



# **Additional Support Needs in School Education**

## **Response to the Call for Written Evidence from the Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee**

**The UNISON Scotland Submission to the Scottish Parliament's  
Education and Skills Committee**

**February 2017**

## **Introduction**

UNISON is Scotland's largest public sector trade union. UNISON members deliver a wide range of services across every sector in education including nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools UNISON is able to analyse and collate their experience as service users and staff to provide evidence to the committee. UNISON welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to Education and Skills Committee.

## **Evidence**

UNISON conducted a survey of members working in schools in September 2016 while the survey focused on the impact of cuts on schools members answers to the questions highlighted a range of issues which are relevant to the committee's inquiry into Additional Support Needs in schools

The key challenges raised by members were:

- Increased general workload and physical demands
- Increasing amounts of challenging behaviour
- Dealing with medications and personal care

Almost 80% respondents indicated that their workload is getting heavier. For some members this means doing much more of the same work as before because staff numbers and hours have been cut but expectations remain the same. Members are also telling us that there are increasing levels of challenging behaviour and in some case violence in schools and that it's our members who have to deal with pupils who are disruptive and violent towards staff and other pupils. Alongside pupils displaying challenging behaviour many members are now expected to deal with a range of medical and personal care needs for children that they do not feel adequately trained, supported or indeed paid to undertake.

Pupils exhibit challenging behaviour for a range of reasons. Some have with complex disabilities and mental health problems others are just reacting to challenging things in their personal lives. *Getting it Right for Every Child* requires that they need the right support. This requires resources, staff and appropriate training and support for staff to ensure that they are able to deal with behaviours in a suitable manner. Not finding the lowest paid member of staff in the building and telling them to keep an eye on them. Being the victim of violence at your work is not acceptable just because the person who hits you has a disability or is facing a difficult time in their lives. It's not fair on the pupil themselves, nor their fellow pupils and certainly not for the victim.

Support staff, particularly classroom assistants, are also expected to undertake a range of personal care and medical tasks. We are not talking about cleaning a cut and putting on a plaster or giving a child some Calpol. (though even these carry risks that need to be properly managed<sup>1</sup>) Pupils require a range of interventions, checking blood sugar and responding with correct insulin injections, catheterisation, tube feeding, dealing with tracheotomy tubes. These are tasks which carry high degrees of risk if not done properly. Many staff are uncomfortable with taking on the level of responsibility and risk that medical

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<sup>1</sup> A child has open heart surgery after a cut that wasn't properly cleaned in school leads to an infection <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/young-girl-undergoes-open-heart-9741018>

procedures require and feel that the training and risk assessment that they have been given are not adequate to the tasks involved.

Alongside medical intervention are the personal care tasks which members are increasingly expected to undertake: nappy changing, cleaning intimate areas, heavy lifting and operating hoists. Enabling children with disabilities to participate in mainstream education is something that we fully support. It is their fundamental human right. Enabling this requires more than warm words and Act of Parliament. It needs adequate resources to provide the appropriately trained and qualified staff to support their individual needs whether that is for personal care, medical procedures or behavioural challenges.

These quotes from our survey and give an indication of members' experiences in our schools.

### **What's being cut?**

*We can give less support to pupils; two children now need day long support which means that others suffer. We do not have enough staff. Children of less 'pushy' parents left out.*

*Specialist behaviour units etc been closed*

*Educational psychologists, EAL and speech and language therapists.*

*Working in one class in the morning up until my lunch with a child with additional needs then with another class after my lunch with one child with medical needs and another two children with additional*

*My remit bears no comparison to what it was initially. I have greater responsibility, working directly with children in either groups situations or individually. There is an increased number of children with ASN and there are not enough PSAs to give adequate support.*

*More personal care, more manual handling. Less classroom time with pupils who have learning difficulties not of a physical nature*

*More complex additional needs pupils so more time spent on personal care, physio, hoisting and so on*

*More children are having complex difficulties, not enough support staff to help*

### **Dealing with challenging behaviour**

*Certainly different. Still classroom based as much as possible but more involved with behavioural issues and working one to one with pupils unable to cope. Often spend long periods of time out of the room, wandering corridors, entertaining children who refuse to join the class.*

