

From: [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA] <[REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA]@parliament.uk>

Sent: 20 January 2023 13:46

To: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>

Subject: Letter from John Stevenson MP

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find attached a letter from John Stevenson MP to Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP.

Best wishes,

[REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA]

[REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA]

The Office of John Stevenson MP for Carlisle

[REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA]

[REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA]

House of Commons, Westminster, London, SW1A 0AA

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Sent via email to: CabSecES@gov.scot

Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Our Ref: JO21550

20 January 2023

Dear Shirley-Anne

RE: [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA]

I am writing on behalf of my constituent, [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA], with regards to the issues her [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] faced in school, while studying in Scotland. My constituent's [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA], who is now 14, has autism and dyslexia. [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] was unable to read, due to [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] not receiving any additional support for [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] learning difficulties.

[REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] has therefore recently decided to move to [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA], in the hope that her [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] will be happier in the education system here. This is following her [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] and

[REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] ending up being [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] for [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA], prior to the family deciding to move to England.

Although my constituent's [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] is no longer studying in Scotland, she is still extremely concerned about the falling literacy rates. [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] states that not all councils in Scotland are following the education guidance from the Scottish Government, particularly with regards to training teaching staff to support pupils with learning difficulties and that this may be the cause of many children not being able to read.

According to [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] there is more of a holistic approach in Scotland, whereas she states that in England there is more training available to staff, who wish to specialise in supporting pupils with ADHD, dyslexia or autism.

Following the surgery appointment [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] attended at my office, I contacted the Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Oliver Mundell MSP on her behalf. I understand that he has raised [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] case with the Scottish Government and he has lodged a number of parliamentary questions on her behalf.

However, following the advice of David Duguid MP, [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] has since contacted me to ask that I forward a document on to you directly, with regards to the Right to Read inquiry report. As such, please find a copy of this enclosed with my letter. I would be grateful if you could inform my constituent as to whether you can assist her any further with her research.

Many thanks in advance for your response.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

John Stevenson MP

Right to Read Inquiry for Scotland

[REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA]

History

In August 2012 I relocated to [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA], with my husband and [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] so that they could start school in August 2013. I mistakenly held the belief that the Scottish education system was superior to the system in England.

After starting school, it was clear that my [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] was not developing reading skills as easily as [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] and after a 2-year battle with the school [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] was eventually identified as having dyslexia. The [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] has a Dyslexia Friendly accreditation scheme for their schools. At the end of Primary 3 we moved our [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] from a silver to gold Dyslexia Friendly school. I did not know at the time that Scotland does not have an accurate definition of dyslexia or has trained their educational psychologists/teachers on effective evidence-based assessment/teaching practices that enables children with dyslexia to learn how to read. [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA]

From May 2018 onwards I have researched the Science of Reading, bought systematic synthetic phonics programmes recommended by the Department of Education in England and have taught my severely dyslexic [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] how to read.

I am endeavouring to find a way to rescue Scottish children who are trapped in a dysfunctional education system that is failing to teach dyslexic and disadvantaged children how to read. Since devolution Scotland and England have diverged in their approach to the teaching of reading and identifying children with dyslexia. I believe that Scotland is breaking the Equality Act by failing to ensure that children with additional support needs learn how to read.

In 2018, I took [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] to the [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] claiming that they used discriminatory practices, failure to identify dyslexia early and failing to provide synthetic phonics instruction. I had 3 International experts: Prof [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA], Dr [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] and Mrs [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] (recommended by Sir [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA]). [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] instructed 'Prof' [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] a self-declared expert in literacy and dyslexia, he has never held a Professorial chair or had any research published on dyslexia or phonics instruction. In August 2020, the [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] dismissed the evidence from all my experts, accepted a self-declared Scottish experts' opinion and did not uphold my claims. I am convinced had I presented the same evidence at an English Tribunal my claim would have been upheld.

