care experienced children and young people and those on the edges of care.

“I came away feeling more confident”

Attendee at in-person event

“Helps reinforce the work I’m currently doing and a good reminder of how important and worthwhile our job is”

Attendee at in-person event

“Just hearing that what we do matters already makes a difference and keeps us motivated to do better”

Attendee at in-person event

Overall, feedback gathered from pupil support staff involved in the in-person training events demonstrates the programme’s positive impact on staff’s understanding of key issues faced by care experienced children and young people, and their confidence to embed trauma-informed approaches.



Recommendation:

7. Teachers and pupil support staff should be provided with opportunities to engage with/in in-person training, with colleagues from different settings, to share and learn from examples of good practice, build relationships with other professionals and increase confidence.



Sophie Elliott

Policy Projects & Participation Officer,
Children in Scotland



Simon Massey

Head of Development & Engagement
Children in Scotland



Judith Turbyne

Chief Executive,
Children in Scotland



Appendix: Full list of recommendations

1. School and local authority leaders should review processes for induction and supporting new members of pupil support staff, to ensure that key policy information is accessible and adequate time is given to understand approaches to supporting and safeguarding the wellbeing and rights of children and young people.
2. By 2030, training must be accessible for all school staff to support them to play their part in Keeping the Promise.
3. School leaders should ensure that pupil support staff are given opportunities to review pupil's support plans, and allocated time to develop an understanding of additional support needs and strategies to support them.
4. School and local authority leaders should use in-service days as an opportunity for pupil support staff and teachers to engage in training and development opportunities together, and share learning from their practice.
5. Local authority leaders should allocate regular, ring-fenced time for pupil support staff to engage in self-directed learning, development and planning activity.
6. School leadership should monitor implementation of supervision to ensure that pupil support staff are given opportunities to seek support and identify their development.
7. Teachers and pupil support staff should be provided with opportunities to engage in/with in-person training, with colleagues from different settings, to share and learn from examples of good practice, build relationships with other professionals and increase confidence.