

SEN SURVEY ISSUES AND ACTIONS

SURVEY 2025

Introduction

Special Educational Needs, Additional Learning Needs, Additional Support Needs and inclusion: Issues and actions

This document outlines some of the key issues arising from our 2025 survey of special educational needs (SEN), additional learning needs (ALN), Additional Support Needs (ASN) and inclusion, while setting out actions that NASUWT will take in response to those issues.

The document is split into three sections:

- SEN/ALN/ASN teachers and teachers working in specialist settings;
- Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCOs) and Principal Teachers (ASN/Support for Learning (SfL)); and
- Schools and support for SEN, ALN and ASN. This includes issues and actions that relate to the experiences of class teachers, but also wider issues affecting schools.

SEN/ALN/ASN teachers and teachers working in specialist settings

1. Issue: There is a need to **challenge school and setting practices that see violence and abuse as 'part of the job'**.
2. Issue: There is a need to **challenge school and setting practices that involve differential treatment of staff**, particularly practices that involve teachers and support staff being treated differently to managers and leaders
3. Issue: Examine the reasons **why schools in Scotland are less likely to encourage staff to report incidents and why they are less likely to record incidents**. This should include examining both national and local policies and practices and should consider implications for policies and practices in other administrations.
4. Issue: There is a need to **address the lack of advice given to teachers about making reasonable adjustments for learners who have a disability**. This includes clarifying that SEN/ALN/ASN and disability does not equate to doing nothing or allowing pupils to 'get away with it', but is about making adjustments that may be different to those for other pupils that will support the pupil to behave and learn appropriately.
5. Issue: There is a need to **acknowledge and promote examples of positive and effective practice**. This should include highlighting the contextual factors that are key to that practice being effective.

Actions

- Negotiate with the employer to secure acceptable practices.
- Encourage and support teachers in specialist schools to report incidents to their employer.
- Use 'refusal to teach' to challenge poor management practices where the employer refuses to negotiate or adopt appropriate policies and practices.
- Produce advice and guidance which clarifies when 'refusal to teach' may be appropriate if the learner has a disability, SEN, ALN or ASN. Also draw members' attention to other helpful advice and guidance on equalities legislation and making reasonable adjustments (e.g. **CDC guidance on the Equality Act 2010 for teachers and schools, for trustees and governors, and accessibility plans**).
- Challenge schools and settings that are not providing teachers with advice and guidance on making reasonable adjustments.
- Build union capacity to advocate for appropriate policies and practices.
- Ensure that issues affecting SEN, ALN and ASN teachers and teachers working in specialist settings are identified and addressed in NASUWT's behaviour surveys and as part of actions arising from those surveys.

SENCOs, ALNCOs and Principal Teachers (SfL/ASN)

1. Issue: The survey findings raise very significant concerns about the **pressures on SENCOs, ALNCOs and Principal Teachers (ASN/SfL)**. This includes:
 - a. being **allocated insufficient time to fulfil their SEN, ALN and ASN responsibilities**;
 - b. **competing demands on their time** from their other roles and responsibilities;
 - c. **workload pressures**, including those arising from cuts to resources and staffing in the school and in external services and agencies;
 - d. issues of **isolation**, particularly when there is no SEN/ALN/ASN team or where the SENCO/ALNCO is not a member of the senior leadership team;
 - e. **lack of support**, particularly lack of admin support.
2. Issue: The survey findings draw attention to **issues relating to SENCO and ALNCO pay** at both school and national levels. The codes of practice for SEND in England and ALN in Wales state that the role of the SENCO or ALNCO is a strategic one and that the SENCO/ALNCO should be a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) or have a clear line of communication to the SLT. Our findings indicate that many SENCOs and ALNCOs are not senior leaders and that many of those who are not senior leaders are not supported by senior leaders. Further, the findings indicate that a significant number of SENCOs and ALNCOs receive very little recompense for the role.
3. Issue: The survey findings highlight that many **SENCOs and ALNCOs do not have time to fulfil their strategic responsibilities**. Further, in a significant number of schools it appears that **insufficient attention is paid to embedding inclusion and addressing SEN, ALN and ASN in strategic school planning and decision making**. This is picked up in more detail under the next section: 'Schools and support for SEN, ALN, ASN and inclusion'.

