SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

Additional Support for Learning
Findings Report

Published: Tuesday 27th May 2025

About the Assembly.

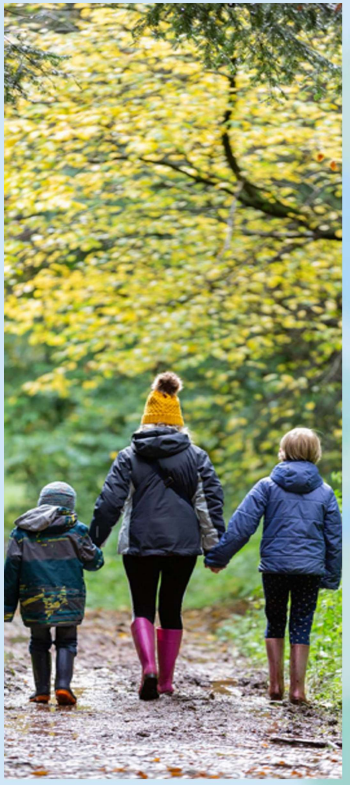
An Assembly of parents and carers with a focus on education

The Scottish Assembly of Parents and Carers is a unique way of hearing the views and experiences of parents and carers.

Assembly members are a diverse group of parents and carers from all over Scotland, demographically representative of different backgrounds, cultures, families and more.

The Assembly came about after consideration of the best ways to hear the voices of different parents and carers, reflecting the diversity of the Scottish population as much as possible. Assemblies and lived-experience panels are an established and exciting way to hear voices – in this case, to ensure that parental experiences and perspectives can be factored into Scottish education policy.

Assembly members meet to discuss issues of interest online, in focus groups or views, experiences and ideas can be shared via surveys too. The focus of the Scottish Assembly of Parents and Carers is always on the best outcomes for all children and young people.



SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

About this survey.

When the Assembly first asked its membership its priorities when we published our first survey last year, Additional Support for Learning was the number one issue for parents in Scotland.

The data from this survey reveals several key themes parents prioritised: the importance of **Inclusive Learning Environments**, **School Staffing and Training**, **Mainstreaming** and **Resources**.

Since then, there have been a number of policy interventions. In its budget the Scottish Government announced additional funding of £29m in its ASN plan. How that money will be spent has not been published yet but it's thought that it will be spent on training teachers. The other major policy development has been the publication by Audit Scotland of their report into ASN. The report highlights the huge growth in ASL rates in Scotland and makes a number of key observations and vital areas for improvement.

This survey and focus groups ran from **7 March to 31 March 2025,** with **144** Assembly Members responding.

Our shared aim with the Scottish Government is for the Assembly to make some solid policy proposals – inspired by parents and carers - to improve the future of all of our children.

SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

Key Findings

Inclusive Learning Environments

- Only **11%** of respondents *strongly* agree that current ASL policies promote an inclusive learning environment.
- **74%** believe that diverse environments (eg forest schools) offer essential sensory and physical engagement that is missing in traditional classrooms.
- **70%** support therapy-based settings and project-based learning as highly beneficial for children with ASN.
- **65%** believe integrating neurodiversity education is *very important* to foster empathy and inclusion.

School Staffing & Training

- **48%** of respondents say here are now fewer support staff in their child's school since they started.
- Only **8%** observed an increase in support staff.
- A strong **92%** agree additional support staff would benefit children with ASN.
- **78%** believe all staff should gain practical experiences in special education settings to better support children with ASN.
- **64%** say large class sizes negatively impact teacher effectiveness in supporting their child.

Mainstreaming

- **71%** strongly agree alternative provisions should be provided for children who struggle in mainstream.
- **24%** somewhat agree but feel mainstream setting should be improved.
- Only **3%** disagree, indicating strong support for flexible education pathways beyond full mainstreaming.

Resources

- **49%** say resource challenges have significantly reduced the quality of their child's education.
- **83%** believe that budget constraints have had a significant impact on the support provided to children with ASN.
- **40%** reported that extracurricular activities have been reduced, and **12%** say they have been eliminated, impacting opportunities for children with ASN.

SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

Our Key Asks

Our Key Asks

Across Scotland, children and young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN) face inconsistent support in education. **These calls for action have been formally agreed upon by members of The Scottish Assembly of Parents and Carers**, a collective representing the lived experience and expertise of families across Scotland navigating ASN systems daily. Together, we call on decision makers at all levels to take urgent, coordinated, and transformative action to ensure inclusive, respectful, and effective provision – where all learners with additional support needs are seen, supported and empowered.

When we talk about ASN, we mean all children and young people who need additional support to learn. This includes (but is not limited to) those who are:

- Neurodivergent (including autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, Tourette's etc)
- Disabled
- Deaf or hard of hearing
- Blind or visually impaired
- Experiencing physical or mental health challenges (including cancer, chronic fatigue, and anxiety)
- Living with trauma
- Facing barriers due to poverty, care experience or social exclusion
- Highly able or gifted learners with unmet support needs
- Experiencing language barriers or are new to English
- Recovering from school-based trauma or unable to attend school physically

Our call to action:

The Scottish Assembly of Parents and Carers calls on the Scottish Government, local authorities and school leadership to take urgent, meaningful action to transform ASN provision across Scotland.

Families are clear; Inclusion must be real. Resources must be fair. Every child must be supported – not just some. And this must be underpinned by evidence, accountability, and data that leads to action.

Our Key Asks

Strengthen resources and staffing in every school

- Increase dedicated ASN support staff across schools.
- Improve general staffing levels to reduce pressure on teachers and ensure meaningful support for all learners.
- Ensure timely access to diagnosis and assessments to avoid long waits for essential support.

Recognise and value parent voices

- Implement mechanisms to actively listen to and include parent views in decisions about their child's support.
- Foster a culture of empathy and respect for parents and carers, regardless of their background, navigating ASN support.
- Ensure schools actively listen and respond to family concerns and lived experience.

Mandatory ASN training for all school staff

- Embed ASN training in initial teacher education to ensure all new teachers are equipped to meet diverse needs from the outset.
- Provide continuous professional development/learning on ASN for current classroom teachers.
- Provide role specific training for all staff, including playground assistants, dinner staff, and janitors, to promote inclusive practice across the whole school environment.

Specialist training and awareness on complex needs

- Invest in training on specific needs, including Neurodiversity, Trauma-informed practices, challenging behaviour strategies, British Sign Language (BSL) and alternative communication methods, supporting learners with complex needs.

Our Key Asks

Build a culture of understanding and acceptance

- Support staff and pupils to view children with ASN as individuals, not as 'bad behaviour'
- Implement whole school community initiatives to build understanding of ASN and break down stigma.
- Encourage a strengths-based view of each child as an individual.

Enforce legal obligations

- Increase awareness and enforcement of legal responsibilities under ASN legislation.
- Hold schools and local authorities accountable for meeting statutory duties to provide ASN support.

Inclusion – not just attendance

- Inclusion polices must go beyond just ensuring physical presences in mainstream schools – they must ensure children with ASN are socially and emotionally included in the school community.
- Adopt flexible, person-centred approaches that meet diverse needs rather than a one size fits all model.
- Recognise the needs of highly able and gifted children, who also fall under ASN legal framework but are often overlooked. These learners require appropriate challenge and support to stay engaged and motivated, ensuring they are not deprioritised.

Diverse learning pathways

- Expand access to alternative and outdoor learning opportunities, online learning platforms and specialist subjects.
- Progress qualifications and assessments to recognise a broader range of achievements – not only those aimed toward university.
- Ensure support and alternative provisions are in place for learners who are unable to attend school regularly, ensuring that families are supported.

Our Key Asks

In addition to the key asks, parents and carers shared powerful reflections that underline the urgency for change:

'Just because it's a physical disability doesn't mean they don't need extra help.'

'Autism or health conditions such as cancer don't understand postcodes!'

'The only issue is these are just recommendations. They are all essentially part of GIRFEC, SHANARRI etc but are not enforced.'

'These should be fundamental statements that should be carried out if we are to get it right for every child.'

'Finally, someone is listening, the fact I agreed to everything is a first! Just wish I heard this 10 years ago. Painful watching my third child extremely struggle for same reasons.'

'It crushes whole families. Time to turn it around so they are up top and happy with the rest.'

'The lack of support and understanding around our children is creating a ticking time bomb of mental health for the child, siblings and parents.'

'Most of the problems I experience on a daily basis is the issues at break times.'

'Many with ASN find social interactions with peers the most difficult and there is currently zero support/training.'

'There should be other ways around this here too to add to qualification when missed so much at school through no fault of their own.'

'Also, might want to add this into colleges. Class sizes push them out here too.'

'Is it not better to co-produce a new service system?'

'Adding multiple 'bolt ons' to a system that is so challenged does make me wonder should we have a blank sheet.'

'What would a new rights-based, co-produced, multi-dimensional, evidence-based service system look like?'

'These changes are long overdue. The system is failing so many children and families as it is now.'

'Shocking that outcomes for ASN kids are practically immeasurable.'

'The lack of use of electronic databases… is archaic and causes lots of disjointed working.'

'There should be a standardised reporting system across Scotland to measure needs / support offered / attendance.'

'Parents are often consulted but rarely given real power.'

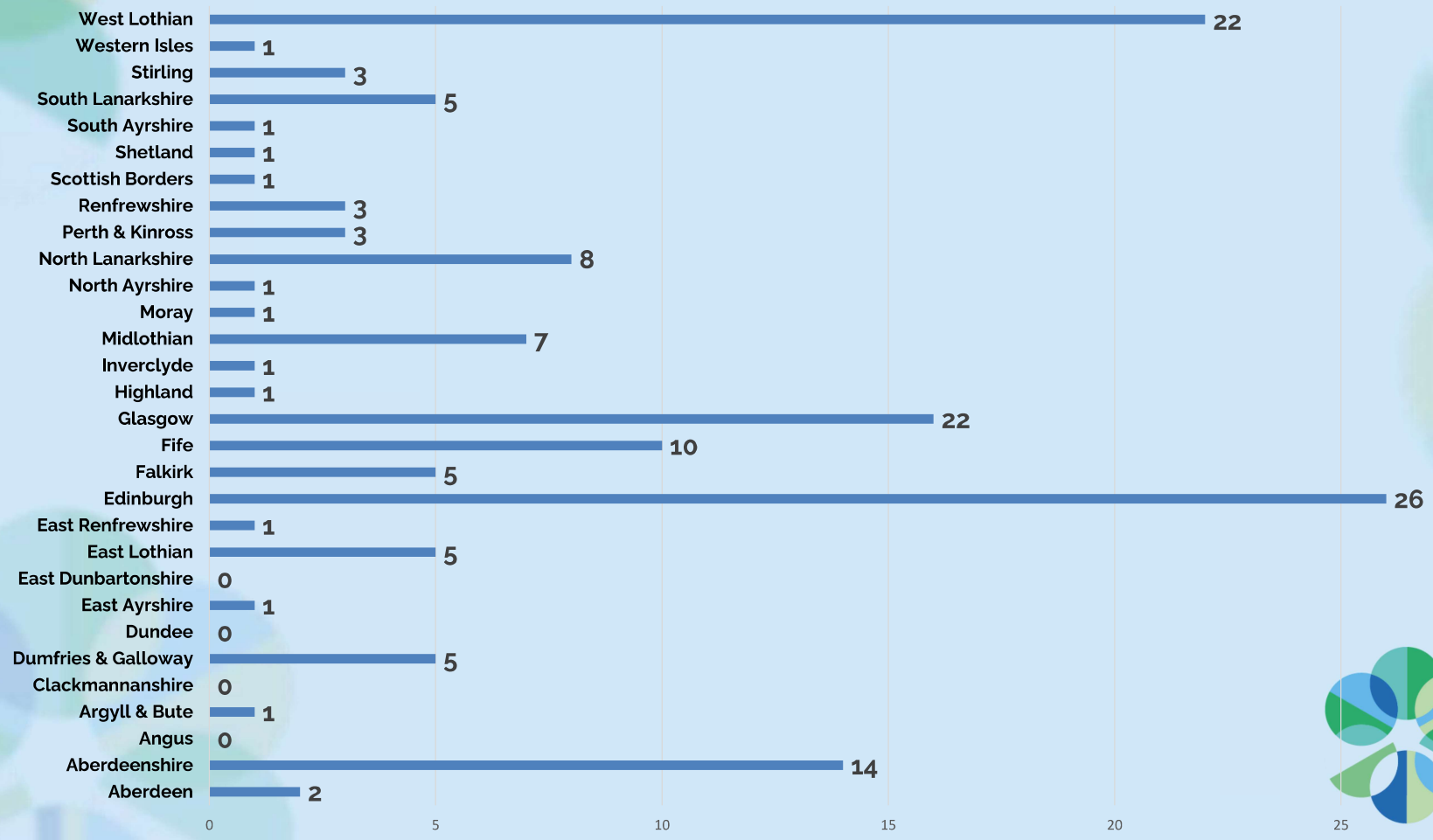
'Parents should have a seat at the table where policies are developed, not just implemented.'

