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## Additional Support for Learning in mainstream schools

In May, The Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee published its report on the support available for children with additional support needs (ASN) within the mainstream education system in Scotland - ['How is Additional Support for learning working in practice?'](#).

In preparing the report, the Committee held a roundtable evidence session on ASN education provision and issued a call for views from academics and organisations, and those with direct experience of ASN, including parents and school staff.

[The National Autistic Society Scotland's response](#) to this consultation focused on the need for teachers in Scotland to have a better understanding of autism, highlighting the successful [Every Teacher](#) campaign in England, and called for autism to be included as a specific topic in Initial Teacher Education in Scotland. We also argued that teachers who are already qualified should have access to training in autism as part of their continuing professional development.

### Teacher training

In the report, the Committee recognises that additional support for learning should be a key feature of teacher training. While the report doesn't go into great detail on teacher training, it states that the committee is very interested in training as an issue and intends to return to this later in the session.

The Committee acknowledges that issues undoubtedly exist in teacher training, citing the reduction in specialist staff available in school to provide specialist training and the inability of school staff to take time out from other work pressures to train.

### "Insufficient resources"

The overarching theme of the report is that resources are not currently sufficient to support those with ASN in mainstream schools. Because of this lack of resources, there was substantial evidence given to the committee to suggest that some children feel more excluded in a

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mainstream school setting than they may have done in a special school. In other words, the policy to 'include' is having the opposite effect in some circumstances.

While the number of pupils recorded with ASN has more than doubled over the last few years (153% increase since 2010), the number of teachers and other staff with an ASN specialism has reduced, as have the number of educational psychologists and other specialists providing support to teachers outside the classroom. There has also been a reduction in the number of specialist support services and a reduction in special school places.

The report calls on the Government to assess the extent to which this lack of resources is impacting on mainstreaming in practice. It also recommends that the Government carry out a quality assurance review of the implementation of the presumption of mainstream policy, and more broadly the availability of additional support for learning in mainstream schools.

It recommends that there be parliamentary oversight of the progress of the implementation of mainstreaming and additional support for learning, reporting on an annual basis. There is, however, agreement that mainstreaming is still the correct approach.

### **Autism specific evidence**

The report contains a section which outlines the evidence that was given specifically on autism (page 14 of the report). This is on the basis that autism is one of the most prevalent conditions requiring support - 55 of the 143 parents submitting views to the Committee challenged whether mainstreaming was working for their autistic children.

The report stresses that the autism evidence highlights the pressure on the education system as well as a danger that children with ASN like autism can be perceived socially as 'the problem' by other children and parents. It states that it is undoubtedly the case from the evidence received that some disruptive behaviour is a direct result of being in an educational setting where children do not receive enough support due to insufficient resources.

The National Autistic Society Scotland will continue to make the case for autism to be included as a specific topic in Initial Teacher Education in Scotland. We want to make sure that every new teacher is trained to work with autistic pupils. While autism can present some challenges, we know that a child who is understood and supported can make excellent progress. Having teachers who are properly trained and have the necessary tools to support the inclusion of autistic children and young people in mainstream education services is a vital component of this.