Actions

- Press for SENCOs and ALNCOs to be **paid on the leadership pay range at no detriment to their terms and conditions of service**. (In England and Wales teachers who are on the leadership pay range lose their contractual right to 195 working days and 1,265 hours of directed time that they are entitled to if they are remunerated by means of a TLR. There is a need to ensure that SENCOs and ALNCOs retain these protections.)
- Address SENCO/ALNCO pay in NASUWT campaigns for a 35-hour week and press for this to be addressed through national policy reforms
- Use time budgets to gather evidence about SENCO/ALNCO/Principal Teacher (ASN/SfL) workload, duties and responsibilities at school/setting level and use the findings to challenge school/setting practice and to advocate for national reforms.
- Urge governments to evaluate the roles of SENCOs, ALNCOs and Principal Teachers (ASN/SfL), including establishing the nature of responsibilities and demands of the role in different contexts and the impacts of lack of time for SEN, ALN, ASN and inclusion.

- Examine the nature and extent of practices such as sharing of a SENCO/ALNCO across a group of schools and senior leaders nominally being the SENCO/ALNCO and delegating responsibilities to teachers.
- Campaign to raise SENCO, ALNCO and Principal Teacher (ASN/SfL) awareness of their right to a work/life balance and support them to secure their right in their school/setting.
- Strengthen NASUWT networks to enable SENCOs, ALNCOs and Principal Teachers (ASN/SfL) to share their experiences and influence policies and practices locally and nationally.

Schools and support for SEN, ALN, ASN and inclusion

1. Issue: There is a need to draw a **distinction** between:

- **poor and unacceptable practice** at individual school, setting or service level;
- issues that are the result of **lack of resources**; and
- issues arising from **national policies and requirements that do not support inclusive practice** or that place **unreasonable and unsustainable pressures** on schools and services across the system.

'Inclusion' must not mean that schools and teachers are expected to do more without the necessary support or are left to fill a void because of pressures on other services.

National policies must address the pressure points across the system and recognise the particular pressures on those in frontline roles. This includes SENCOs, ALNCOs and class teachers, as well as frontline staff delivering specialist services.

2. Issue: There is a need to clarify **what is meant by 'inclusion'**. **Independent research** commissioned by NASUWT identifies a number of interpretations of inclusion: as an ideology and/or aspiration linked to human rights; as a place (usually mainstream versus special school); as a policy; as a professional practice (inclusive teaching); and as a personal experience (how the individual experiences inclusion).

While governments may have policies for inclusion, there are questions about what those policies are seeking to achieve. For example, are they about:

- securing the right of learners to access education in their own communities?
- ensuring that every learner receives an education that meets their needs?
- learners being taught in classes alongside their peers, irrespective of the nature and complexity of their needs?
- ensuring that every learner is included in the life of a school?

NASUWT is concerned that policies are often driven by the need to make efficiency savings and that this takes precedence over other objectives.

NASUWT supports the social model of inclusion as a principle, meaning that the focus should be on removing barriers to inclusion. However, this must not mean that teachers, schools and other frontline staff are left to provide the 'solutions', or to address gaps in specialist support.

We believe that there is a need for a spectrum of provision, including specialist provision. What provision is appropriate will depend on the needs of the learner but also on the resources and support available both within and to the school or setting. Governments must ensure that expectations for inclusion are matched by the resources needed to deliver those expectations.

3. Issue: Wider **education policies must align with and support policies for inclusion.** Significant changes are needed to policies such as those relating to the curriculum, assessment and accountability in order to support the inclusion of more learners with special and additional needs in mainstream schools. Other issues – such as class size, education phase, the nature and content of teachers' initial teacher education, and teachers' access to continuing professional learning and development – need to be considered and addressed as part of policy reforms that focus on inclusion. Some of these reforms will take significant time to implement and this must be factored into the timeframes for 'inclusion' reforms.
4. Issue: There is a need to clarify **what is meant by inclusive teaching** and to ensure that **expectations about inclusive teaching are manageable and sustainable.** The survey findings suggest that some teachers are not being supported to adopt inclusive teaching practices. Further, they suggest that, in a small but significant number of schools/MATs in England, practices that require teachers to deliver a curriculum that has been prepared for them may make differentiated or adaptive teaching difficult or impossible.
5. Issue: Class teachers have **more learners who have SEN, ALN or ASN** in their classes **and the needs of learners** in both mainstream and specialist school classes **are more complex**, but **resources and support are being cut.** It will be particularly important to challenge plans and policies that set expectations for more inclusion without providing the funding and wider resources needed to deliver this.
6. Issue: There is a need to identify and address specific issues **by educational phase or context.** The survey highlights particular challenges for teachers in small schools, where teachers and leaders fulfil many roles and have significant teaching commitments. It also finds that many primary SENCOs and ALNCOs have multiple roles and responsibilities. Further, the survey points to challenges in obtaining specialist support in the early years because of the need to first gather evidence to prove that support is needed.
7. Issue: There is a need to focus on the increasing **use of specialist resource provision and units in mainstream schools**, particularly in **Northern Ireland and England.** The survey findings indicate that some schools have established resource provision because they are experiencing difficulties obtaining specialist placements (e.g. for learners who have EHCP-naming specialist provision but the provision is full). Specialist resource provision may serve different purposes and cater for very different groups of learners. It will be important to clarify what positive practice looks like and to challenge unacceptable policies and practices both locally and nationally. It will also be important to address factors such as the sustainability of provision.
8. Issue: **Learners** needing specialist support **remain in mainstream because specialist provision is full** or the specialist provision refuses to admit the learner **because of their behaviour.** The survey findings indicate that unrealistic expectations are being placed on schools to meet the needs of learners requiring specialist provision where specialist places are not available. Mainstream schools are not being given the specialist resources and support to meet the needs of such learners.

