



School Leaders Scotland

ASN Provision

Presumption of mainstream, parental choice and education closer to home are three core ideas which continue to have an impact on schools across Scotland. School Leaders Scotland is committed to Inclusion and as an Association we strongly believe that young people should be taught within mainstream education where this will have a positive impact on them and their families. In response to a survey on Workload SLS members stated clearly that the one thing which would make their role much more manageable was proper support for Inclusion and/or adequate ASN provision. The survey also showed the second most crucial area that SLS members would want to change about their job was the support for ASN/distressed pupils. (See Appendix A) With this in mind, and to gain a clearer picture of how Additional Support Needs provision is working across Scotland, we contacted all 32 Scottish Local Authorities with a Freedom of Information request and sent a survey out to all SLS members.

Freedom of Information Request

Within the FOI to Local Authorities, we had the following requests:

- 1) Number of places for children and young people currently being supported in specialised provision in Secondary school (by year group)
- 2) Number of applications for these places over the past 3 years for entry into a placement in S1
- 3) Number of successful applications from mainstream Primary schools for specialised provision in S1 over the past 3 years.

By specialised provision we mean:

specialised provision outside of mainstream school or specialised provision within a mainstream, for example: LCSC (Language and Communication Support Centre), standalone and colocated provisions (both would come under ASL schools), Home Base in schools, etc. including any ASN provision.

We received data from all 32 Local Authorities which gave us the following information:

There is roughly the same amount of young people in specialised provision S1-S4 (around about 1600 places each year). Looking across the years the same number of places is allocated year on year; however, this takes place at the same time as the overall number of applications from Mainstream Primary is sharply increasing - from around 1000 applications to over 1300. This means that we are increasingly seeing young people in mainstream provision for whom an application has been made towards specialised provision and who have been unsuccessful. It is important to note that, in most instances, for an application to be made there has been a "Team around the Child" (or other local equivalent) where a mixture of Education colleagues (HT, DHT for example), Educational Psychologist, potentially a range of Health professionals, as well as the young person's family have discussed the young person and believe that a specialised provision would be beneficial. This discussion (at the end of a range of interventions and supports already being tried) would lead to a decision to apply for a specialist provision, or not.

When comparing the number of applications against the successful applications from a mainstream primary, we see the reality of the situation. Over the past 3 years (22-23, 23-24, 24-25) the percentage of successful applications (as a percentage of overall applications) has fallen from 51% in 22-23 to 33% in 24-25. (See Appendix B)

SLS Member Survey

Given this data, gaining an insight into the real impact within mainstream Secondary schools was important. School Leaders Scotland surveyed the membership and received 181 responses covering all Local Authorities; most respondents were in Senior Leadership. (see Appendix C)

The information gathered showed a clear picture, where 99% of respondents had seen an increase in young people within their schools with Additional Support Needs, and with 96% saying that there had been an increase in the level of dysregulation from young people.

This has happened at the same time as the thresholds for being allocated a place have increased. 82% of respondents said that it had become much harder for a young person to be allocated a place in specialised provision, and more than two thirds of applications placed by secondary schools were unsuccessful. Again, as previously stated, the application is made with parental consent and generally when extra supports in mainstream have already been exhausted.

The impact in schools of the increasing level of dysregulation is clear. Only 1 person said there had been no negative impact while no one said the impact had been positive. Most respondents said there had been an increase in staff stress, further dysregulation across the school and that there had been an impact on both middle leaders and the SLT, with 80% saying that their workload had greatly increased due to the growing demands of supporting additional support needs.

There is a further impact on absenteeism in staff and teachers are feeling that planning around young people with ASN is becoming unmanageable, especially when some schools have over 50% of their young people with ASN. There are fewer supports in schools due to reduced school budgets overall. A reduction in support staff, along with other agencies outside of Education being unable to put supports in place for young people as their thresholds have also increased, has helped create an environment where teachers feel they are not able to support young people in the way in which they want. There is a clear desire from classroom teachers and SLT to support all young people and to change their practice to be able to create more inclusive classrooms.

Schools are trying to be as innovative as possible to help create solutions and ensure that all young people are able to access the best education. Bespoke timetables, the use of Pupil Equity Funding to enable targeted support, changes to curriculum were all mentioned as being used by almost all respondents. Schools are also thinking outside the box, trying to support young people and their families in the community, by working with parents and families and by pulling resources.