Professor Linda Siegel was instructed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission to be an expert for their Right to Read Inquiry. In March 2022, the Inquiry published their report [Right to Read inquiry report | Ontario Human Rights Commission \(ohrc.on.ca\)](#) All the recommendations are applicable to Scotland, but not England as the educational changes applied in England are based on the Science of Reading research. However, in England children with dyslexia are not getting the remediation required due to resourcing within local authorities.

I have exhausted all avenues within Scotland to highlight what has happened to my [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] within [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] (see summary table) and how [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] experience is typical for children struggling to learn how to read across the whole of Scotland.

Learning to read is a human right, poor literacy skills are linked to increased risk of suicide, poor mental health, criminal behaviour, drug/substance abuse and lower life expectancy.

'When educators fail to educate themselves, it is only the children who suffer'

Summary of Differences between Scotland and England's Education Services

Scotland	England
<p>Scotland does not have a statutory education system</p> <p>Scottish Government produces guidance for education that 32 Councils should 'follow', but the Government has no power over the Councils</p>	<p>England has a statutory education system managed by the Department for Education (DfE)</p>
<p>1997-2002 Scottish Office spent £60 million on Council early literacy projects to improve literacy and close attainment gap. Three main Council projects were: Clackmannanshire, West Dunbartonshire and North Lanarkshire</p> <p>2000 – A research evidence based synthetic phonics literacy programme developed by Prof Rhona Johnston and Dr Joyce Watson at St Andrews University and tested in Clackmannanshire schools was published for other Councils/schools to use in Scotland</p>	<p>1990's -2005 several initiatives related to improved reading standards</p>
<p>2002 - Scottish Government accept the Currie report that confirms educational psychologists are to adopt the Social Model of disability and will no longer assess children for the genetically acquired neurodevelopmental learning disorders (dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia or ADHD) using scientific evidence based cognitive assessments.</p> <p>'In their practice, educational psychologists have moved away from a medical model, which perceived the problem to be inherent in the child, thereby requiring assessment, diagnosis and treatment, towards a model which perceives difficulties to arise from the interaction of children with their environment, curriculum, teachers and peers'.</p> <p>2002-2022 – Scotland had only 2 Universities training Educational Psychologists, Strathclyde and Dundee but last year Strathclyde stopped offering their course. Educational psychologists</p>	<p>2005 – Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) were identified: dyslexia, dyscalculia, developmental co-ordination disorder (component of dysgraphia) and ADHD and a set of evidenced based standardised set of assessments were developed.</p> <p>A SpLD Standards Committee (SASC) was set up that oversees the implementation. SASC aims to support and advance standards in SpLD assessment, training and practice and encourage improvements in best practice in the assessment of specific learning difficulties. The SpLD Assessment Practising Certificate underpins these aims. SASC has a responsibility for providing guidance on training and implementation of standards and for overseeing and approving processes of awarding SpLD Assessment Practising Certificates. SASC - What is SASC</p>

<p>have not been trained in the equivalent English SpLD assessment practices for the past 17 years</p> <p>Educational Psychologists train Scottish teachers on the Social Model (non-scientific) of disability. So now nearly 2 generations of Scottish children have not had their neurodevelopmental conditions identified early and remediated.</p>	<p>Educational psychologists and specialist teachers can undertake SpLD assessments.</p> <p>This means that children are assessed for the 4 main neurodevelopmental conditions, that impact the ability to learn reading/writing/maths in one assessment.</p>
<p>2002-2004 The Curriculum for Excellence is introduced, and the Additional Support for Learning Act is published.</p> <p>The Scottish education system is 'needs' led, and a child does not need a diagnosis before they receive 'support'. However, no-one is trained on identifying the root cause of the 'need' and so then the correct 'support' (or teaching method) can't be determined</p>	
<p>2006 – In Scotland the reaction to the Rose report was not positive. Jack McConnell said that Councils/schools would share phonics teaching through best practice. A lecturer at Strathclyde, Sue Ellis, criticised the researched and basically said teachers should be left to use their own professional judgement</p>	<p>2005 – Government appointed Sir Jim Rose to conduct a review on the teaching of reading. Sir Jim Rose took evidence from many experts, including those from the USA and visited Clackmannanshire schools that were using the synthetic phonics programme developed by Johnston and Watson</p> <p>In his 2006 report, Sir Jim Rose recommended that every child in England is initially taught how to read by using systematic phonics and other literacy methods such as: whole language/multi-cueing/guessing were to be removed. The emphasis was on teaching children how to decode words and decodable books were to be used (not levelled readers)</p> <p>2007 – DfE published the Letters and Sounds framework document that details how phonics should be taught in all English schools</p>

2007 – Scotland made up their own definition of dyslexia that does not match the 2002 International Dyslexia Association (IDA) definition that specifically states that dyslexia is a language disorder (which includes poor phonemic awareness) that impacts the ability to learn how to decode words. Children who have dyslexia and those from disadvantaged background have poor phonemic awareness

2009 – Sir Jim Rose produced a second report: Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties. The report documents a definition of dyslexia that is closely aligned with the 2002 IDA definition

Key recommendations are that:

- Synthetic phonics instruction is used more intensively
- Educational psychologists and specialist teachers are trained on how to assess for SpLD's
- Accredited training to be provided for teachers to specialise in teaching children with dyslexia

2010 – Scotland sets up a committee to develop a Literacy Action Plan. The plan states that Councils will be encouraged to follow Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach, to use the CfE guidance etc.

The committee looked internally at councils to see what Scottish literacy programmes could be promoted. The 1997 North Lanarkshire project eventually produced a literacy programme called Active Literacy, that had been used by the Council since 2005. The design of the programme is whole language/multicueing/guessing with minimal phonics. The Active Literacy design had been basically banned in England because research has shown it is ineffective and not suitable for children with dyslexia or for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Around 25 out of 32 Councils have been using Active literacy products. South Ayrshire Council stopped using Jolly Phonics, that was a synthetic phonics programme, and replaced it with Active Literacy.

In 2013, Aberdeenshire Council paid over £420,000 to implement Active Literacy within all their primary schools

<p>2010-2017 – 16 Councils used the InCAS standardised assessment for literacy produced by the University of Durham (now Cambridge). Around 53% of Scottish pupil had their reading, comprehension, decoding and vocabulary age measured and assessed against their chronological age. This information was not provided to parents as the Scottish Government/Councils/teaching unions don't want league tables</p>	<p>2012 In England the phonics check was introduced to assess how well children were learning how to decode words. The phonics check includes nonsense words to test the child's decoding skills. Parents in England automatically receive the results of standardised assessments conducted on their children</p>
<p>2012 – Scottish Government launched the 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit' which is based on the Social Model of disability. Educational Psychologist are not responsible for identifying dyslexia. Teachers are expected to use a holistic approach and gather contextual evidence to determine if a child has dyslexia. No scientific evidence-based assessments are included in the approach. Teachers are not trained in the International Dyslexia Association definition of dyslexia and don't know simple standardised assessments that can identify poor phonemic awareness that prevent acquiring decoding skills.</p> <p>Children are not expected to be identified as having dyslexia until primary 3, so a 'watch them fail' model is being used.</p> <p>The Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit does not give guidance on the teaching methods required to ensure a child with poor phonemic awareness can learn how to decode words</p>	<p>2012 – The DfE published criteria on what needs to be present in a commercial systematic synthetic phonics programme and lists the names of programmes that they have determined meet those criteria. A key requirement is that children practice their decoding skill using decodable books.</p> <p>The Active Literacy programme promoted in Scotland could not be used in any English school</p> <p>Those teaching phonics are expected to be able to identify struggling children within weeks of them starting formal instruction</p>

2013 – The Scottish Government paid Prof Topping and Educational Psychologist £3,500 to develop the Primary One Literacy Assessment and Action Resource (POLAAR) that was intended to help Primary 1 teachers identify and assess children who are most at risk of developing later difficulties with reading and writing. The assessment is aligned with the CfE and there is no reference to children having access to decodable books.

