

Research into supporting children with complex additional support needs



About this research



In 2022 the Scottish Government asked for **research** about services for pupils with **complex** additional support needs in Scotland.

Complex means having lots of different services and support involved.

Research means getting facts, figures and information about something.



The research looked at 4 main areas:

- policy – the rules and agreements of an organisation



- practice – how we work





- partnerships – working together with other people and organisations



- what parents, carers, children and young people think



11 schools in 7 council areas in Scotland took part including:

- **mainstream** schools, both with and without additional support units
- schools funded by the council
- schools funded by grants
- independent special schools



A **mainstream** school is an ordinary school that meets the needs of pupils who do not have special educational needs.

202 people took part including:



- 91 children and young people with complex additional support needs



- 18 parents and carers
- 73 school staff including class teachers, pupil support staff and senior leaders



- 20 staff from support organisations

This research included:



- talking to people
- watching what happens in classrooms
- creative activities with children and young people



This report gives information about what the people who took part in the research thought.

Information that covers all the areas of research



The research found that:

- many teachers, support staff, senior school staff and parents thought there was less money, materials and staff



- many people said that staff are one of the most important things that give children a positive experience of education



- many people who did partnership working said that individual staff make partnerships work well



- some parents and school staff think that national policy about placements is not always followed



- some staff from support organisations, school staff and parents said that training was very important but it could be hard to get



- many staff said it is important to learn:
 - from the staff they work with
 - from children and young people

Policy



The research found that most school staff and parents knew a lot about national policies and thought they were positive.

Some people said some policies did not work well together.

For example, the '**Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)**' policy does not always work alongside the policy that children with additional support needs should go to a mainstream school.



'**GIRFEC**' is a policy to give children, young people and their families the right support at the right time.

Practice



Most parents, carers and pupils said that good relationships with staff supported children and young people to live a full life.

School staff felt that it was important to have good school leadership so that pupils and staff felt supported.



Many school staff and some pupils said that physical environments of schools were important, for example:

- outdoor space



- quiet space



- natural light



- resources like swimming pools



Many children and young people, parents and carers, and school staff reported that supported access to the local community worked well for pupils.



Some school staff said it was harder for children and young people to do this because they felt there was less money, materials and staff.

Services are not the same in all parts of Scotland.

Partnerships



Many parents had positive experiences in their children's early years.

Parents reported different support services working well together in early years settings and were very positive about the support their child got at that time.

Many staff and some parents said that children and young people now have less specialist support like:



- **educational psychologists** – experts who look at children's learning behaviours



- **speech and language therapists** – experts who work with a person's speech, hearing and language skills



- **occupational therapists** – experts who work with a person's movement and everyday skills

What did parents, carers and pupils think?



Many parents and school staff said support worked well when children move between schools – for example moving from primary school to high school.



Most children and young people with complex additional support needs said that having friends and having good relationships with staff helped them to enjoy school and to feel included.



And finally ...



Since 2012:

- there are more children and young people with additional support needs in Scotland
- there is a view that there are more children and young people with more complex needs



Some children and young people are not getting the support and services they need to live their best life.



The Doran Review was published in 2012.

It looked for ways to make services better for children with complex additional support needs.



We hope that information from this research and work on the Doran Review **recommendations** will improve support services for children and young people with complex additional support needs in Scotland.

Recommendations are what we think should happen.