The impact of this does appear to very dependent on the young person and their families. The success of interventions shows clearly that a “one-size-fits-all” approach is not as successful, leading to schools trying a range of interventions in an attempt to find the one that has the most impact for each individual young person. Where this happens, the impact can be very positive with calmer schools, better engagement and with young people being able to attain more qualifications than they had previously been predicted to achieve. These interventions however all come at a cost, with some of the most successful interventions being the ones which are less sustainable due to them requiring more intensive staffing or more resources.

Families also find the whole process difficult; from the beginning when they are deciding if they wish to go towards a specialised provision, to waiting for an outcome and then either having to come to terms with being unsuccessful or having to start the transition to the specialised provision. Within mainstream schools, families can struggle with wanting the correct support for their young person and can have unrealistic expectations or be looking for specific supports which may not be the best fit for their child's needs. This continues to create conflict with schools who have no control on the provision available and are already doing their best to ensure all young people get the education they need and aim to ensure that supports are appropriate to the needs of the young person, not to a diagnosis.

Future Considerations

Secondary Schools are struggling under the burdens of planning. To be able to reduce the impact on staff, time needs to be taken to look at what is on offer to all pupils, in every classroom. Can schools become even more communication friendly? Can the basic level of supports in classrooms across the country take in more cognisance of the increasing neurodivergence seen in our pupils? The ultimate aim would be to support more young people without having to provide extra resources in terms of staffing and without having to do additional planning as we are able to meet their needs within their basic classroom offering.

Can all teachers ensure that the differentiation in place is effective in ensuring there is appropriate pace and challenge for all learners? Secondary schools may also need to look to primary school practice, as more often young people are needing the type of support more commonly possible within that sector. For this to work, time needs to be taken to train staff and enhance provision, ensure appropriate supports are in place in every classroom and for every young person who requires those supports; the more schools have budgetary constraints, the harder this will be. There also needs to be more support in Initial Teacher Education to help support new staff to understand the needs of young people and how we can effectively plan, differentiate and assess the wider range of needs and abilities coming into secondary schools across Scotland.

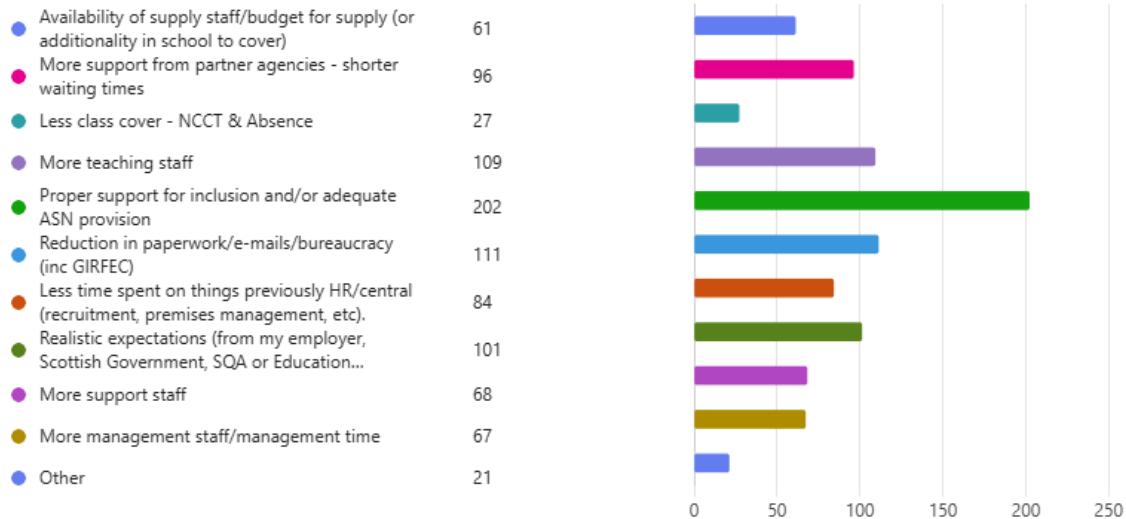
Looking to the future, there needs to be a review of what presumption of mainstream means and ensure consistency of approach across Scotland. There is no clear strategy across all 32 Scottish Local Authorities, meaning where you stay will have an impact on the type and level of support that is available. As the level of dysregulation in our mainstream schools increases at the same time as thresholds for specialised provision also increases, there needs to be a conversation around whether this is indeed Inclusion in practice and if these decisions mean we are actually getting it right for every child. If this is the case, then we need to ensure that schools are empowered, and have the required budget, to be able to put the right strategies in place. If we can get the correct type of support to young people, we will see a decrease in dysregulation and ensure more positive outcomes for all learners. There is a desire from educators to make a difference, but there needs to be the proper and correct support for this to happen.