'My daughter has a genetic condition. We need a care programme approach for such children from diagnosis.'

Demographics

Location of Respondents

Members responded from 28 local authorities. As shown, we had particularly high responses from Edinburgh and West Lothian.



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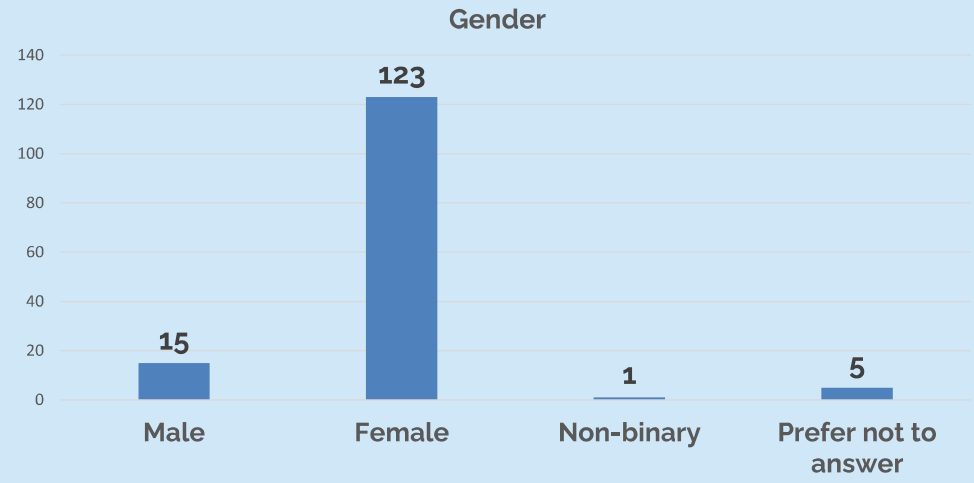
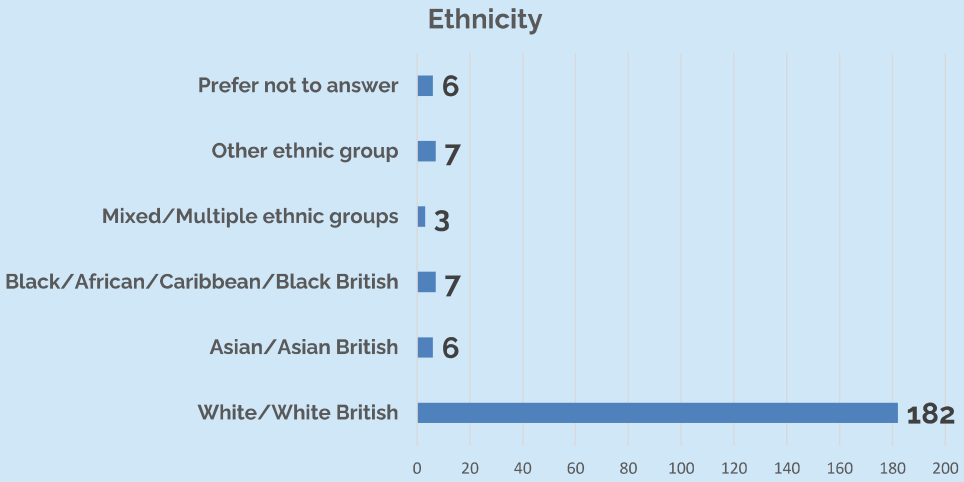
Parents and Carers who took part





Age Bracket

- 25-34 **5**
- 35-44 **67**
- 44.54 **60**
- 55-64 **11**
- Above 65 **1**

What is your marital status?

- Married **100**
- Divorced **11**
- Separated **10**
- Single **13**
- Prefer not to
- answer **10**

Please describe your household

- Single Parent Household **29**
- Household has 2 or more adults in it **113**
- Prefer not to answer **2**

Is English your First Language?

- Yes **130**
- No **14**

Other First Languages

Yoruba
Tamil
Spanish
French
Igbo
Greek
German
Finnish
Polish

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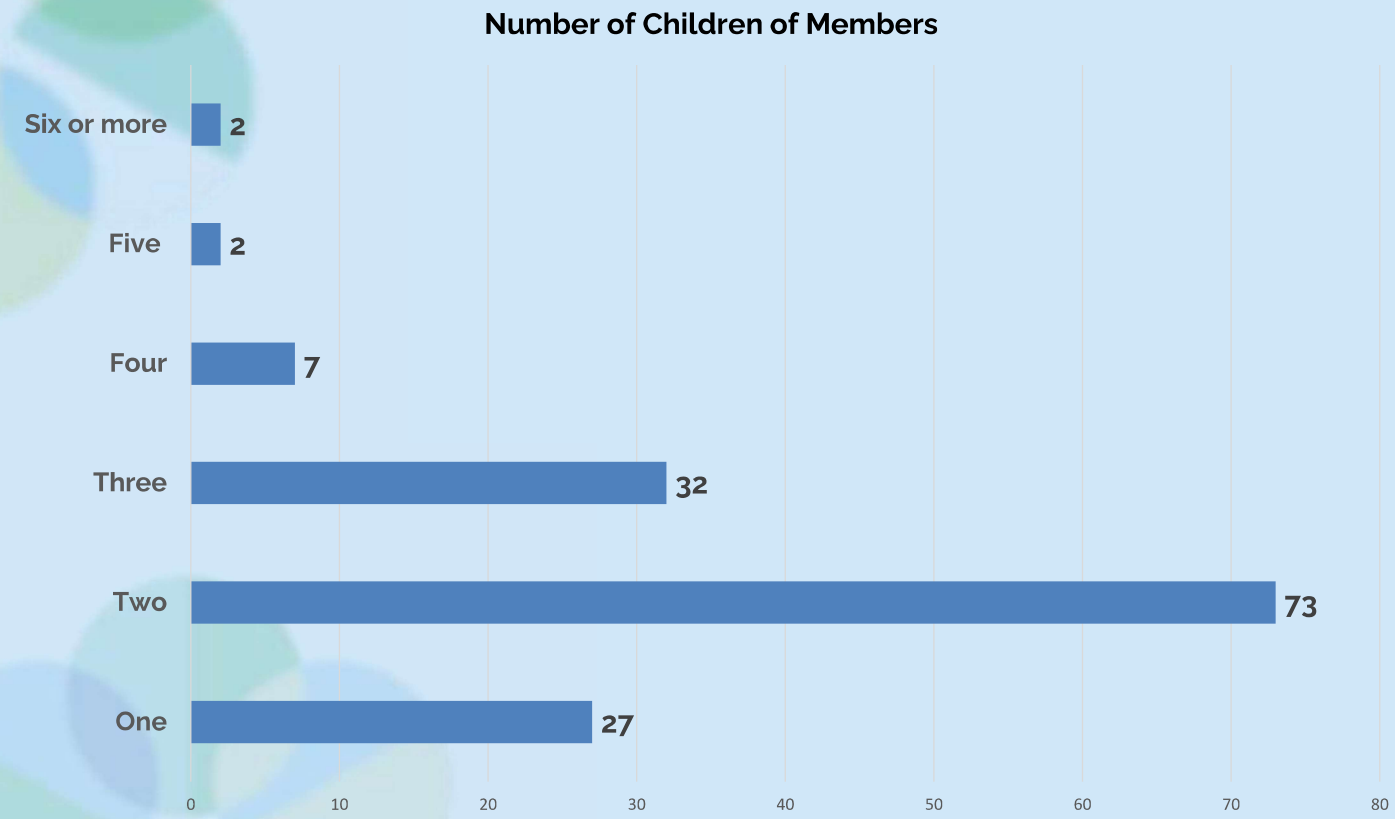
Children & Young People

Assembly Members who have participated in this survey have at least 1 school aged child.