'Inclusion' must be resourced adequately. Transition to a more inclusive mainstream school system requires additional investment through the period of transition. There is a need to resource and protect funding for early intervention.

9. Issue: **AI and digital technologies** are often **cited as solutions** to issues such as excessive teacher workload. They also provide **scope to work differently**, which may **create opportunities** but also **poses risks**.

There is little robust evidence to support claims that AI tools reduce teachers' workload. Claims about workload are often designed to sell a product rather than being based on robust evidence. The extent to which a technology or tool will increase efficiency and reduce workload will depend on many factors including how it is implemented, how it interacts with other systems and technology, and whether teachers have received the training and support they need to use the technology or tool effectively.

Technology is being used to support the use of virtual access points (VAPs) in some schools, particularly in England and Scotland. It will be important to examine this practice and consider the implications for both learners and teachers. There is a risk that technology may be implemented in ways that impact adversely on teachers' terms and conditions, or be used to rationalise the teaching workforce.

There is a need to explore **how AI tools might be used to address the administrative elements of SEN, ALN or ASN work**, e.g. supporting and improving communications with staff, with parents and across services. It will be relevant to pick up this issue at national, area/authority/joint services level and individual institution level.

When considering whether EdTech and AI tools might help teachers to adapt lessons and reduce their workload, it will be important to ensure that they comply with **NASUWT's ethical principles for AI and digital technologies**.

10. Issue: There is a need to address the **lack of support provided to class teachers** to meet the diverse needs of learners in their classes. There is also a need to tackle **differences in teachers' access to support**. The survey findings suggest that teachers of 'non-core' subjects struggle to access support, and that assumptions are being made that teachers of practical subjects do not require additional support. This also links to issues about learners' **entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum**.

Supply teachers report that they are not given **information about learners who have SEN, ALN or ASN**. This has significant implications for their ability to meet the needs of learners in their classes. It also increases the risk of supply teachers experiencing poor learner behaviour in their classes and then being blamed for the poor behaviour.

11. Issue: There is a need to **challenge education authority and specialist service procedures and practices, including health and social care services, which create workload burdens for staff in schools**.

While we acknowledge that authorities and services are struggling to meet demands, it is not acceptable that they adopt procedures and practices that place workload burdens on staff in schools. The survey provides evidence of the unacceptable strategies that some authorities and services are adopting to deter or prevent applications to assessments and support; for example, denying initial applications, raising thresholds for support, limiting the support provided, and refusing to provide services and support to learners who attend a school in the local authority area but who live in another local authority area.

Such practices must be challenged locally but also through pressing for changes to statutory guidance, regulation and accountability systems.

There is also a need to pick up issues locally and nationally about the lack of health service and social care engagement with and support around the SEN, ALN or ASN process. It is not acceptable, for example, for local authorities to pay for services and provision that should be provided from health and social care budgets.

Actions

- Utilise nation-specific groups to seek feedback and advice on SEN/ALN/ASN-related policy and practice issues. In England, establish teacher panels to provide feedback and advice on SEND-related issues and reforms.
- Build union capacity at regional and local levels to negotiate on SEN, ALN, ASN and inclusion matters, and to advocate for appropriate practices.
- Use work-time budgets to collect evidence about the make-up of SENCO, ALNCO and Principal Teacher (ASN/SfL) work roles and responsibilities, and the workload pressures they are under. Use this evidence to challenge policies and practices and to secure appropriate reforms.
- Use the survey findings and other evidence from members about SEN, ALN and ASN policy and practices to shape our work with governments, national bodies and local employers, including campaigning for reforms.
- Update NASUWT advice and guidance on SEN, ALN and ASN, including our advice on SEN, ALN and ASN systems and managing workloads, and urge governments to endorse the advice.
- Examine general education policies (e.g. class size, curriculum) that relate to or impact on SEN, ALN and ASN and schools' and teachers' ability to be inclusive, clarify NASUWT positions where needed, and take actions to secure policy change.
- Include SEN, ALN, ASN and inclusion within NASUWT work on AI and EdTech.