The POLAAR assessment is promoted by the educational psychologist that is also the author of Active Literacy. POLAAR is not a standardised assessment of phonemic awareness, does not test a child's decoding skills and is basically not fit for purpose. [Primary One Literacy Assessment and Action Resource \(POLAAR\) | Learning resources | National Improvement Hub \(education.gov.scot\)](#)

2014 – The Scottish Government introduced the Children and Young People Act. The Act was, in part, to standardise the GIRFEC approach and provide statutory Child Plans. Therefore, the previous Child Plan process that was documented in the 2004 Additional Support Needs Act was modified by Councils to ensure that very few statutory Child Plans would be issued. The implementation of this Act has been deeply flawed and there is not a standard process/document being used across 32 Councils

Section 70 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 states a parent or others can make a complaint to Scottish Ministers if they think a Council has failed to carry out its duties under education law.

No Section 70 complaint has been upheld by the Scottish Government in over 11 years. Parents complain that the contents of the child plan don't address the child's actual needs and remediations needed to ensure they are able to attain academic success

2014 – England introduces the Education Health Care Plan. The same procedures and document templates are used by every local authority in England

Parents in England regularly have their complaints against Local Authorities upheld by their local Ombudsman and Tribunals

<p>2018 – The Scottish Government brought in the Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA). However, children are given a literacy level score of between 1-12 depending on how far they have progressed through the Curriculum for Excellence. The assessments are not based on the Science of Reading that was used by the University of Durham (they lost the bid to deliver the SNSA). Therefore, the Scottish Government doesn't know the reading ages of the pupils assessed. By Primary 7, too many pupils are leaving primary school functionally illiterate, and the Scottish Government doesn't know the number of pupils affected.</p> <p>Between 2006-2021, 25% of children without an additional support need leave school without obtaining a single higher grade. For children identified with dyslexia, 50% leave school without obtaining a single higher, this figure has not changed in 15 years</p>	<p>England collects and publishes extensive data on the progress of children's reading for every local authority and school</p>

2020 - The Scottish Government published the Making Sense report, that was the outcome of an independent review of education for children and young people with dyslexia.

This final report highlights the progress of the Making Sense: Dyslexia and Inclusive Practice Programme 2014 – 2019. The aim of the programme was to help schools and local authorities improve the outcomes for learners with dyslexia and develop sustainable inclusive practice within their school community.

The author of the report confirmed that there were no measurable outcomes for the project i.e., improvement in numbers of children identified with dyslexia, age identified, improvement in academic outcomes etc.

The project produced teacher training modules that were endorsed by the General Teaching Council for Scotland and Dyslexia Scotland. The training is based on Scotland's inaccurate definition of dyslexia, social/holistic model for identifying dyslexia and does not include the most effective teaching methods for teaching a child with poor phonemic awareness how to decode.

The training is not fit for purpose, but thousands of teachers have completed the training

2021 – The DfE work with Ofsted to produce guidance on phonics teaching. Ofsted has specific expectations of how successful phonics teaching is conducted in schools and will form judgements based on these expectations. Inspectors will consider whether a rigorous approach to the teaching of reading develops learners' confidence and enjoyment in reading.

Phonics books must be fully decodable and match progression exactly to pupils' phonic knowledge. This is required by Ofsted and the teaching sequence should show a cumulative progression in knowledge that is matched to the books children read, so that they are not expected to use other strategies to work out what unfamiliar words are.

Summary of Organisations Contacted with Concerns and their Responses

Organisation	Response
2016-06-15 [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA] Complaints	<p>The failures by the school staff have resulted in a detrimental effect to the child's emotional and mental wellbeing.</p> <p>I accept that this is your perception and this is most regrettable. However, in terms of health and wellbeing indicators there is no evidence to support this. The parental survey which you completed for [REDACTED] is based on the health and wellbeing indicators and you responded positively to most of these and 'don't know' for some of the other statements. You did disagree with the 'respected' section.</p> <p><i>This aspect of your complaint is therefore not upheld.</i></p>
2017-02-17 [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA] Councillor Education Portfolio	<p>I'm sorry you are not satisfied with the Leadership Panel but I do not accept your view that the Standards and Quality report is inaccurate. With regard to your final point on the harming of children in our schools, the protection and safeguarding of children is our most sacred duty as a Council and I do not accept that any child or young person has been deliberately harmed by a failure to follow the law. However, as you indicate, that may well be clarified should you choose to pursue a complaint to the Scottish Government.</p>
2017-02-23 SPSO	<p>7. Confirm that the complaint investigator for the council obtained the correct evidence required to determine if the parents complaint that there had been a detrimental impact on the child's emotional and mental well-being could be upheld or not;</p> <p>I have considered this point carefully. I am very mindful that you, as a parent, will best know your own son and that the conclusion reached by the Council caused you considerable distress. I have decided not to investigate this point further because I have concluded that the Council were in error in considering this issue to be a complaint in the first instance. This is because a complaint which can be considered through the complaints process should be about a service provided or not provided by the Council. In this instance you were complaining about the impact the Council's inaction has had on your [REDACTED]. While I would expect the Council to be mindful of that impact in conducting their investigation; that investigation should have been confined to the alleged failures and not the consequences of those failures which were ultimately not matters where they could reach a conclusion. I will be writing to the Council to advise them of my decision and will draw this particular point to their attention and remind them of the importance of properly establishing what complaints can and should be considered in their investigations.</p>
2017-06-09 GTCS	<p>GTCS cannot consider matters relating to competency from members of the public nor do we investigate concerns relating to a teacher's ability in terms of their performance in a promoted post. Our expectation would be that such matters were addressed at Local Authority level. It is extremely unfortunate that there does appear to have been errors in this case and a pupil has been adversely affected as a result. However, GTCS would expect that such errors have been addressed by the Local Authority and appropriate measures put in place to prevent a similar situation occurring again.</p>
2017-11-30 [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA] Quality Improvement Manager	<p>I can certainly appreciate from your e-mail that you feel [REDACTED] continues to be distressed following the delay in diagnosing [REDACTED] with dyslexia. In my response to this complaint, I refuted the allegation that flaws in school processes had a detrimental impact on [REDACTED] emotional wellbeing. I do not believe that further investigation would produce a different outcome from that of my previous response to you and, as this has already been addressed, I will not be re-opening this investigation. I acknowledge that [REDACTED] learning self-concept is not as positive as we all want it to be. We use health and wellbeing programmes of study in school to boost confidence, self-esteem and resilience. In addition, [REDACTED] benefits from targeted support through a growth mindset programme.</p>