Parent Roles

- Biological Parent **132**
- Kinship Carer **3**
- Adoptive **2**
- Step- Parent **5**
- Foster Carer **3**
- Other **1**

SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

Children & Young People

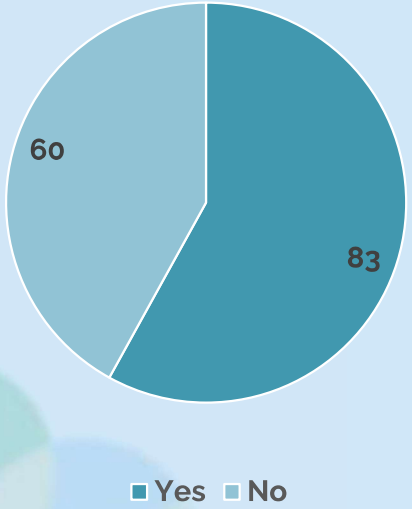
Children – English as additional language

Yes – all my children have English as an additional language **4**
No – all my children have English as their first language **138**
Some of my children have English as their first language, and some as an additional language **3**

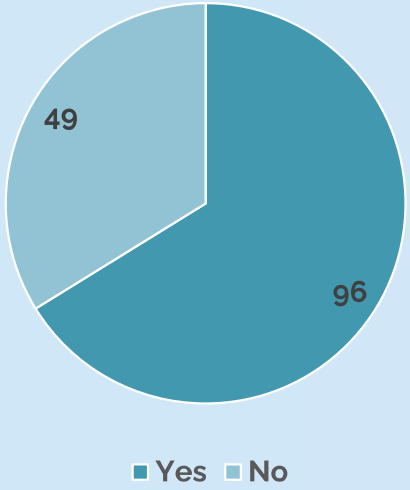
Other Languages

Finnish
German
Japanese
Polish
Spanish
British Sign Language

Children with a Disability or Health Condition



Children Receiving Additional Learning Support



Child Currently or Has Had Previous Experience in Care

Yes **10**
No **134**

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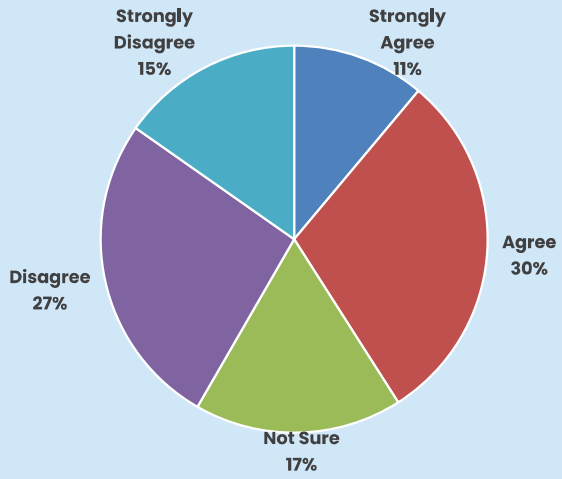
Inclusive Learning Environments

Do you believe that the current Additional Support for Learning (ASL) policies in your child's school promote an inclusive learning environment? (144 answered, 0 skipped)



- **Strongly agree:** You believe the policies are highly effective in fostering an inclusive environment. **11% (16)**
- **Agree:** You think the policies are generally supportive of inclusivity but could benefit from some improvements. **30% (43)**
- **Not sure**: you are undecided or feel the policies neither positively nor negatively impact inclusivity. **17% (25)**
- **Disagree:** You feel the policies do not adequately support an inclusive learning environment. **27% (38)**
- **Strongly disagree:** You believe the policies are ineffective and fail to promote inclusivity. **15% (22)**

Select the statements you agree with regarding exploring diverse environments (e.g., forest schools, outdoor learning) for children with ASN? (144 answered, 0 skipped)

- Diverse environments provide essential sensory engagement and physical activities that traditional classrooms may lack. **(74%)**
- These environments offer positive additional experiences but should complement traditional classroom settings. **(57%)**
- These environments may not significantly differ from traditional classrooms. **(1%)**
- They might distract from conventional learning methods. **(6%)**
- Traditional classroom environments are sufficient for all children. **(1%)**

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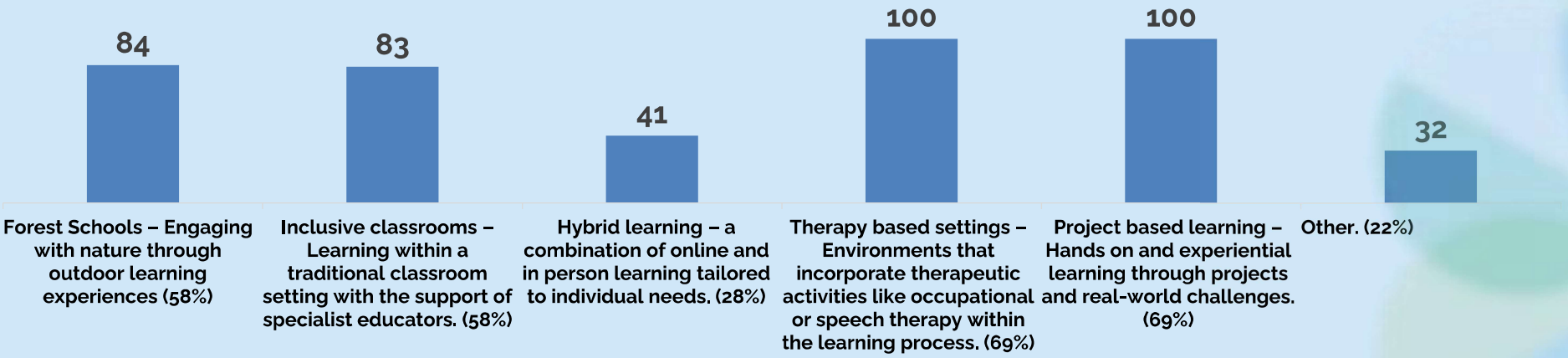
Which of the following learning environments do you think would be most beneficial for children with ASN? (144 answered, 0 skipped)



Sample of Parents Comments.

'Play therapy to support mental wellbeing'

'Flexible schooling to support social and emotional needs'

'Small group settings that allow more support for learners with additional needs'

'Community based options for young people unable short or long term to go into the school building. Such as in local libraries, community centres, charity bases etc. At present opportunities of this sort are extremely limited, gatekept by school so parent aren't aware of what is available. Parents who can seek private tutoring support but mostly cobbling together trying to find what works when their child is unable to cope with the school environment and regime.'

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Sample of Parent's Comments cont...

'Intermediate schools that allow inclusion for Neurodiverse minds with small classrooms, specialist educators & trained support staff. Learning at children, pace.'

'All learning should be learner led, so be flexible enough to offer a timetable that can give children, the experiences they need to realise and release potential. We need to move away from education only happens in school walls, some children benefit from a hybrid, some from home, online or community based.'

'This is difficult to answer as ASN's are such a wide spectrum and what would work well for one child would not for others.'

'Co produced learning - incorporating lived and learned experience with those out of school, part time and in school - you will get a very different outcome if you co-produce bottom up with children and families, starting with tests of change, rural/urban, deprived and affluent areas.'

'I think an inclusive environment is suitable for some children, but we need more special schools to support those who have higher needs. At present the inclusion targets are detrimental to pupils who are not having their needs met by teachers who cannot support ASL pupils and facilitate learning for their other pupils.'

'Using community resources which our young people enjoy out of school. This supports young people with ASN to feel confident and safe in other places.'

'In acknowledging neurodivergence is a spectrum it is therefore logical that each individual requires an holistic assessment which would determine the most suitable learning environment. Inclusion shouldn't just mean included in a space it can also mean being in a space that facilitates being able to be actively engaged in the curriculum.'

'Any or all of the above, depending on the additional support needs of the learner - "ASN" is an extremely broad category, and even children with the same diagnosis can have very different profiles. However, learning tailored to individual needs and therapeutic input for children who require it are a bare minimum.'

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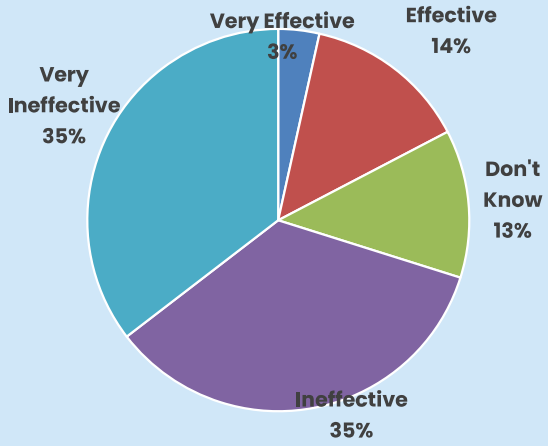
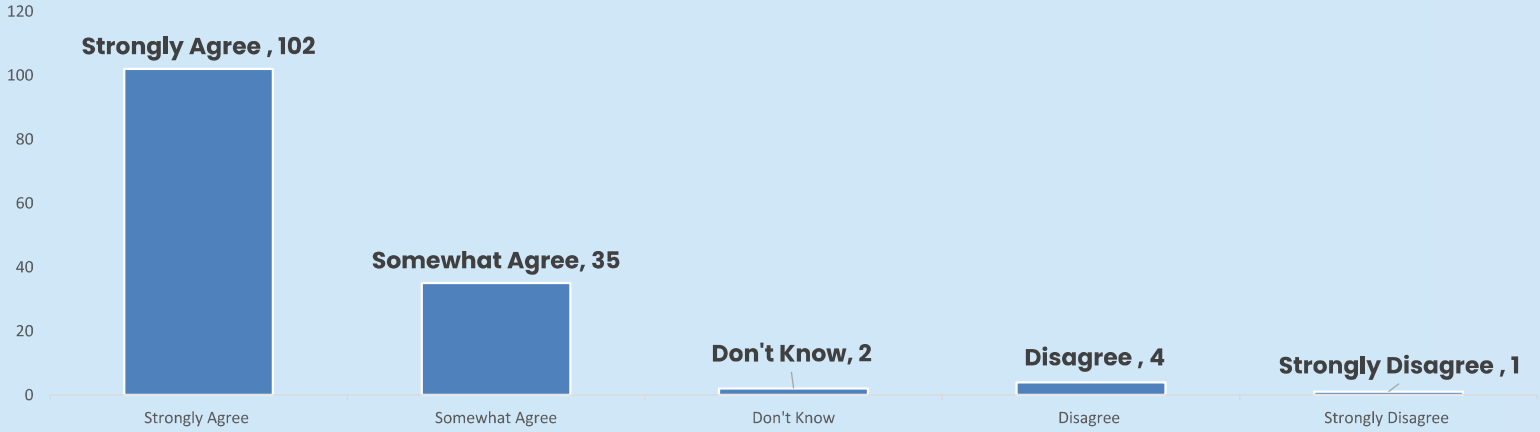
How effective do you think current support systems are in addressing the individual needs of pupils who struggle with traditional schooling? (144 answered, 0 skipped)



- **Very Effective** - You find the support systems highly effective in meeting the needs of these pupils. **3% (5)**
- **Effective** - You think the systems work well but could use some enhancements. **14% (20)**
- **Don't know** - You have no strong opinion on their effectiveness. **13% (18)**
- **Ineffective** - You believe the support systems are lacking and do not adequately address individual needs. **35% (50)**
- **Very Ineffective** - You feel the support systems fail to meet the needs of pupils struggling with traditional schooling. **35% (51)**

Do you agree it's important to provide alternative provisions for children who struggle in mainstream settings to ensure that they receive appropriate education? (144 answered, 0 skipped)



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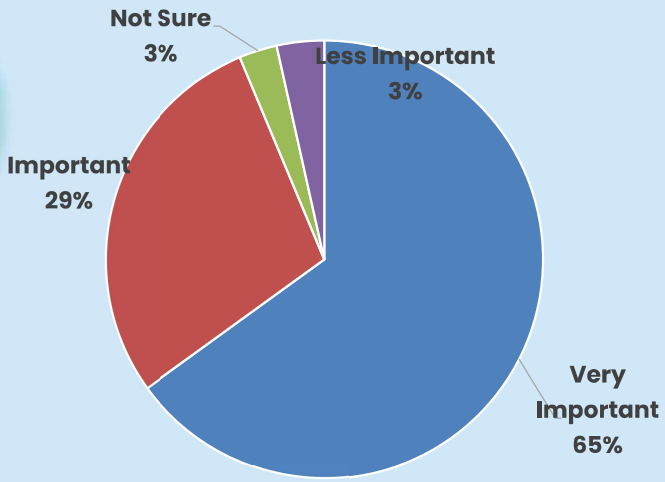
How important is it to integrate neurodiversity teaching within the curriculum to help all children understand and support each other? (143 answered, 1 skipped)



- **Very Important**: It fosters an inclusive culture and encourages empathy among children. **65% (93)**
- **Important**: Neurodiversity teaching is good but should be balanced with other curriculum elements. **28% (41)**
- **Not Sure:** It may not have a significant impact on peer understanding and support. **3% (4)**
- **Less Important:** It could take focus away from other critical areas of the curriculum. **3% (5)**

'I would love to see not just more awareness but true acceptance of neurodivergent children. It is still very much the case of neurodivergent children having to adapt to a neurotypical environment which is sometimes very though and demanding.'