Graham Hutton
General Secretary
August 2025

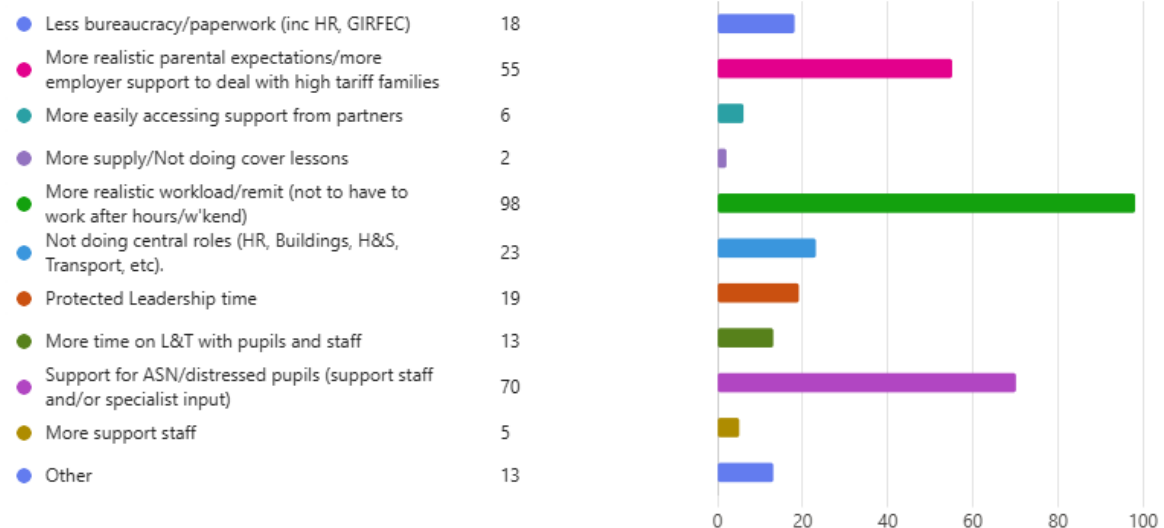
Appendix A

SLS Workload Survey

What would make your role more manageable?

