



Inclusion Ambassadors

Let's Talk Education – Our National Discussion

November 2022

About Children in Scotland

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.

Background

The Inclusion Ambassadors are a group of secondary-aged pupils who have a range of additional support needs and attend a variety of educational provision across Scotland. Children in Scotland has supported the Inclusion Ambassadors since 2016, and have been formally running the group since 2019.

At present there are around 20 members of the group from across 16 local authorities. The group are encouraged to speak freely and openly, sharing their experiences of being a pupil with additional support needs in Scotland, including what works and what could make things better. They share their experiences of being a young person with additional support needs in Scotland through online and in-person meetings. Each meeting focuses on topics or issues that are important to the group. Where relevant we also engage with national stakeholders to ensure they can hear directly from the group.

The Inclusion Ambassadors' views on the future of Scottish Education

In the main, this summary focuses on topics covered at the Inclusion Ambassador's November 2022 meeting which focussed on the National Discussion on Scottish Education and what they think the future of Scottish education should look like.

The group have also fed into a range of ongoing policy issues at national level, and we feel it is important to also take the opportunity to highlight this evidence and information here.

Previous topics highlighted by the Inclusion Ambassadors

- The group have discussed how exams and assessments can make pupils feel and have advocated for a more flexible exam system. [Read their submission to the Independent Review of Exams and Assessments here.](#)
- They want all pupils to feel happy and safe in schools and created a pledge pack for school staff to encourage them to take steps towards this. [Click here to view](#)
- They have spoken about the importance of good language and communication and co-created a resource for schools around this. [Click here to view](#)
- They created the Success Looks Different Awards to celebrate schools who are helping pupils with additional support needs feel included, supported and valued. Further information about the Awards and the winners can be [found here](#)
- The importance of PSA's and of meaningful relationship-based practice was highlighted in a recent podcast series featuring Inclusion Ambassadors and their support assistants.
 - [Episode 1 can be found here](#)
 - [Episode 2 can be found here](#)

November 2022 Session

We framed the discussions about the future of Scottish Education around the [Vision Statement for success for children and young people who have additional support needs](#) developed by the Inclusion Ambassadors in response to the Additional Support for Learning Action Plan.

Vision statement



School should help me be the best I can be.

School is a place where children and young people learn, socialise and become prepared for life beyond school.

Success is different for everyone. But it is important that all the adults that children and young people come in to contact with in school get to know them as individuals. They should ask, listen and act on what the young people say about the support that works best for them.

This Vision Statement provides key evidence on what children and young people who access additional support for learning have already said matters to them. This

should be embedded within education policy going forward, not just policy specifically related to additional support for learning.

For this submission, the group chose to focus on the “*School should help me be the best I can be*” section of their Vision Statement. This short summary identifies some of the ways they would bring this to life. We have also included links to other recent key topics and submissions from the group.

The importance of support plans

Members of the group highlighted the importance of support plans. This was related to both ensuring these are in place but also that they are then followed by staff.

Several Ambassadors shared their experiences of support plans not being adhered to in schools and highlighted how this affected their wellbeing.

'During covid, my plans weren't reviewed. I don't know where mine is. I think pupils should have more access to support, you don't know what you should be getting or the plans may need to change. Feels more like a bit of paperwork the school has to be honest. It should be support that is followed through.' (Inclusion Ambassador)

One member shared that it was distressing for them when school staff did not stick to their support plan. They are now in college and noted they are “not as anxious or stressed out”. They explained that because college staff are aware of their support plan, they are confident that any issue that comes up will be resolved. Looking back, they described feelings of frustration that they did not get the support they were promised or had been agreed to when they were in school.

Another member shared that they had a difficult period in primary school as their support plan was not adhered to and access to support were reduced, despite the fact that they were meant to receive full-time 1-1 support. This resulted in them missing school due to panic attacks.

'Don't say you'll stick to it, actually stick to it!' (Inclusion Ambassador)

One specific example raised included a young person not being allowed to go outside before a fire drill, as agreed in their plan, despite the school being aware of how anxious this made them due to busy corridors and noise. Such situations can be doubly distressing for children and young people, both because of being exposed to the stressful situation and because the agreed plan has not been followed.