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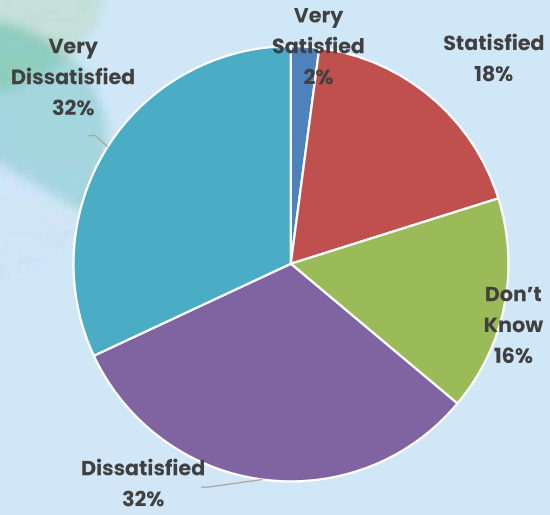
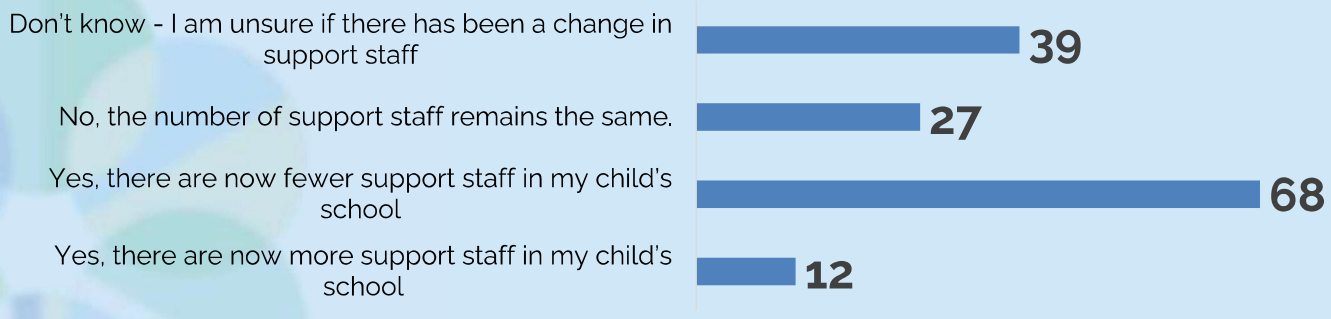
Resources

How satisfied are you with the current level of support available for children with additional support needs (ASN) in schools? (144 answered, 0 skipped)



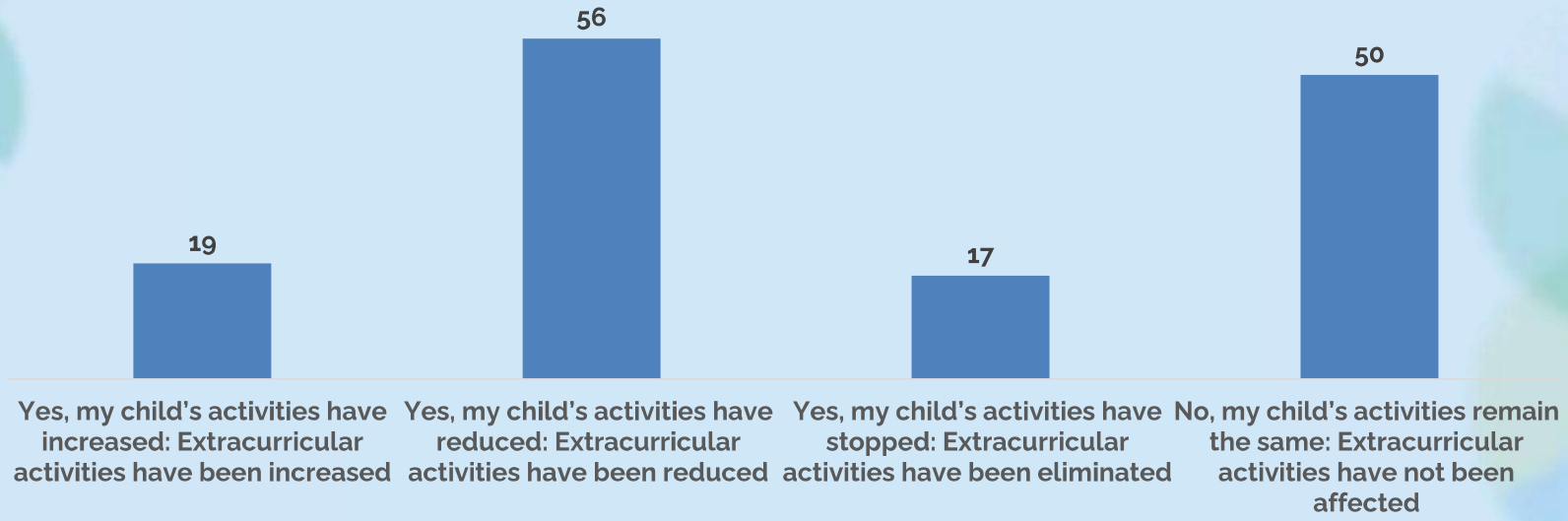
- **Very satisfied** - The support provided is excellent. **2% (3)**
- **Satisfied** - The support provided is good but could be improved. **18% (26)**
- **Don't know** - I'm unsure about the level of support available. **16% (23)**
- **Dissatisfied** - The support provided is inadequate. **32% (46)**
- **Very dissatisfied** - The support provided is severely lacking. **32% (46)**

Has your child experienced a change in the amount of support staff since they started school? (143 answered, 1 skipped)



SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

Has the number of extracurricular activities in your child's school changed since they started school? (141 answered, 3 skipped)

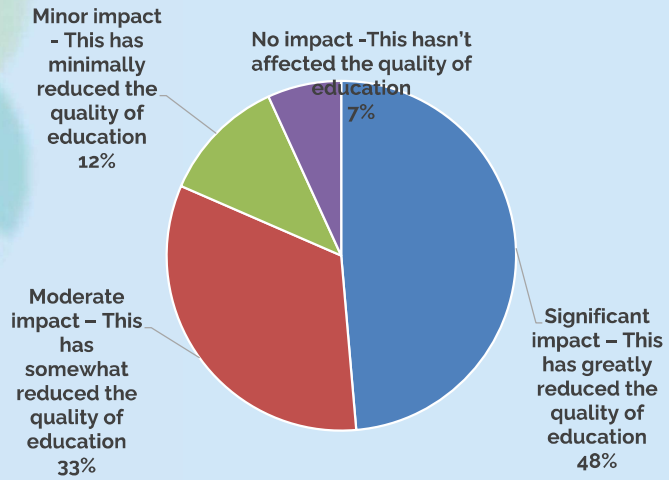


"In response re: extracurricular activities, lunchtime clubs at my child's school have been reduced. This (mainstream) school has never offered anything after school that meets my child's needs and interests, so I am unable to comment on that."

"....You also spoke of extracurricular activities but in my experience, there are none."

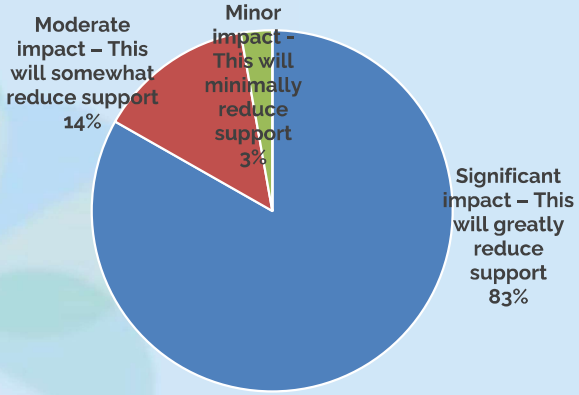
SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

To what extent have resource challenges affected the quality of the education your child receives? (144 answered, 0 skipped)



- **Significant impact** – This has greatly reduced the quality of education. **48% (71)**
- **Moderate impact** – This has somewhat reduced the quality of education. **33% (48)**
- **Minor impact** - This has minimally reduced the quality of education**. 12% (17)**
- **No impact** -This hasn't affected the quality of education. **7% (10)**

How do you perceive the impact of school budget constraints on the support provided to children with additional support needs? (143 answered, 1 skipped)



- **Significant impact** – This will greatly reduce support. **83% (119)**
- **Moderate impact** – This will somewhat reduce support. **14% (20)**
- **Minor impact** - This will minimally reduce support. **3% (4)**
- **No impact** -This won't affect support. **0%**

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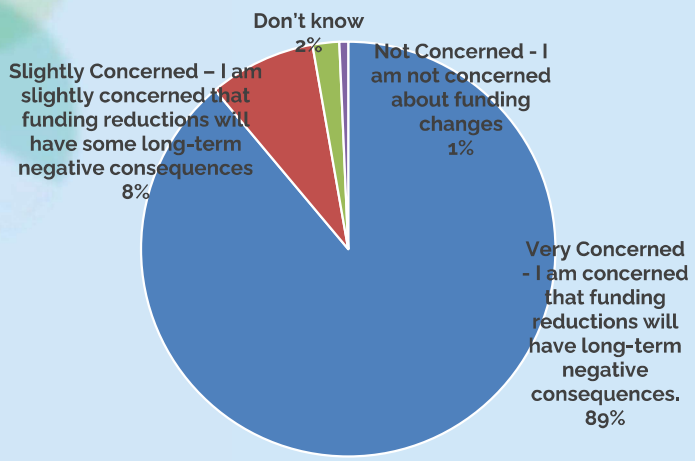
To what extend are you concerned that reductions in additional support for learning (ASL) funding could lead to long terms negative consequences for children with additional support needs, such as decreased academic performance and well-being? (144 answered, 0 skipped)



- **Very Concerned** - I am concerned that funding reductions will have long-term negative consequences. **89% (128)**
- **Slightly Concerned** – I am slightly concerned that funding reductions will have some long-term negative consequences. **8% (12)**
- **Don't know – 2% (3)**
- **Not Concerned** - I am not concerned about funding changes. **1% (1)**

Would you like to see increased transparency and communication from school administration regarding budget decisions and their impact? (144 answered, 0 skipped)

- **Yes:** There should be increased transparency and communication from the school administration regarding budget decisions and their impact. **84% (121)**
- **No:** There is currently enough transparency and communication from the school administration regarding budget decisions and their impact. **6% (9)**
- **Don't know**: I am unsure about the level of transparency and communication from the school administration regarding budget decisions and their impact. **10% (14)**