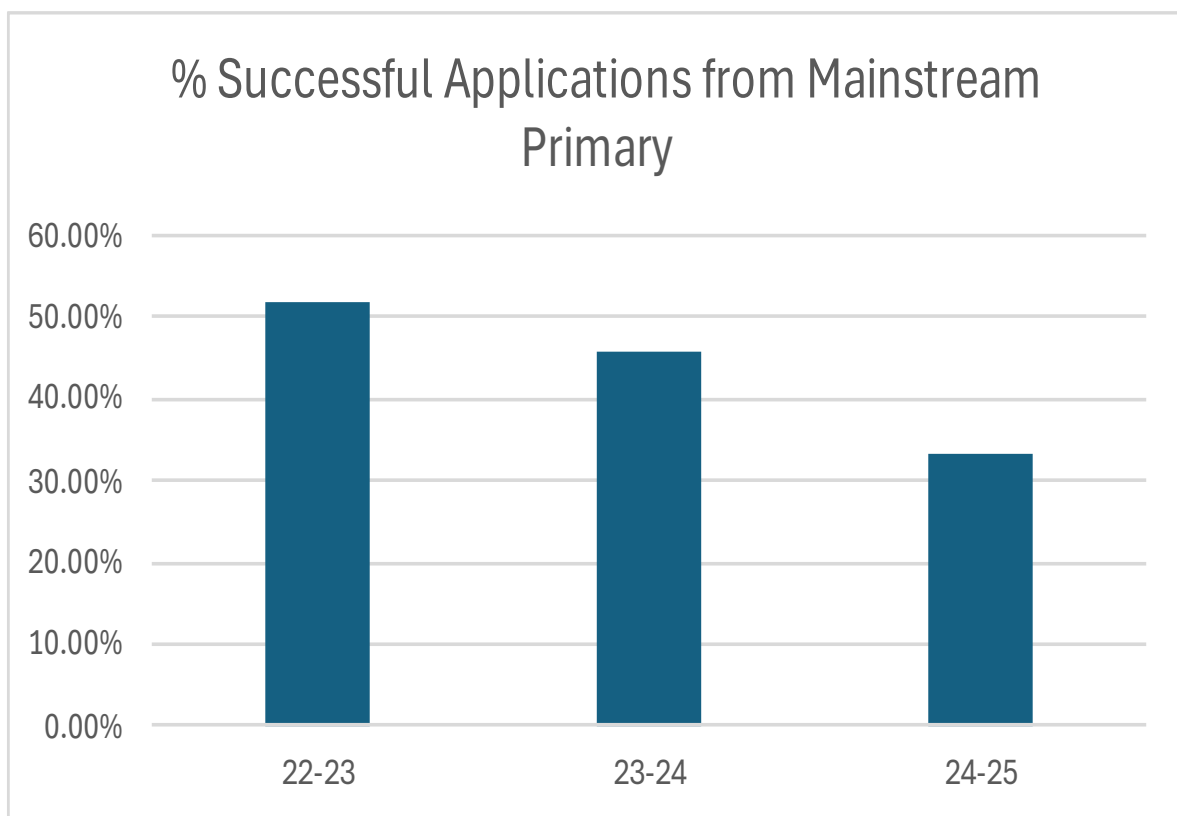
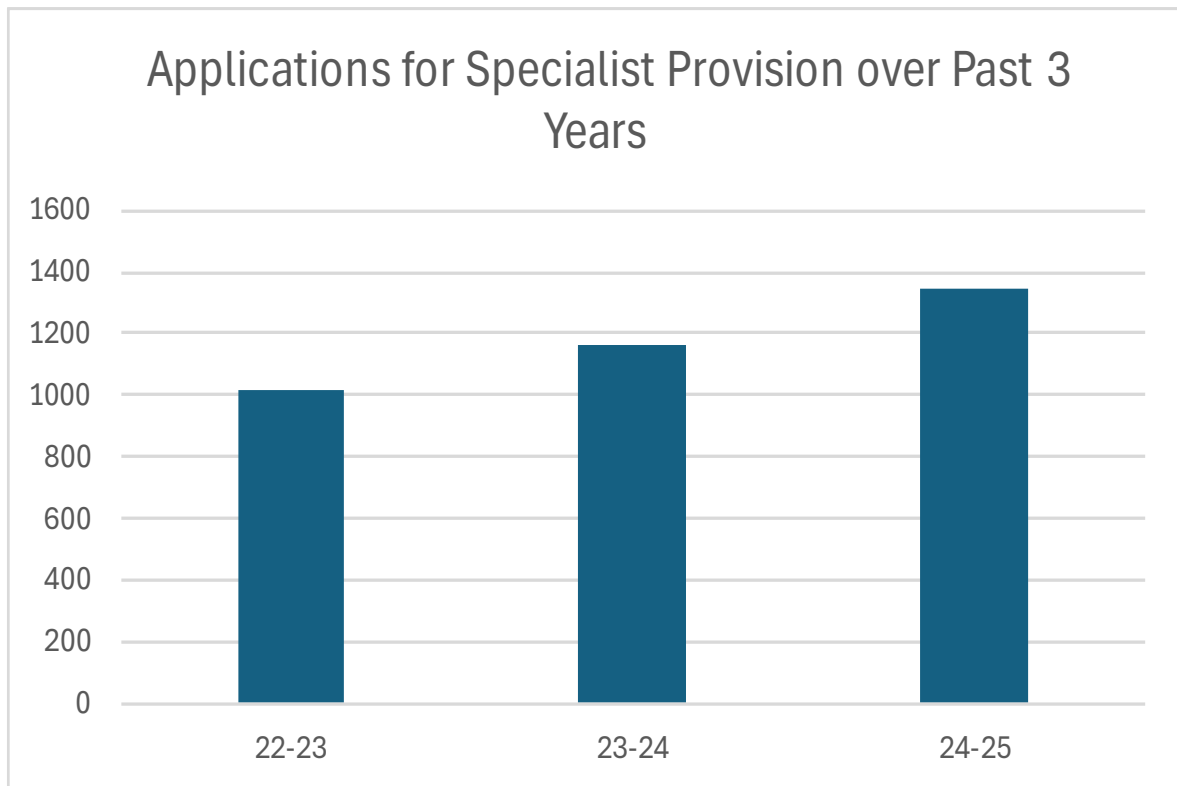


If you could change **ONE** thing about your job, what would it be?



Appendix B

Freedom of Information



Appendix C

SLS Additional Support Needs Survey

3) Have you noticed an increase of young people with Additional Support Needs within you school

Yes: 180

No: 1



4) Have you noticed an increase in the level of dysregulation in pupils in your school

Yes: 175

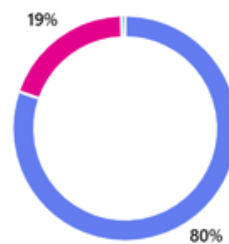
No: 7



9.

Has there been a change to your workload, or the workload of staff within your school surrounding additional support needs?

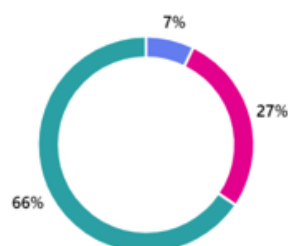
Greatly increased workload	147
Increased workload	35
Same workload	1
Decreased workload	0
Greatly decreased workload	0



10.

Within your council has there been a change to level of additional support available within mainstream education (for example the number of additional support needs assistants)

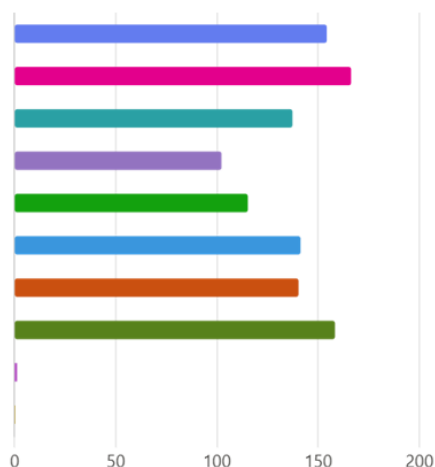
Increased level of support	13
Same level of support	49
Decreased level of support	118



11.

What has been the negative impact to changes to level of support? Select all that apply

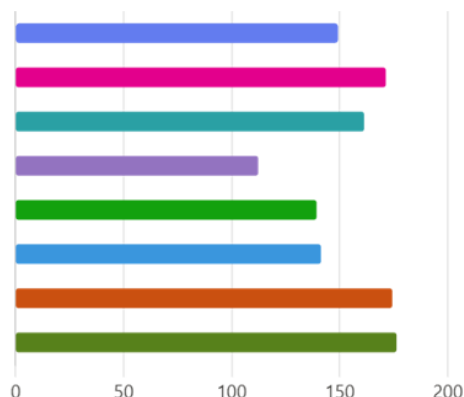
More dysregulation	154
Increase in staff stress	166
Increase in number of incidents	137
Increase in severity of incidents	102
Overall behaviour across school more challenging	115
Impact on PT/FH time dealing with incidents	141
Impact on PTPS time with increased meetings with pupils and/or parents	140
Impact on SLT time dealing with incidents	158
No negative impact	1
Impact has been positive	0



13.

Have you tried any of the following strategies to support these changes? Tick all that apply

Small class for targeted pupils	149
Different curriculum offering for specific young people	171
Use of PEF funding to target support	161
Use of additional teaching staff	112
Change to use of support staff	139
Use of 3rd sector interventions	141
Bespoke timetables	174
Part time timetables	176



14.

Have these strategies had a positive impact

For almost all	7
For most	32
For the majority	69
For less than half	49
For few	24