It is clear from these experiences that having the right support gives young people a sense of stability. It also shows the importance of consistent support and schools delivering what has been agreed. The group want schools to ensure that plans are followed. They also want to be involved in developing and reviewing their plans, with access to the plans throughout the year.

PSE topics and life after school

The Ambassadors emphasised the importance of PSE classes and how these could help prepare children and young people when they leave school, beyond what pupils need to learn for formal examinations. They want to learn a wider range of life skills that can help them be the best they can be. This included areas such as independent living and travel, how to manage money and preparing for work.

One member pointed out how currently young people have to learn these skills after they leave school and that this can be difficult.

"I just feel like you are in the deep end after that" (Inclusion Ambassador)

The group have previously discussed this topic at length, highlighting the lack of support for life beyond school. They feel there is too great a focus on college and university and not the other paths that young people might take.

Based on the group's discussions around transitions from school, we created a resource of reflective questions that can be used to reflect on and improve support in this area. ([Click here to view](#)) Key to this was early engagement with careers advisors and more opportunities to meet with them.

How pupils treat each other in schools

The group discussed the importance of pupils being kind to each other in school and also the negative impact that bullying can have. Some members of the group have had personal experience of bullying within school and felt that often these issues were not dealt with effectively.

'I think I would change for all pupils to be nice to each other' (Inclusion Ambassador)

'One thing my school doesn't handle well is says we need to respect each other a lot. When teachers see bullying happen, they don't do much. Or they don't notice and kids feel nervous to talk to them about it.' (Inclusion Ambassador)

Members of the group told us that if bullying happens, pupils need to feel comfortable talking to teachers and know that something will be done about it. They also said that pupils treating each other with more respect would have a positive impact.

Over the pandemic we discussed these issues at length. Members of the group were clear that being happy and safe in school was essential for supporting their learning. The group discussed the importance of relationships with peers in this context and how the wider school culture could make them feel supported.

We developed a pledge pack for schools to show they would meet support young people to be happy and safe in school. [You can access this here.](#)

Creating opportunities for pupils

The Inclusion Ambassadors highlighted that there is not equal access to opportunities in schools across Scotland. This included activities such as different types of sports in PE. The group would welcome increased opportunities for pupils in every school. They also said that it is important that teachers ask pupils what they are interested in and what they might want to do in school.

"Schools should do things differently so pupils can do the things they enjoy".
(Inclusion Ambassador)

One member shared an example of their school asking pupils what activities they want to do and creating different clubs for them to join. This school has given pupils the opportunity to learn about subjects like Geology through open learning with the Open University.

We did not have the opportunity to discuss this in greater detail, however it is worth noting that there could be particular issues here for young people who require

additional support to participate in activities. Adequate staffing and appropriate training will be needed to support this.

Summary and recommendations

It is evident that for members of the Inclusion Ambassadors, there are aspects of education that need to change. We hope that decisionmakers make use of the opportunity presented by the National Discussion to change, and improve, the experiences for all learners.

The short discussion at the November meeting of the group highlighted the importance of some key topics. Based on this it is important that the National Discussion recognises:

- The Inclusion Ambassadors Vision Statement as central to improvement in education going forward
- Rights-based approaches to support plans are needed, and should be followed.
- Children and young people need to be able to access plans when they want and to be involved in their development and review.
- Schools need to provide wider ranges of opportunities and identify how they can provide these safely for children and young people who require additional support to participate.
- Schools need to embed guidance on rights-based approaches to bullying which ensure young people feel concerns have been responded to. Communication is key.
- Transition support needs to have an increased focus on life skills rather than primarily further and higher education.

Children in Scotland briefing

As part of our wider organisational engagement with the National Discussion, Children in Scotland has prepared an education policy briefing. This has already been submitted to the National Discussion but we wish to highlight it again here.

This briefing has been informed by our work with children and young people, including the Inclusion Ambassadors. It contains a wider series of recommendations that we know will improve outcomes for children and young people with additional support needs.

[You can access the briefing here.](#)

For more information, please contact Chris Ross, Senior Policy, Projects and Participation Officer, cross@childreninscotland.org.uk