



CONSULTATION

**Independent Professional Adviser for Future School Reform:**  
**Future School Reform**  
**6 February 2026**

NASUWT welcomes the call for views focused on three key areas of the school system: School improvement; School funding; and School governance.

NASUWT is the Teachers' Union, representing teachers and school leaders in all sectors of education and across all 32 local authorities in Scotland.

**SPECIFIC COMMENTS**

**IMPROVEMENT**

**1. How and how well are schools being supported to improve?**

The question is poorly framed and underlines the widespread assumptions held within Scottish education that the overt focus on improvements should be in schools.

A fit-for-purpose system would hold the Government, Ministers and other public bodies to account effectively for the impact of their actions on education. It would move away from its current disproportionate focus on the perceived performance of individual schools.

It is the Union's view that the current school accountability regime, comprised of the inspection of individual schools should be reformed in order to be fairer and more supportive of schools and the teachers and leaders that work in them. This substantive change in approach is necessary before questions about school improvement can be fairly considered.

## **2. What could be done to make things even better than they are?**

The current inspection system, and the wider accountability regime within which it sits, operates largely on the basis of a fictional notion that the responsibility for the quality of children and young people's educational experience rests primarily within the boundaries of each individual school. The fact is, however, that the quality of education in individual schools cannot exceed the capacity of the wider system to support the efforts of teachers and headteachers.

Some form of external inspection is a necessary part of a publicly accountable education system. Yet it is the case that inspection will always be regarded as deeply controversial and contestable for as long as it remains located within a dysfunctional accountability framework. The accountability framework needs to be reformed so that it incorporates within its scope the actions of others with responsibility for the education system. This includes Government Ministers, local authorities and the wider services for children and young people that have an impact on their learning and wellbeing

The accountability regime fails to acknowledge the significant authority, control and influence other bodies have over individual schools, or to hold them to account for the exercise of their powers. These bodies discharge critical functions that relate to matters including the curriculum and qualifications, supporting children with special and additional needs, workforce recruitment, retention and deployment, and the quantum and distribution of funding.

Further, it does not take account of the impact of decisions at national and local level on the provision of wider services for children, including health, social care and youth and community services, all of which play a critical role in supporting the work undertaken by schools.

The Government should not insist on inspection arrangements nor promote narratives that hold schools accountable for its failure to prioritise investment in education. Against over a decade of cuts to local authorities, impacting education and the services that support it, teachers and headteachers have battled to deliver the very best education possible for children and young people. Too often, our members report that they are swimming against a tide of cuts and a lack of resources.

Too often, the consequences of our current system include the generation of excessive and unreasonable pressures on the school workforce and allow people to conclude that the main purposes of accountability are to be punitive and unsupportive of schools and their staff.

It is for this reason that NASUWT continues to call for a fundamental reassessment of the ways in which accountability is understood and operationalised across the education system.

For more detail see: <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/static/b2518721-def4-4fa2-99c730ef5a528b5f/Consultation-Response-Scottish-Government-School-Inspections-Are-Changing.pdf>

NASUWT also believes that an in-depth review of the National Improvement Framework is long overdue. The Union agrees with the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA) that effective communication is key and have long maintained that teachers and their representatives need to be an integral part of any discussion on NIF.

It is a perennial issue however that NASUWT, and other unions, raise significant concerns regarding the NIF, how it is communicated, implemented,

reviewed and ultimately its effectiveness in delivering improvement and change - yet year after year the opinions of teaching professionals are sidelined.

NASUWT has repeatedly noted:

*'in relation to the specific questions posed... quotes from previous submissions to the annual NIF review which still apply have been added. It is worth stressing that the reason these comments are still pertinent is that they have not been acted upon'*

The NIF remains a source of deep frustration for teachers.

In our response... to Scottish Government around the Hayward recommendations the Union said:

*'Indeed, it may be time to strengthen that recommendation further and reimagining the NIF entirely, alongside national governance arrangements for policy creation. It is unclear whether existing stringent data collection systems would sit comfortably within a reinvigorated system which empowered and trusted teachers'*

It remains an ongoing issue that the structures surrounding the NIF sit independently within the overarching governance arrangements for Scottish Education Policy. At the NIF Professional Associations meetings, the NASUWT and others have provided repeated challenge around whether continuing with the NIF was appropriate: this does remain the elephant in the room. Doesn't the NIF just add to confusion about the future direction of the Scottish education system? How does the NIF align with everything else that is going on, the constituent parts of 'everything else' not even cohering with each other very well? Doesn't the National Discussion call into question some of the principles and features on which the NIF is based?

This is not a new criticism of the NIF, in 2022 NASUWT stated:

*'The Union believes that a significant review of the place of the NIF within the Scottish context should be undertaken. It would be an appropriate time to stop and reflect on whether the NIF has set out what it intended to achieve and if not to review the current process.*

*There must be some acceptance that the views of the profession in relation to the NIF have been largely ignored: this is a poor platform upon which to build for improvement within education.'*

What teachers and schools need is time and resources and to be trusted to undertake their role, leading on teaching and learning. Feedback from members indicates that teachers are increasingly being asked to collate more and more data, fill out more and more bits of paper and yet they have no confidence that anyone actually needs the data, is looking at the data or that this constant bureaucratic churn is fuelling anything more than professional burnout.

We need the NIF to be sufficiently reflective to realise that measuring a thing does not improve it – indeed, where resources are limited, it can in fact cause a detriment because the time and effort of teachers are being diverted from their core role of teaching and learning. The question implicitly recognises that the NIF is not in and of itself a driver for change, yet it is still asks how things can be tweaked so that measuring data can support improvement. An honest reflection is needed, as we expect from our schools and teachers. If something is not working we should not continue to do it, hoping for a different result.

The Union believes that gathering more data would not currently be proportionate or reasonable. Schools are still within the recovery phase of the pandemic and any additional workload burdens should be avoided at this time.

Rather than add further data collection burdens, the Scottish Government should assess whether existing systems meet the following tests:

- The use of data should always be guided by an understanding of its limitations as a way of measuring pupil progress and attainment. No test or assessment has 100% reliability and validity and its outcomes should always be contextualised with other information and evidence of pupil achievement. Any assessment or test will always fail to capture some essential aspects of learning. This is particularly true of standardised assessments.
- Pupil assessment data should never be used as the basis for forming judgments about the effectiveness of teachers' work in classrooms. Data can provide a backdrop to professional discussion and reflection but no assessment is designed to assess the professional competence or performance of teachers. Pupil performance in tests and assessments is influenced by many factors that are beyond the reasonable control or influence of individual teachers.
- Pupils do not learn in a strictly linear way. It is not possible to produce precise estimates of (or targets for) future pupil performance based on prior attainment. At best, assessments can point out where pupils need to go next in their 'learning journeys'.
- Children's learning experiences should be curriculum-led, not assessment-led. Assessment is the servant of the curriculum. