

Additional Support for Learning – See Me comments

General Points:

See Me would like the Additional Support for Learning review to incorporate commitment and a call to action to address the fundamental nature of mental health stigma and discrimination in the provision of Additional Support for Learning (ASL) for children and young people. This can apply a number of levels, such as when a family does not reach out for ASL due to the stigma of doing so, when children and young people's mental health needs are not taken into account or overshadowed by other additional support needs and the type and nature of additional support provided to people not meeting the needs of the individual to the individual due to stigma from professionals. A previous review of ASL found that there is "considerable scope to have more effective approaches to identifying the more hidden needs of those who are looked after, young carers and those with mental health issues."¹ From See Me's research we know that pupils and staff speak about people with mental health problems as being perceived differently by themselves and others, that they fear the consequences of opening up, and that this impacts on people's willingness to open conversations about mental health.² We are concerned that many young people with mental health problems are not receiving the ASL they are entitled to due to lack of knowledge about mental health and stigma.

This lack of understanding and stigma is also an issue for those who receive ASL. The Doran review of 'Learning Provision for Children and Young People with Complex Additional Support Needs' highlighted that "Many respondents reported unhelpful attitudes and values that existed in some organisations and which were expressed by some professionals in the assessment and decision making processes."³ We believe that this speaks to the heart of the issue – when children and young people receive a negative response from a professional, they are less likely to seek help in the future or receive help that is relevant to them. They may worry about not being listened to, confidentiality, not being taken seriously, being judged, being seen as a burden, of receiving a diagnosis or being labelled and the consequences of speaking out. Any such negative response will make it harder to provide the right help at the right time and place, and children and young people with additional support needs will experience worse outcomes as a result.

See Me welcomes the explicit references to mental health conditions in the 'Additional support for learning: statutory guidance', for example stating that "Mental health and wellbeing issues such as anxiety, eating disorders and depression can disrupt learning and may lead to additional support being required, for example from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), or local

¹ Review of the Additional Support for Learning Act: Adding Benefits for Learners, A report by HMIE to Scottish Ministers, Nov 2010, p. 3, <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/2009/1/raslaabl.pdf>

² See Me Evaluation of Process and Impact: Phase 2 Year 2, <https://www.seemescotland.org/media/9517/mhf-see-me-report-year-2-final-310719.pdf>

³ The Doran Review 'The Right Help at the right time in the right place: Strategic Review of Learning Provision for Children and Young People with Complex Additional Support Needs', 2012, p 10, <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20170108050712/http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/11/7084/downloads>

counselling services to ensure benefit from school education”⁴ However, we would like to see a greater emphasis on severe and enduring mental health problems, and more detail on how professionals can support children and young people with these conditions. This is especially important given the recent increase in young people being detained under the Mental Health Act.⁵ Recent data show that the rate of exclusion for pupils with additional support needs was almost five times higher than for pupils without additional support needs.⁶ Given this, and the fact that pupils who have been excluded are more likely to have worse mental health outcomes⁷, we would encourage the Review Chair to examine the potential interplay between ASL, exclusions and detention under the Mental Health Act among the most vulnerable children and young people. Greater consideration should be given to how to provide education for the small cohort of young people unable to attend school due to severe and enduring mental health problems and in ways best suited to their needs and circumstances.

Furthermore, we are concerned by the number of generic references to “mental or physical health problems” throughout the Statutory Guidance. There does not appear to be an explicit focus on how professionals are supported to identify and support children and young people with mental health problems. We know that when there is no explicit focus on mental health, teachers, pupils, parents and carers and support workers do not feel empowered to open conversations about mental health and this underlying stigma means a child or young person’s real support needs are not met.

In terms of making better use of existing resources, See Me would encourage the review to address the issue of information sharing between schools, CAMHS, and the wider public services. While there are doubtless data sharing challenges, children and young people grow frustrated with having to repeat their stories and being bounced between services without their specific needs and challenges met. In general all ASL support plans must be created with the individual and be especially tailored to their needs making it easy to link to the appropriate professionals and advocacy to empower CYP to make the decisions they feel would be beneficial to them. We would welcome clarity on how recent initiatives from the Scottish Government may provide an opportunity for better integration between services. For example, this review should closely attend to the recent work of developing a Community Services Framework between COSLA and Scottish Government and consider how best this framework can create joined up services that support children and young people in need of ASL.

Recommendations:

⁴ Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended), 2017, Scottish Government, p. 23, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-education-additional-support-learning-scotland/pages/3/>

⁵ Mental Health Act monitoring report 2018-19, Annual statistical monitoring, Oct 2019, Mental Welfare Commission, <https://www.mwcscot.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/MHA-MonitoringReport2019.pdf>

⁶ Summary statistics for schools in Scotland, 2019, p. 25, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-no-10-2019-edition/>

⁷ Mental health and wellbeing among adolescents in Scotland: profile and trends, Carolyn Black and Chris Martin, Ipsos MORI Scotland and Scottish Government, 2015, p. 30, <https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00488358.pdf>

- We would welcome explicit recommendations for countering mental health stigma, drawing on learning about what works. Academic research and See Me's work has shown the impact of social contact and education to combatting stigma. We would like to see a commitment to embedding combating stigma into the review's recommendations. We would like to see acknowledgement of the value of social contact approaches in normalising mental health problems and promoting recovery.
- We would like to see proactive steps taken to ensure people with 'hidden' conditions receive ASL. We want to see a commitment to training, education and capacity building to enhance knowledge, understanding and behaviour change relating to mental health among professionals: enhancing mental health literacy and responsiveness, safeguarding, mental health first aid intervention, suicide intervention training, resilience and mindfulness with reducing stigma and discrimination considered as core aspects within them. Complementing this should be specific engagement of people with lived experience, and directly challenge attitudes and prejudices on mental health, promotes recovery, and focuses on skills development to change how people interact with others experiencing a mental health problem. School staff should also be given the tools to link with resources in their community.
- We would like explicit focus on how to support the most vulnerable children and young people, especially those who may be impacted by ASL, exclusion and greater risk of detention under the Mental Health Act. Careful consideration should be given to applying tailored and flexible approach to meet the educational and social needs of young people unable to attend school due to their mental health conditions.
- Clarity should be provided on how the Additional Supports for Learners with interplay with recently announced Scottish Government initiatives, such as the Community Services Framework.

About See Me

See Me is Scotland's national programme to end mental health stigma and discrimination. Our vision is to enable people who experience mental health problems to live fulfilled lives.

We are working to change negative behaviours towards mental health, by creating a movement for change, bringing people together all over Scotland who are passionate about tackling stigma, to work as one. We work with our supporters, volunteers and champions, to make real changes in communities across the country.

We want to change the culture around mental health so people feel confident enough to speak about how they are feeling and can ask for help if they need it, without the fear that they will be stigmatised and discriminated against. To do this we are targeting key settings where people face stigma and discrimination; in work, education, health and social care, and in their local communities.