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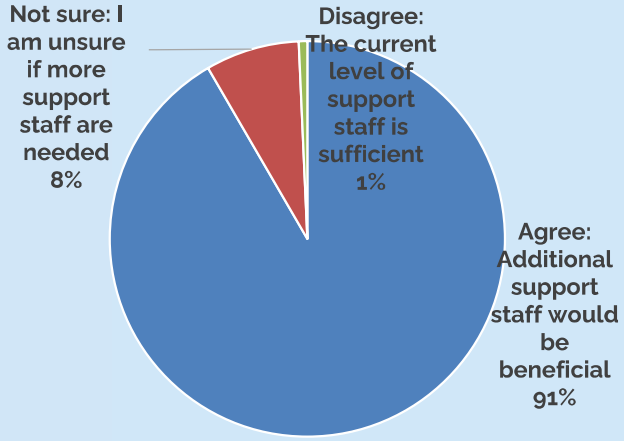
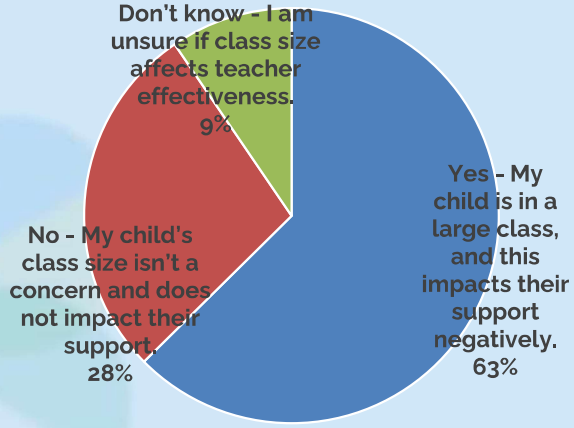
School Staffing & Training

Do you think more support staff would help pupils with learning disabilities and behavioural challenges? (143 answered, 1 skipped)



- **Agree:** Additional support staff would be beneficial. **91% (131)**
- **Not sure:** I am unsure if more support staff are needed**. 8% (11)**
- **Disagree**: The current level of support staff is sufficient. **1% (1)**

Have you observed large class sizes affect teacher effectiveness in supporting your child? (143 answered, 1 skipped)



- **Yes** - My child is in a large class, and this impacts their support negatively. **63% (92)**
- **No** - My child's class size isn't a concern and does not impact their support. **28% (41)**
- **Don't know** - I am unsure if class size affects teacher effectiveness. **9% (14)**

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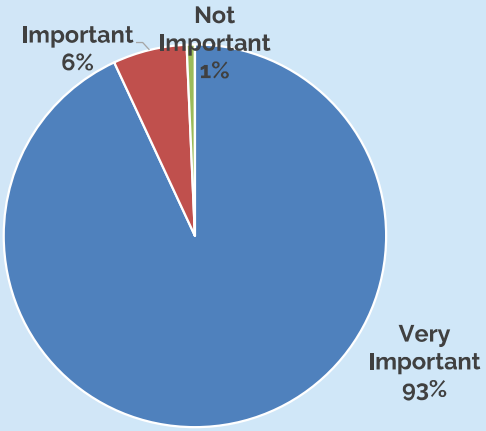
How important do you think teacher training on disabilities is (ie dyslexia, ADHD, and neurodiversity)? (144 answered, 0 skipped)



- **Very important. 93% (134)**
- **Important. 6% (9)**
- **Not Important. 1% (1)**
- **Don't know. 0 (0%)**

Sharing good practice

"My daughter in P5, son in S4 – lucky with mainstream primary school, both with special needs, they (the school) helped before and after the diagnosis. Lots in place to help daughter's class understand her to prevent bullying and her getting into trouble. Both have Tourette's, teachers have undergone training with Tourette's Scotland."

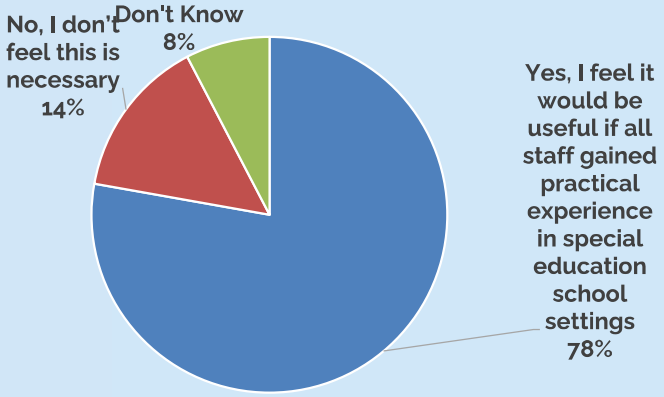
'I also feel that specialised neurodivergence training should be offered to ALL staff & volunteers within an educational setting so that everyone is equipped to handle any ASL or neurodivergent issues- Janitors, Canteen, Admin, Library, PSA *(Pupil Support Assistant)* and teachers all fall under this.'

'...Furthermore, I do not want to see £29 million wasted on ineffective teacher training. We need transparency about what the training will involve to ensure it is robust and suitable for all children with Additional Support Needs. This cannot be a tick-box exercise. We need high-quality training based on evidence-based research, not something designed just to give the impression of progress.'

'I really wish more training was done on how adhd presents in many girls. My daughter is given no special allowances at all, because the teachers all see her as well-behaved child. She struggles to concentrate, is very easily distracted, makes many mistakes when copying from the board, yet no help or understanding is given despite us asking.'

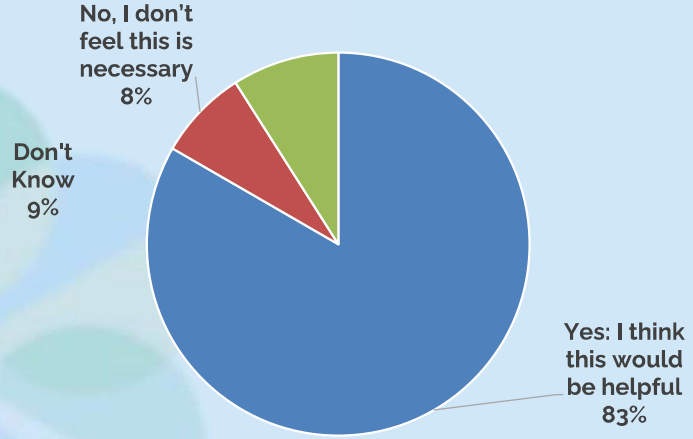
'It is not only the number of support staff in school which is the issue, but also their own understanding and training around the needs of the children. Similarly, many teachers have had little to no formal input on ASN and often continue to use approaches to teaching and behaviour management which are outdated and overly behaviourist, and do not work well for neurodivergent children. There is too little flexibility in the system and a tendency to default to traditional approaches when a problem arises. School staff need training in, but also help with implementing, how to do things differently.'

Should all staff gain practical experience in special education school settings to better understand and support learners with additional support needs? (144 answered, 0 skipped)



- **Yes**, I feel it would be useful if all staff gained practical experience in special education school settings. **78% (112)**
- **No**, I don't feel this is necessary. **14% (21)**
- **Don't know**. **8% (11)**

Do you believe the hiring of learning disability nurses or equivalent professionals to assess needs in schools would be helpful? (144 answered, 0 skipped)

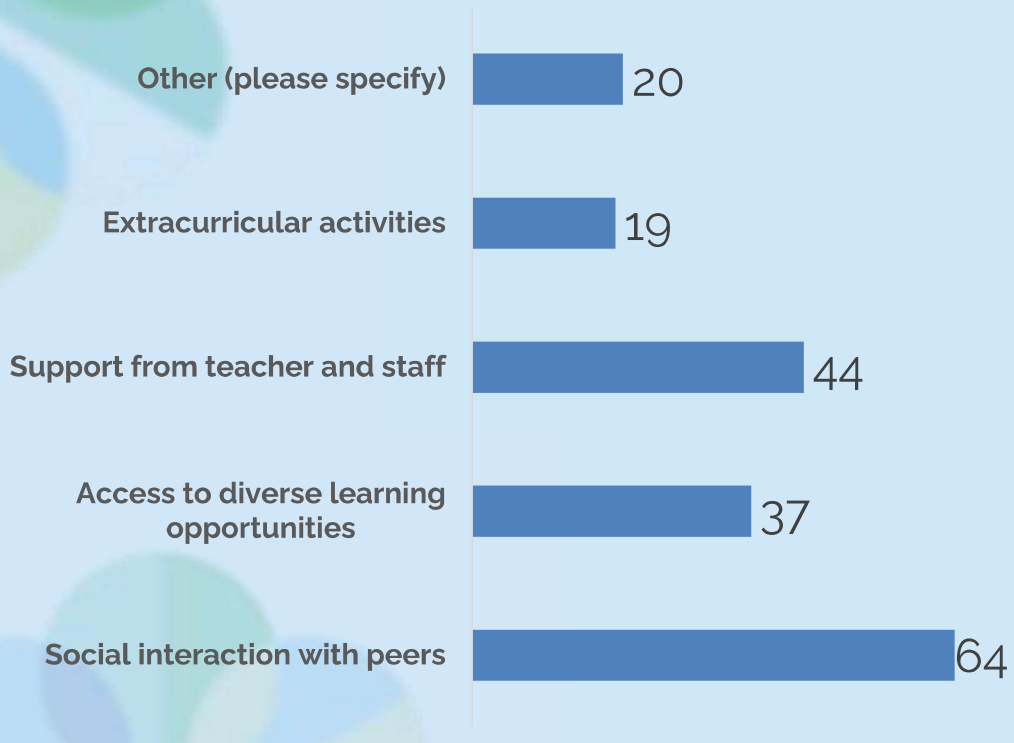


- **Yes:** I think this would be helpful. **83% (120)**
- **No**: I don't think this is necessary. **8% (11)**
- **Don't know**. **9% (13)**

SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

Mainstreaming

What aspects of mainstream schooling does your child benefit from the most? (100 answered, 44 skipped)



Sample of comments (other)

'To be a normal member of the community, attending with siblings the same school.'

'The resource base offers specialist support for deaf children which is essential, while allowing mainstream opportunities in the mainstream class too.'

'Being able to access the same opportunities as their peers (with support where required)'

'Falling through cracks because she's a high masker and those with outbursts get all the help and constantly disrupt the class.'

'None at the moment, his needs are not met.'

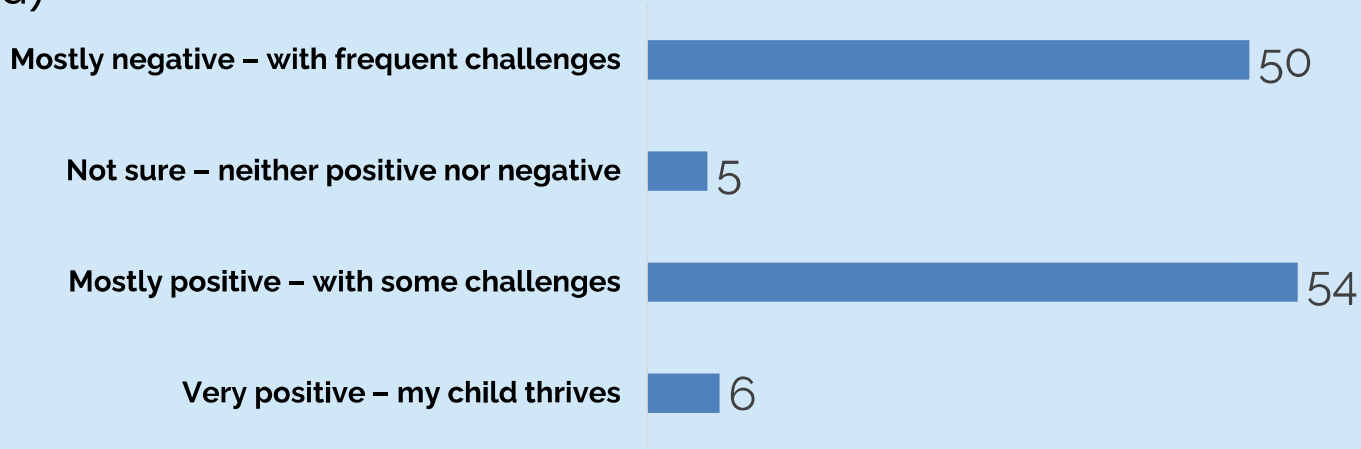
'Routine and predictability.'

'Difficult to say, our son is unable to share this kind of thing. He is attending school and seems to be engaging with ASL adjustments.'

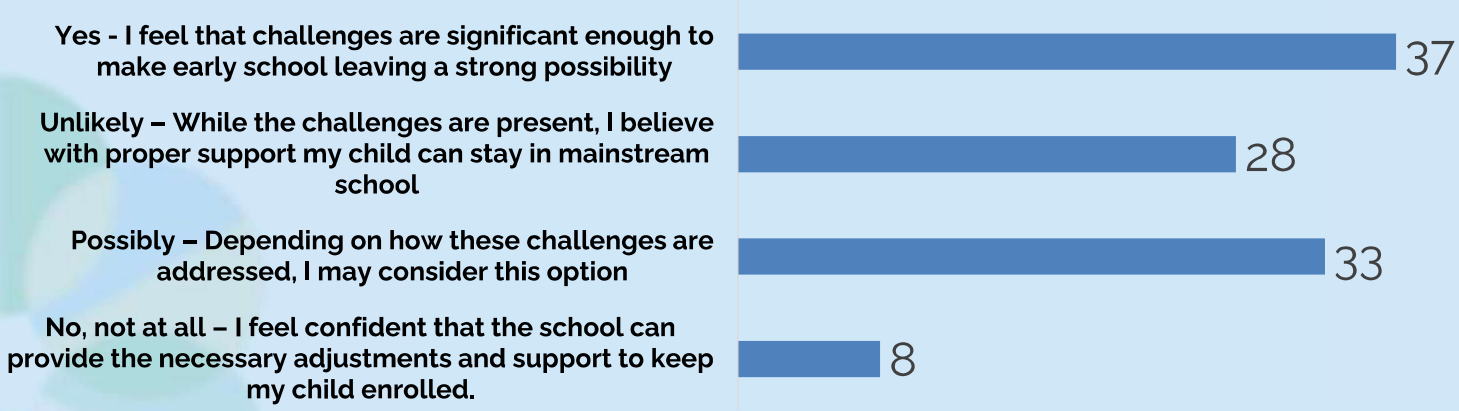
'He feels the same as his peers, he doesn't want special treatment.'

SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

How would you rate your child's experiences in mainstream school? (100 answered, 44 skipped)

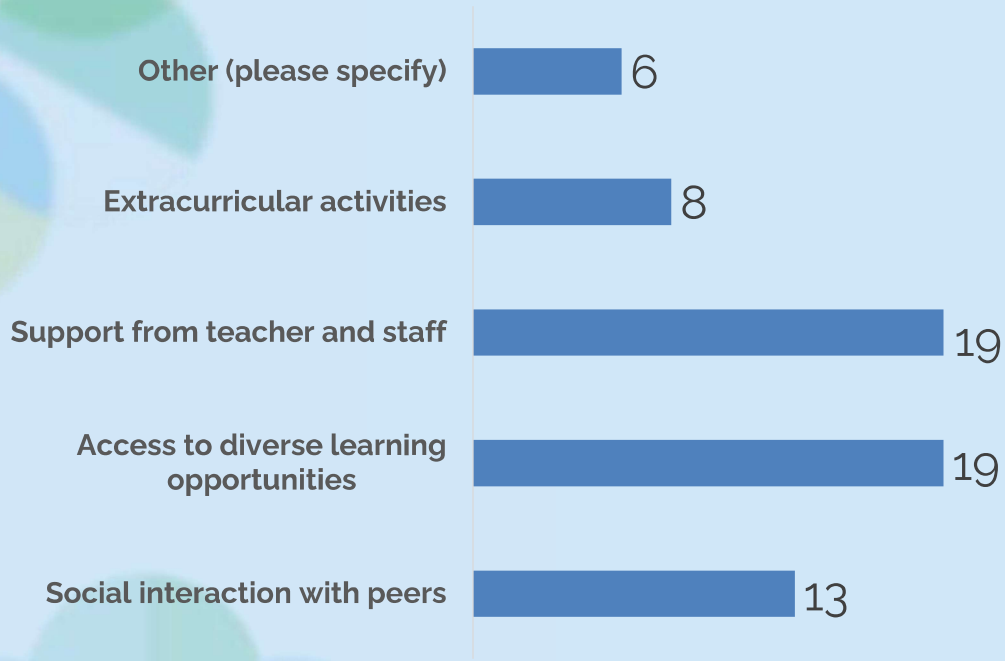


Do you feel that challenges your child/ren face in mainstream school settings would make you consider having them leave school early? (100 answered, 44 skipped)



Special Schooling

What aspects of special schooling does your child benefit from the most? (28 answered, 116 skipped)



Sample of comments (other)

'Specialist teachers for deaf children and BSL fluent CSW's *(Communication Support Worker)* both essentials!'

'My children receive the 1:1 required when they need it and staff are available. Staffing and experience is a huge issue!'

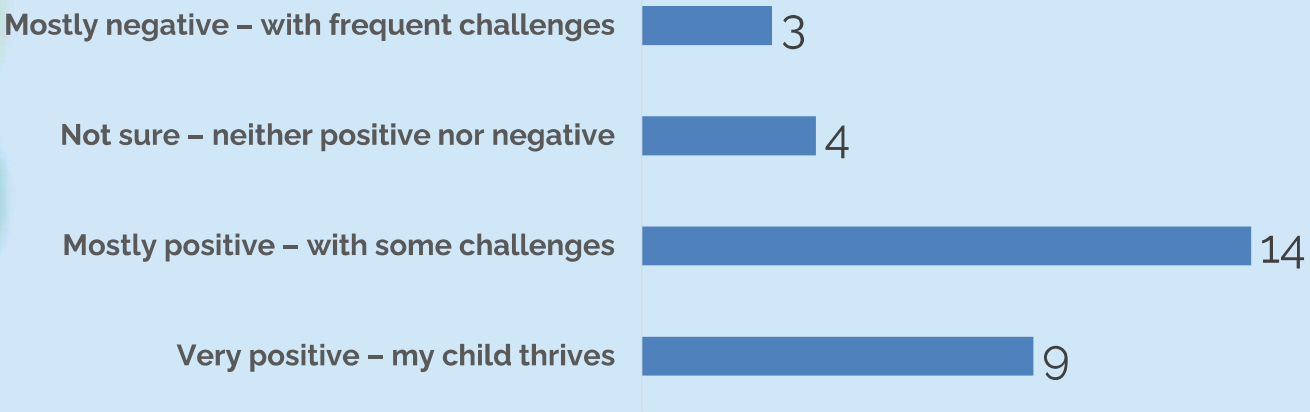
'In school therapies / learning based on personal interests.'

'Having the daily learning tailored to her needs and interests.'

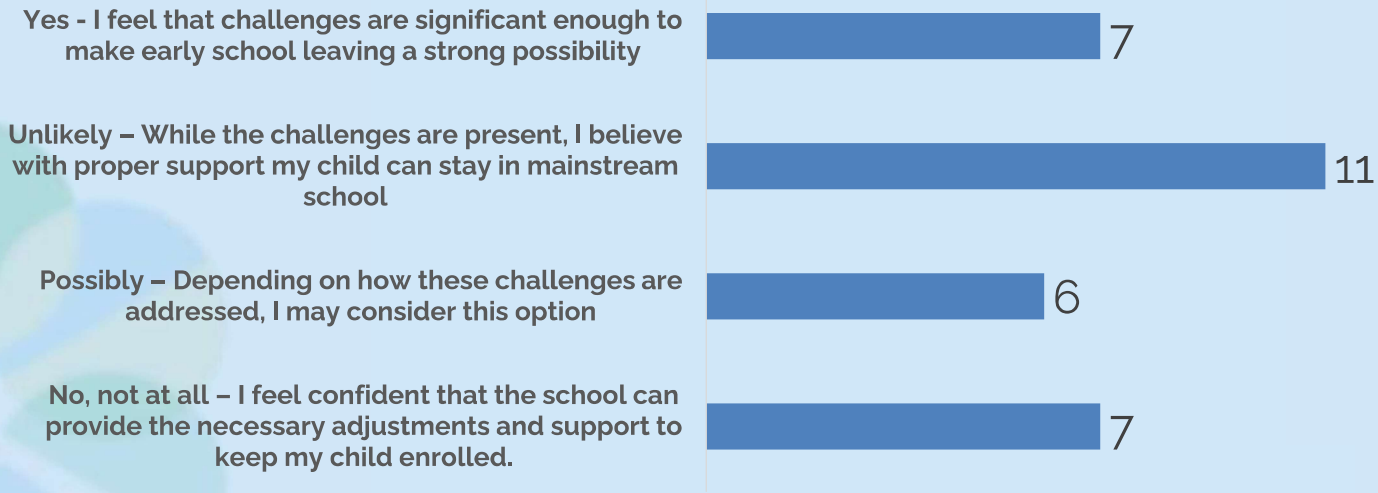
'None of the above, the worst move I made was getting my son into his placement, instead I should have removed him entirely from education. He has not been given the same opportunities as children his age. He is a very intelligent young man but because of lack of staffing he has been failed time and time again.'

SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

How would you rate your child's experience in special school? (28 answered, 116 skipped)



Do you feel that challenges your child/ren face in special school settings would make you consider having them leave school early? (28 answered, 116 skipped)



SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

Additional Comments

Is there anything else you would like to comment on regarding additional support for learning in schools?

94 respondents left comments on the following themes:

Understanding/Awareness of children with ASN **15**
Specific teacher training/Support for teachers **40**
Masking/Burnout **2**
Classroom environments/class sizes **7**
Expectations on teachers **2**
ASN placements and their availability **10**
Early interventions **2**
Parent Support/Advice pathways **2**
Policy issues **6**
Suggestions **8**
Communication with parents **5**
Highly Able **2**
GIRFEC **3**
BSL in schools **2**
Diagnosis **3**
Bullying **3**

Reduced Timetables **3**
Whole School approach **4**
Attainment **4**
Inclusion **6**
Impact on families **8**
Evidence based support **3**
Positive experience **4**
Negative experience **5**
Behaviour **8**
Resources **21**
Mainstream environment **19**
Alarming rates of ASN **3**
Life skills **2**
Alternative learning **4**
Impact on other learners **11**
Removed child from school **2**
Special schooling **7**

SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

Sample of Parent's Comments.