<p>2017-12-08 Education Scotland Safeguarding Team</p>	<p>In response to your concerns, Education Scotland will follow our safeguarding procedures. This requires us to inform the Council of your concerns in order that they are fully aware of the information you have shared with us. Our Area Lead Officer has discussed the issues with the appropriate member of staff at the education authority.</p>
<p>2017-12-22 Scottish Government</p>	<p>Turning to the use of phonics in supporting learning. Curriculum for Excellence is a teacher-led approach to learning. Our curricular approach is deliberately non-prescriptive, recognising that children learn in different and unique ways and that it is for empowered practitioners and teachers to decide the teaching methods which are most appropriate for individual children. As such, prescribing any single approach to learning and teaching runs contrary to the principles and framework on which the curriculum is based.</p>
<p>2018-Jan-12 Head [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA] Councillors [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA]</p>	<p>Our ambition as a Council is to close the poverty attainment gap that exists between the richest and the poorest in our communities and in closing that attainment gap the needs of those with additional learning needs will be included in our considerations. In the discussions I have had with staff I am convinced that the Council has improved our systems to identify children whose learning might be affected by a range of factors that may affect their ability to learn. I am also confident that current approaches are consistent with our legal duties in relation to meeting children and young people's additional support needs.</p>
<p>2018-06-22 Scottish Government</p>	<p>Firstly, it may be helpful to clarify that teachers at your children's school are employees of the Council and therefore any issues you may have about their conduct or competence in carrying out their duties are, like complaints about any of their employees, for the Council to deal with in line with their locally agreed policies and procedures in this regard. I am sure you will appreciate, therefore that Scottish Ministers do not have any general powers that would allow them to intervene in a matter such as this.</p>
<p>2020-08-20 Education and Health FirstTier Tribunal</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Tribunal finds that the responsible body has not failed to comply with the duty to make reasonable adjustments in terms of section 21 of the Equality Act 2010. The claim is therefore dismissed. 2. The claim for indirect discrimination in terms of section 19 of the Equality Act 2010 is not well-founded and is dismissed. 3. The claim of discrimination arising from disability in terms of section 15 of the Equality Act 2010 is not well-founded and is dismissed. <p>The conclusion was that my expectations for my [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA] were too high, [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA] had the best 'support' Scotland had to offer and the reason [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA] could not read was because [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA] had dyslexia. The fact that [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA] was never taught using systematic synthetic phonics, an evidence based teaching method for a child with dyslexia/poor phonemic awareness was irrelevant. The full report can be found with this link.</p> <p>ASN D 20 08 2020.pdf (healthandeducationchamber.scot)</p>

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Foghlam agus Sgilean

Shirley-Anne Somerville BPA/MSP

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John Stevenson MP

[REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA@parliament.uk]

Our Reference: 202300340050

Your Reference: JO21550

3 February 2023

Dear John Stevenson MP,

Thank you for your letter of 20 January 2023 regarding your constituent's [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA] and the provision of support in schools for children and young people with additional support needs.

I am sorry to hear about the difficulties your constituent has encountered in trying to get the support necessary for her [REDACTED – PERSONAL DATA] while in Scotland. I am committed to ensuring that all children and young people get the support that they need to reach their full learning potential and welcome the opportunity to comment on the concerns raised by [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] about these important matters.

In your letter you refer to literacy rates. It may be helpful if I explain that literacy, alongside numeracy and health and wellbeing, are the three key focuses identified by Scottish Ministers for improvement in education. Literacy is foundational to every child's education, and reading is a fundamental skill for life as well as a source of lifelong pleasure for many. We fund the Scottish Book Trust to deliver a book gifting programme called Read, Write, Count to all Primary 2 and Primary 3 pupils. In addition, we deliver the First Minister's Reading Challenge in Scottish schools and have launched the Reading Schools Programme this year. Each of these initiatives aims to positively impact on pupils' attainment by building and embedding reading cultures in schools, at home and in the community to support and nurture a love of reading for pleasure at an appropriate level.

Scottish schools, supported by their local authority, plan the reading curriculum to meet the needs of the learners within their own local context. The [Experiences and Outcomes](#), developed by Education Scotland, provide a framework for planning and, as such, do not prescribe specific approaches or pedagogies for any aspect of learning to read, including the decoding aspect which Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) specifically teaches. Although Systematic Synthetic Phonics and other

phonics approaches are widely implemented across Scotland's classrooms these are only one part of a broader approach to teaching early reading. [The Benchmarks for Literacy](#), underpinned by good moderation processes, support teachers in their professional judgement of literacy levels.

