

Summary:

Our response to the Scottish Government consultation on 'Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice'

The Scottish Government is looking to update the document that guides local authorities' implementation of Additional Support for Learning (ASL) policy.

It recently ran a public consultation on its draft update. Our response was informed by our experience as an education provider and as a charity advocating with and for neurodivergent people and families.

Policy–practice gap

We know that there is a significant gap between what is written in policy and what neurodivergent learners and families experience in reality. **Statutory guidance is only meaningful if it translates into lived reality.**

Though updating the guidance is important, it represents a small part of overall reforms required in Scottish education.

In common with reports from parliamentary Committee inquiries focused on neurodivergent lived experiences, our response stressed that neuro-affirming practices are not optional extras, and that a clear plan from government on addressing shortcomings in ASL is necessary.

Accessibility

The questions in the public consultation focused on the clarity and accessibility of the guidance and its alignment to ASL policy.

We stressed that guidance should use plain English definitions and include practical examples of supporting neurodivergent people for educators.

Rights

Central to our response was a focus on rights and access to rights. As part of this, we recommended that a shorter version of the guidance should be developed, focused on learners' rights.

This would be for learners and families, specifically, and include key information about identifying and assessing a learner's needs, planning support, transitions, and placements.

Wellbeing

The guidance does not emphasise the importance of wellbeing as foundational to learning and implementation of ASL policy, particularly for neurodivergent learners. We want to see this changed.

Wellbeing is central to everything that we do. We believe that building a foundation of good wellbeing is a prerequisite for learning and future attainment.

Independent schools

We don't think this guidance recognises the importance of independent special schools (like our Sensational Learning Centre) in Scotland's education system. Our role in modelling innovative, inclusive and neuro-affirming practices is well recognised – and can inform system-wide improvement across the country.

SLC should receive equal consideration for learner placements by local authorities alongside state sector special schools.

School inspections should test all schools' compliance with the guidance, making sure that there is a greater incentive to meet the needs of pupils with Additional Support Needs.

The guidance should reflect on the importance of specialist ASL staff, inputs from non-education services and agencies, and protected time for teachers.

Next steps

We have offered to meet the Scottish Government to discuss these points further. We would like to work with them to develop case studies on ASL good practice, too.

Education is a key policy focus for The Donaldson Trust. You can read what else we've had to say about supporting neurodivergent learners effectively [here](#).