'I would love to see not just more awareness but true acceptance of neurodivergent children. It is still very much the case of neurodivergent children having to adapt to a neurotypical environment which is sometimes very tough and demanding.'

'Councils do not know what their legal obligations are. QIMs *(Quality Improvement Managers),* QIOs *(Quality Improvement Officers)* & HTs *(Headteachers)* are ableist and uneducated on neurodiversity. Even the Curriculum is neuronormative esp. the H&W & literacy aspects of the es and os and bench marks. The curriculum needs to be reviewed with support of those with lived experience to remove or reword these elements. My heart breaks when I hear autistic learners tell me that they have been marked down due to not making eye contact etc! Neuro differences are being viewed as being the problem however it is the environment that is the problem. If 45% of learners have ASN, it means that the mainstream system isn't fit for purpose for 45% of learners! In what other area of the world would this be accepted. The children are not the problem, the broken outdated neuronormative system is the problem!'

'Every child with additional needs is different, therefore support needed differs. Support needs to be tailored to the child. It would be useful for teachers to get experience in a special needs setting; however they are there to teach everyone and if there was enough support, they could concentrate on teaching. At my school pupils in mainstream have said they would like more staff. There needs to be quicker diagnosis of autism etc and needs identified as soon as possible to help the child. It's not just about throwing money at the problem; more funding is needed but the money needs to be spent wisely.'

'Feel schools should increase the number of teachers and PSA's. There are far too many kids in classes with different needs that one teacher is unable to cope. The kids that can learn have their day at school disrupted daily with kids with additional needs. It's not their fault it's the system'

'More work needs to be done to support the education of children who can not physically attend school.'

Sample of Parent's Comments.

'The expected skill set of a general teacher, in my opinion is expected to be quite high. There is danger of spreading too thin. Also, full integration in a classroom environment without appropriate specialist resource leaves middle range children to be left to manage at a "good enough" standard. I personally find this to be the case. Lots of kids learning just enough whilst coping with difficult to manage children abound and one teacher expected to make the idealistic view of utopian inclusion for all come true'

'The special schools my children attend are wonderful, but the lack of staff due to vacancies not being filled and sickness not being covered due to lack of supply staff has had a significant impact on the opportunities my child is offered. The school are currently looking at a part time school timetable for the ASN setting as they do not have enough staff currently to have all the children in at the same time'

'The standard for support for deaf children should be set high. Communication support workers should all have BSL fluency, and ToDs *(Teacher of the Deaf)* should also. Deafness isn't straightforward, every deaf child is so different, but BSL should be an option for every deaf child.'

'My children are not ASN students, but the behaviour of their ASN classmates is affecting their learning. Schools need more support to handle the disruptive behaviours so that the other students aren't negatively affected. There also needs to be a balance of how many and what kind of ASN students are put in the same classrooms as some ASN behaviour can set off disruptive behaviours in other ASN students who would've been fine if the first child hadn't affected them (example: lack of impulse control in one can least to another's autistic meltdown).'

'There is a lot to be done here. The focus on mainstreaming all but the most severe cases is harming all pupils. Those who seem well behaved/high maskers are falling through the cracks. In our school it's firefighting the chaos day to day of those with massive behavioural issues. It's not working and it's letting our children down.'

Sample of Parent's Comments.

‘Fellow parents have suggested much more flexibility in school times, uniform, ability to have mental health days for the child without judgement, better communication, better transitions (I.e from nursery to p1), class sizes are an issue as are staff numbers.’

‘Something has to be done because we are setting our kids up for failure. The lack of provision due to budget constraints is going to lead to massive crisis.’

‘The issue is not that my child cannot cope in mainstream education. In fact, he is one of the most well-behaved pupils in his class and is very eager to learn. The real problem lies in the lack of knowledge about how to effectively support a neurodivergent child academically. Instead of addressing this gap, it is far too easy for teachers and local authorities to attribute his academic performance to his disabilities. The truth is, all neurodivergent children can learn—this is clearly proven through scientific research and data.’

‘Smaller class sizes is the only way I feel will import r asl for disabled children also think disability should be taking out the asn category and funded/ supported on its own like it’s more the diverse range of pupils in a classroom now teacher training is fine how it is . Just need more support staff.’

‘In regards to question regarding more support staff, it’s imperative that they are trained in ASL to stop burnout & trauma.’

‘This is an urgent priority. So many children are at home with no provision for them. I am concerned there's a lack of provision for children who can't cope in mainstream but don't meet the criteria for a special school or enhanced support base. Every child has a right to education and this right is not being upheld in many cases. Something positive is the EDAN hub which is supporting families with issues accessing school.’

‘Mainstream failed my child for 6 years - resulting in burnout, an anxiety disorder and OCD. The failures almost ruined our lives and both parents almost loosing their jobs. Current lack of suitable provision is a disgrace.’

Sample of Parent's Comments.

‘There must be more funding for more pupil support workers. Teachers aren’t just teachers. They are having to assist with personal care, help multiple children regulate their emotions, assist with continence, and numerous other things then do their regular teaching job aswell. it is so unfair to expect teachers to do it all , as well as expecting pupil support workers to be able to manage such a large quantity of ASN kids and also be there for kids with behaviour issues, dyslexia , childhood trauma etc. there must be more staff , more support. I am lucky our school is managing and are amazing but they really are stretched thin. It’s clear to see this is ongoing issue at EVERY mainstream school. There must be more funding for more staff so that everyone can thrive. If our teachers and pupil support workers are worked to the point of burn out this will not help our children or the staff personally. Things really do need to change.’

‘I’m keen to explore how Highly able and gifted children can be supported in mainstream education. They come under ASN category as per policy but often get overlooked due to lack of resources or most resources directed towards children on the other end of the spectrum with learning difficulties.’

‘Gifted and highly able learners are always an after thought when it comes to additional needs. If they don't receive appropriate support and challenge they can easily disengage from learning as much as children with needs that are more typically thought of under the asn umbrella. When it comes to support in school, they are very much bottom of the list which will only get worse with increasing budget constraints.’

‘The detrimental impact of mainstream schooling on children with ASN is hugely significant, mentally and emotionally. The impact upon families is considerable to the point of exhaustion due to the constant uphill battle to get at times even the basics of supports despite providing as much information as possible to the school. They expect the children to just get on with it and fail to understand the extremely difficult issues they experience and there is little to no inclusivity only segregation, isolation, solitude and loneliness to the point of believing they are they are the problem. Being a member of a number of support groups for parents bullying is a major factor towards our children, deliberate discrimination and out casting’

Sample of Parent's Comments.

'Some of the difficulties posed in our situation are school level and some are council level. Our local authority here are unsympathetic to change and data driven rather than being more holistic. After recent poor inspection results at our school they are receiving a cash injection to address challenges, however in this scenario small group learning is at risk of being removed to prioritise attendance and support in mainstream classes. This is about attainment rather than inclusion and will make school inaccessible for my child who needs a small group setting. A range of options is needed to suit all learners.'

'My general concern with regards to additional support learning in schools is that there isn't more alarm at the rapidly increasing rates of children that it is said require additional support. Current trends are being noted, but the only response is that more funding, training and resourcing is required. My main concern is that it is not being questioned why exactly are rates for additional support increasing so dramatically? If current trends continue, soon half of all children in Scottish schools will be identified as having some additional support requirement. This is clearly an unsustainable trend. How exactly are such enormous figures possible? What analysis is being done to understand the causes of this rise? To what extent are parents, teachers and possibly medical professionals over-prescribing the category of additional support? What effects did COVID lockdowns have on these numbers? Are they likely to decrease? Are the categories themselves of ASN flawed, such that almost a majority of children might soon be identified as having such? These to me would be the pertinent questions to address first, before rushing headlong into funding and resourcing increased ASN support.'

'Mainstream attempted to put in many supports for my neurodiverse foster child. However, despite their very best efforts, mainstream education was damaging to this child. Their resultant distressed behaviour was witnessed by many adults and children in our relatively small community, which damaged his social reputation and had him labelled as "bad" at only 7 years of age. I removed him from mainstream, and his local authority now fully fund a place at a small independent school, where he is given nurturing support, and many opportunities to shine. The curriculum includes some forest school, art, music and activities such as water sports, mountain biking & even skiing. My foster son is now thriving, his future prospects are so much brighter, but more importantly, he doesn't believe he is bad, or stupid anymore, which he did in mainstream.'

Sample of Parent's Comments.

'Our council has just closed our schools nursery class in the face of huge opposition from the local community. The small nursery with access to additional support and a seamless transition into primary was a huge benefit to my grandson in his learning journey and the move to integrate larger nurseries with no connection to the school family will be devastating for those children coming up behind him. You also spoke of extracurricular activities but in my experience there are none.'

'I'm actually so angry that in 20 years that no one researched or recorded the data required to assess service delivery. It's clear that the " victims" of the presumption of mainstream are simply not important to the Scottish Government or local authorities. It's a basic human right to receive an education and many children with asn simply aren't receiving one. It is however a false economy not to provide appropriate educational support as the current practices are increasing health inequalities for disabled children and children with asn. Life expectancy is lower for people with learning disabilities. 26% of autistic children are unhappy in school. Leading to the well documented poor health outcomes for autistic adults. As an ex-learning disability nurse, I am horrified at the increased needs that the presumption of mainstream is creating unchecked and unchallenged creating so much more incessant suffering for children and young people with additional support needs. The institutions like Lennox castle may be closed but with poor policy and practices at local level you might as well of kept them open as your creating new ways to disable an already vulnerable population. With the amount of evidence that has been presenting to the Government the fact they fail to acknowledge this, and act appropriately is truly shocking. With the increasing numbers of children requiring additional support and the woefully lacking data required to plan appropriately their will be more excluded children to follow.'

'A curriculum that is exceptionally wide fails all children, but particularly those with additional needs. For those struggling with literacy, provide more support in literacy. For those who lack basic numeracy, provide more numeracy. It should be the priority for all schools to ensure children leave education with basic life skills. In some schools the number of interventions (e.g. therapy dogs etc) distracts from proper teaching and fails those who struggle the most. This decade has seen the biggest decline in education standards in Scotland for all children, however the impact is felt most by those with additional needs.'

Sample of Parent's Comments.

'I feel that a national online teaching platform (like e-sgoil) for secondary in particular would be very helpful for many neurodiverse learners or those experiencing high levels of anxiety. Commercial/Independent Schools are starting to provide these and it should be a focus to allow students of all financial backgrounds to access school this way if necessary - not just those who can afford it. Equally more unusual subjects (Classics, Latin, Languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Scots Language, Film) should be available online for students when they are not offered in their current school and these opened up as an option on the timetable with a teacher just facilitating and supervising while students work online.'