In your letter you also refer to teacher training. I fully appreciate and value the contribution teachers make to the education of our children and young people. In Scotland, we have a professional, graduate teaching workforce with high professional standards set by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). It is important that we maintain our teachers' professionalism, and support them to engage in career-long professional learning to further increase their skills to support pupils' learning needs.

All GTCS registered teachers are required to meet their Professional Standards which include a commitment to social justice, inclusion and supporting the specific needs of learners. Ensuring the highest professional standards for all teachers in Scotland helps to ensure positive outcomes for our children and young people.

Additional Support Needs (ASN) is a broad and inclusive term which applies to children or young people who, for whatever reason, require additional support, long or short term, in order to help them make the most of their early learning and childcare and school educational experiences and to be included fully in their learning. Teachers can access a range of free professional learning opportunities and activities on inclusion, additional support needs, wellbeing and equalities throughout their career to further develop their knowledge, understanding and skills required to meet the needs of their learners who require additional support.

Professional learning can be experienced in different ways, for example, reflective dialogue, attendance on specific programmes, reflective reading and research and accessing the many resources and activities developed to support additional support for learning within the Scottish context. These are available from within teachers and school community, local authority, Regional Improvement Collaboratives and nationally from Education Scotland and professional bodies. Examples of the type and content of the free professional learning to support learners who require additional support include:

- the Scottish Government funded Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit and the Autism Toolbox;
- GTCS Professional Recognition Programme on dyslexia and inclusive practice;
- a suite of online modules set within the Scottish context on inclusive practice, specific learning differences and autism;
- a wide range of professional learning resources and activities on the Education Scotland National Improvement Hub and Professional learning Hub; the annual Scottish Learning Festival recordings available after the event for anytime access;
- live webinars;
- lunch time sessions;
- in person events and conferences;
- programmes of focused support – relational approaches, trauma informed practice, UNCRC, neurodevelopmental differences.

Teachers are required to participate in 35 hours of professional learning each year and can focus specifically on additional support needs. The particular learning undertaken would be subject to the needs of individuals and their contexts. Teachers also participate in collegiate sessions and in-service events during which additional support needs is a regular focus area. In addition, local authorities often focus on particular areas and develop bespoke training and professional learning for inclusion, additional support needs, wellbeing and equalities often working with their education psychology team.

Turning to dyslexia specifically, I set out below our approach to the early identification of dyslexia. Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (“the 2004 Act”) education authorities have duties to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of their pupils. They are also responsible for identifying the most appropriate provision for children and young people, taking account of their legislative responsibilities and the individual circumstances of children, young people and their families.

Local authorities are supported in these decisions through the statutory Supporting Learners’ Code of Practice. They are also further supported by the refreshed guidance on the presumption of mainstreaming which seeks to develop a greater understanding of the legislation and encourages a child centred approach to making decisions about placements. It also sets out key features of inclusion and how to improve inclusive practice in schools. The guidance aims to bridge the gap between legislation, policy and day-to-day experience, ensuring that children and young people have equitable access to a quality education which meets their needs and helps them achieve their full potential.

In Scotland, a formal identification of dyslexia is not required before appropriate support is provided, although I recognise that a diagnosis is helpful for children and young people and their families. Our national approach recognises that children and young people with dyslexia benefit from early identification. We are working with local government partners to continue to improve the consistency of early identification through the adoption of the Scottish working definition of dyslexia and use of the Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit’s Dyslexia Identification Pathway. Further information on the assessment [process and pathway can be found at the following link - Assessing and Monitoring | Addressing Dyslexia. An addressing dyslexia toolkit working group is currently developing an enhanced](#) identification pathway, which will include further guidance and support for practitioners on the collaborative assessment of dyslexia.

The Scottish Government is working closely with Dyslexia Scotland, Education Scotland and local government partners, to support a consistent approach across Scotland for the early identification of dyslexia and improve children and young people’s educational experiences. In May 2021, Dyslexia Scotland, working with Education Scotland, was awarded Accredited Professional Recognition programme status. The three free online professional learning modules which form the framework for the Professional Recognition in Dyslexia and Inclusive Practice has a strong focus on the holistic identification process and have been popular with school staff.