*The job seemed to start off as a general supportive role to pupils in the classroom especially for pupils who found the curriculum extremely challenging. Now ASNs in our school seem to be sent into classes, back to back, to provide support in extremely challenging classes both in behavioural terms as well as learning support needs.....I feel that pupils with mental health issues are also passed off to us instead of the 'professionals' who should be better-*

*equiped to take on the complicated supportive role and the accompanying continued documentation of the situation. When one considers that the job evaluation stated that our communication skills interaction were rated lower than those of refuse collectors, something does not add up!*

*Dealing with more behaviour issues than learning*

*In stead if working with children with learning difficulties we are being used to manage abusive and physical children. I have been kicked, spat at punched and bit quite a few times in the last 6 months. We are used to help clean rooms, tidy and give medication.*

*The job has become more physical because of the children's needs, they are more profound both mentally and physically. PSAs have more physical abuse than ever.*

### **Comments on medicines/procedures and personal care**

*Being a first aides it can be abit over powering on what we are expected to do. We have 4 kids who have type 1 diabetes, at least 5 kids with allergies who require epi pens on them at all times. More than 10 who are asthmatic, 3 kids who are in wheel chairs who need special equipment for handling and moving and medication in case they fit or any other problems and over and above this medication that gets handed by parents for children to have throughout the day. One child has just had surgery and requires physio 3 times a day. All PSA's are totally stressed with what we have to do. And on edge if we get a deession wrong. We are not nurses, dentist doctors etc like people think!*

*My workload now includes children with special medical and health needs eg toileting more frequently which includes stoma bag emptying three times a day. Also changing oxygen canisters when necessary. One day a week administering peg feeding*

*More pupils in mainstream with complex medical needs as well as learning needs*

*Yes very much. Psa's are now in playground, dinner hall, administer multiple medication daily, first aid and therefore very little time is in classroom. As a Classroom Assistant previously my main duty was to be in the classroom assisting the teacher with childrens learning.*

*Due to the staff cuts in our department the workload has definitely increased and we are being asked to do more and more i.e. personal care, (splint checks, hoisting, standing frame, liaise with physiotherapy and OT, epileptic pupils, wheelchair pupils: toileting, getting ready for PE and swimming, moving a bambach chair from room to room, fire drill: evac chair*

*am asked to work in the office. Give medication. Expected to provide personal care for pupils. This makes me feel uncomfortable as I am a Classroom Assistant and these jobs are not in my job description*

*last August I've been put in the position of working (unofficially) as a one-one with an autistic child with little support & no training giving or offered*

*Yes most definitely. We have to deal with a lot of verbal and physical violence from the children rather than help children with their education. Also, we are expected to give children their insulin injections if they are diabetic, which is a massive responsibility and quite frankly, we are not nurses*

*epilepsy training was rushed through in less than an hour after school. As a result I felt unprepared and untrained to deal with the pupil's medical issues. Playground supervision is understaffed (ratio pupils to staff out of balance ) and borderline dangerous.*

*Catherisation of a pupil on a daily basis! Left to deal with lots of problems which are infact guidance issues!*

*Very much so. Peg feeding, insulin injections, dealing with children with complex needs not properly trained for.*

*Yes. First aid ( including injections, ripped, catheterisation, self harm), counselling,*

### **Conclusion**

UNISON is the largest public sector trade union in Scotland. We are able to analyse and collate members' experiences of the sector, as service users and staff, to provide evidence to the committee. Our recent report<sup>2</sup> reveals a dedicated workforce committed to supporting children to reach their potential but who are under enormous pressure. Much more needs to be done to ensure that we are *Getting It Right For Every Child*. UNISON therefore welcomes the committee's inquiry into schools education and ASN in particular.

### **For further information, please contact:**

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<sup>2</sup> UNISON's report Hard Lessons can be downloaded here: <http://www.unison-scotland.org/2017/01/16/hard-lessons-support-staff-struggling-to-maintain-standards-for-pupils-because-of-cuts/>