'The special schools my children attend are wonderful, but the lack of staff due to vacancies not being filled and sickness not being covered due to lack of supply staff has had a significant impact on the opportunities my child is offered. The school are currently looking at a part time school timetable for the ASN setting as they do not have enough staff currently to have all the children in at the same time'

'Many schools and teachers are still way out of touch with ASN you either get a teacher that has a small understanding or none at all. Experience is poor and there is an element of ignorance. My child has more than 5 neurodiverse in his class in p1 and They only have the teacher who can't humanly possibly see to all of their needs in addition to the full class. Only the most severely disabled get allocated an ASN support teacher this is shocking because not all disability challenges are visible....my child has high intelligence and would benefit and flourish from 121 ASN support for motivation challenges and anxiety however as he has no academic issue he is left with no support and so achieving less. ASN staff are like finding hens teeth this shouldn't be the case in today's world. (Highschool and primary school examples are the same as I have 1 child in each both experiencing the same) . More ASNs are needed far far more because more children are going into mainstream due to lack of facilities in special schools plus the recognition that Autism/Dyslexia/Adhd does not always impact academically however there are social and anxiety and easy distractibility and these children also need and are entitled to support just as much as a nonverbal child for example, this is often overlooked. Asn staff are needed more in the playground and at breakables and lunchtimes too a time when a high majority of asn children require social support and I have never seen this in any school...so these children walk around alone unsupported or are excluded/bullied when an ASN could support socially the kids to play together or have groups etc.'

Sample of Parent's Comments.

'The lack of support for the wide range of children with additional support needs doesn't just affect children with asn, it affects the whole class. While staff are reactive to dealing with 'issues' children are not being taught, while classrooms are being evacuated due to a very upset child, the class are not learning. Children with addition support needs can not be expected to fit in to mainstream with no support. I very much agree with the presumption of mainstream but ONLY with enough staff who are appropriately trained. The more time that senior management are responding to incidents the less time they have to do their roles and ensure that schools are run well. We are firefighting at the moment and children are getting hurt, and going without teaching and support'

'...Inclusion, as currently defined and implemented, is often conflated with placement. But true inclusion is not simply about presence — it is about belonging, understanding, and support. Being physically present in a mainstream classroom, without the tailored tools to thrive, can be more isolating than being elsewhere. Inclusion without support is not inclusion; it is abandonment in plain sight.

As a parent of a child with complex additional support needs, I have seen firsthand how the system, despite its intent, struggles to individualise support in a scalable, sustainable way. Children are not data points — they are complex, adaptive individuals. The system, by contrast, often operates with fixed categories and inflexible thresholds...

..If we return to first principles — to the actual purpose of education — we see that it is not to make all children the same, but to help each child become more fully themselves. That requires not just policy reform, but a cultural reset, underpinned by early investment, specialist input, and deep respect for difference.

The current system too often asks children to change in order to fit into schools. True inclusion will ask how schools must change to fit children.

Scotland has the legislative and moral foundations in place. What is needed now is action that aligns capacity with commitment, and an unflinching willingness to listen — deeply and consistently — to those who live the reality every day.'

Online Discussions

Summary from Group 1

Parents shared several consistent concerns and experiences regarding their children's experience in school. Key points were:

- **Not feeling listened to:** Parents frequently reported that they do not feel listed to by school staff, including teachers and headteachers, or by other professionals. They feel a sense of being blamed for their child's 'bad' behaviour or their poor wellbeing. One parent said '*We're really willing to do what we can to help not just our kids but other kids in similar situations in the classroom. That's what really hurts when teachers don't listen to you.*'
- **Impact of School Environment:** All parents mentioned that the school environment has put a lot of stress on their child, resulting in anxiety and issues outside of school, affecting both physical and mental wellbeing. These issues are felt at home, where children are experiencing *'chronic diarrhoea and sleep issues'* and '*cries every morning'.* Another shared '*He's only 8 years old and he's worried he's going to be sad for the rest of his life.'* Parents spoke of how their children are forced to mask their distress in school, only to *'get stressed and aggressive at home.'* Some, described as *'quiet in school and ignored as a result of not making problems'* are struggling silently. One child, now in secondary, was *'scared to ask for help'* and is still too anxious to attend on some days.
- **Smaller Class Environment:** Many mentioned their child would be happier in a smaller class environment, where teachers could have more time to support each pupil. This was seen as a challenge in mainstream schools due to larger class sizes and lack of resources. As one parent put it: *'There isn't the capacity to magnify and focus on one individual.'* Parents whose children attend special schooling felt that this has had a positive impact on their child.
- **Training and Understanding:** Parents felt that training and resources are inadequate, and that teachers did not fully understand the needs of their children. It was noted that teachers are not adapting their teaching style for neurodiverse pupils. Even where advanced training has taken place, parents fell their knowledge and lived experience are dismissed. *'They've done the advanced autism training, so they think they know better than you…No one knows their child better than their parents!'*
- **Understanding of neurodiversity:** Some comments highlighted that the understanding of ASD and ADHD has changed in recent years, but that older teachers are not taking this on.
- **Need for whole school training:** There was a consensus that training was needed across the school, including both teaching staff and nonteaching staff, as children want to attend breakfast club or other activities but will not be understood by these running these.

Summary from Group 2

Parents described small improvements over time but said these fall far short of what's needed.

- **ASL Provision and System Challenges:** One parent shared that while there is *'more understanding of ASN under an umbrella of what that could be, for ASD & PDA*,' change is still inadequate: *'There's a tsunami coming that the Scottish Government has not seen.'* Another added, '*The foundations have to be more permanent and solid than the small changes.'* The presumption of mainstreaming was widely criticised. '*Perhaps in 5–10 years there will be the presumption of ASL rather than the assumption of mainstreaming,'* said one parent, '*but in the meantime it's not working well enough.'* Others described reduced hours, unmet needs, and stressed families: *'The children and the families are paying the price of that.'*
- **Impact of budget constraints:** Cuts to teachers and librarians were felt acutely: '*Trusted adults are too busy,'* and '*library seen as a safe space.'* Parents said those who *'don't fit the criteria'* for ASN bases are '*left to float along in the middle.'* One parent said, *'They're being denied a basic education and it's the Scottish Government that has to take this on.'* Several spoke of high ASN rates in schools, but poor support: '*School is 40% ASN and the system is not working for them.'* Another said, *'No opportunity to catch them up … fighting for basic rights.'*
- **Inclusion:** Parents called for models that bring children together. One said, '*If we don't have children growing up together recognising and valuing difference, the children who grow up to be social workers and politicians of the future won't have that experience.'* Being bussed long distances to specialist schools was described as isolating. A more inclusive example was praised, where ASN and mainstream schools share a campus: *'Children are mixing in playground, dinner hall … this should be the way forward.'* Others urged investment in existing schools*: 'Why are we not investing in current staff and infrastructure?'*
- **Parent Communication:** Coproduction with parents was seen as essential: *'Behaviour is a form of communication – and who knows their communication better than the parent?'*
- **Family Impact and Mental Health:** Parents described severe impacts on mental health, employment and wellbeing. One said, *'Lost job and home due to no alternative provision.'* Another described a daughter in *'year 3 of one hour a week'* at school, *with 'massive impact on friendships and social supports.'* School refusal and burnout were common*: 'Children should not be suicidal because they can't access help.'* Parents were often left without guidance: *'No-one tells you where to go or how to help.'*
- **Positive about change:** Parents spoke of what they would change with a 'magic wand': '*Greater understanding and training,' 'a more inclusive and welcoming environment,'* and better access to support. They called for clarity in policy: *'The presumption for mainstreaming and the ASL Act conflict with each other.'*

One parent summarised: *'Include parents, not just as a tick box, but as a real support.'*

Summary from Group 3

Parents described exclusion, barriers, and emotional distress.

- **Experiences of bullying and exclusion:** Parents shared accounts of bullying and exclusion, by peers and the system itself. One said, *"Inclusive" grinds on me, as far as I'm concerned there is no inclusion for neurodivergent children, only exclusion or isolation'.* A parent told us her child was denied PE due to lack of adjustments; another spent two and a half years isolated with adults in an old ASN unit. One parent stated, 'Everything is an uphill battle, nothing is volunteered.'

- **Feeling shut out by professionals:** Some parents mentioned feeling dismissed, blamed, and even bullied by professionals. One said, 'It's a life long fight where you become a toxic parent.' A parent pursuing legal action said, "The council was reported to Scottish Ministers for unlawful exclusion."

- **Mental Health Impacts:** One girls became suicidal in P7 after repeated school trauma; another boy was labelled *"dangerous"* and excluded after an epilepsy diagnosis. *'The stress is terrible.'* one parent added that they may have to quit work. Parents in this group mentioned long waits from CAMHS. *'Drug and alcohol usage is higher later in life due to poor ASN support'* warned one parent.

- **Lack of pathways:** There was a consensus that schools lacked the "stepping stones" for return after absence, and that mainstream is not suitable for all. Online platforms like E-Sgoil were helpful, but hard to access.

- **Support for teachers:** Parents acknowledged a few dedicated staff but said, *'Teachers are under such stress with no resources, often leaving the sector.'* One said, *'It's traumatic for staff too.'*

- **Inequality:** Support was described as inaccessible. *'Some parents aren't interested to pursue it…those children are left to it and missed'* Another said, *'We can speak up for ourselves – not every parent can.'* Parents reported fighting for placements, '*Is this what it takes, to shout the loudest?' 'Inclusivity is just a buzzword….there is no inclusivity, only isolation, segregation and discrimination.'*

- **Positive change:** One parent shared with others that through persistent pressure, they succeeded to force the council to reinstate her son. *'He is now a much less distressed young man.'*

Summary from Group 4

Smaller focus group size so discussion was between two parents with different aged children who shared their ongoing struggle to access tailored support.

- **Accessing tailored support:** Both parents reflected on battles to secure appropriate support during primary school. 'Support can only be described as a constant battle.' The broad-brush approach to ASN was a barrier. One parent described engaging in professional study to gain knowledge for when dealing with services.

- **Lack of Provision for non-attenders:** Both parents expressed concern over the lack of alternative learning environments for children who cannot attend school. One part described their teenager self-teaching Nat 5's due to lack of online alternatives. Another questioned, *'During COVID everything went online – why can't there be investment for those who cannot be in school'*

- **Online and alternative learning:** It was agreed that online learning was beneficial to some, but not all and should not be the only alternative available. Several resources were discussed. Same parent spoke of it being seen as acceptable that an alternative to PE was not presented, and that it contradicted the school's own emphasis on physical education – feeling that the school is happier to exclude than to find workarounds. Again, masking in school was discussed, and the detrimental impact of this on the child's wellbeing outside of school

- **Inclusion:** Consensus in this group that the education should fit the child, rather than the other way round. Inclusion was mentioned as being a term used often but not enacted, and that lived experience understanding was crucial to improving the education system for children with ASN.

- **Lived experience:** Must be used to inform. One parent said, 'There are so many families who don't know they can advocate or aren't able to.' This group also discussed the Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence (LDAN Bill) now postponed until 2026, and emphasised the need for meaning lived experiences engagement in shaping policy going forward.

Thank You

A heartfelt thank you to all the Assembly parents and carers who so generously shared their personal experiences. Your stories bring to light the realities families face and the strength it takes to advocate for your children.

We deeply appreciate your contribution.

SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY OF PARENTS & CARERS

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