In addition to work underway to improve the educational experiences of children and young people with dyslexia, we have committed to introducing a Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity Bill during the course of this Parliament. This Bill aims to ensure that the rights of people with dyslexia, among others, are respected and protected.

Over the last 15 years, we have made extensive policy and legislative changes to enable those with additional support needs to thrive as part of their class, their school and their wider community.

Scotland's inclusive approach celebrates diversity and allows all children and young people to develop an understanding and recognition of differences, contributing to the development of an increasingly inclusive, empathetic and more just society. The Scottish approach to inclusion is already world-leading; our legislative and policy commitments are amongst the most extensive in the world.

In order to further support teachers and children and young people we continue to provide local authorities with an additional £15m each year to improve implementation of additional support for learning across Scotland. This funding is used to secure additional frontline staff and further enhances local authorities' capacity to respond effectively to the individual needs of children and young people. In 2021, 1,036 extra pupil support assistants were recruited. This builds on the increase of 1,354 from the previous year and exceeds our Programme for Government commitment to deliver 1,000 new support assistants. We have invested £60m since 2019-20 and we will continue to provide extra support to local authorities by investing an additional £45m over the next three years to further enhance capacity to respond effectively to the individual needs of children and young people.

The Scottish government has also published the Autism action plan, a plan that was developed collaboratively between stakeholders including the National Autistic Society, Scottish Autism, Children in

Scotland and Education Scotland. This plan aims to improve the support on offer to autistic learners in Scotland. In December 2021, we published a progress report against this action plan. Almost all actions were completed, including development of resources for teachers such as the [Autism Toolbox](#). The toolbox can be accessed for a variety of purposes. It is broken down into sections which allow practitioners to both improve their understanding of autism and to develop practical ways of supporting children and young people with autism. It supports professional learning about autism in general, and offers in-depth information on particular topics that practitioners encounter. We have also created resources to support universities in teaching their students about autism and how best to support autistic children and young people in the classroom.

To further support children and young people and their families in understanding their rights under the 2004 Act and getting the support necessary to thrive we fund a number of services. Enquire is the national advice and information service on additional support for learning. They operate a telephone helpline providing confidential and tailored advice to parents and carers on their children's circumstances and rights to support. They also have a range of resources and signposting on their website (www.enquire.org.uk), seeking to ensure that families can access the most appropriate support.

We also fund My Rights, My Say to provide advice and information, advocacy support and legal representation to children aged between 12 and 15. Further information on how children and young people can feel supported, included, listened to and involved in decisions at school is available on the Reach website (<https://reach.scot/>). The website has information and advice for children and young people about their rights to additional support for learning; practical tips for all sorts of school problems; young people's real life stories; and positive examples of pupil participation.

I recognise that more needs to be done to improve the experiences of children and young people with additional support needs. Angela Morgan's review of implementation of additional support for learning set a clear direction in how we can continue to build on progress, making recommendations on how to improve implementation of additional support for learning. Since 2020, we have worked

closely with local government partners to implement the review's recommendations and have made significant progress in a number of key areas. In November 2021, we published an updated action plan and a joint progress report.

In order to ensure that meaningful change is realised for children and young people we have collaborated with the Additional Support for Learning Project Board to review the action plan, take stock of progress, and agree priorities for the future. In November 2022 we published a further update and a joint progress report highlighting the actions fully completed to-date. We will continue to work closely with partners to deliver the remaining actions. The next update is due in Spring 2024.

I hope that the above is helpful and provides you and [REDACTED - PERSONAL DATA] with the information over the work underway to continue to improve awareness and support for the early identification of dyslexia and our continued commitment to improve the educational experiences of children and young people with additional support needs.

Yours sincerely,

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE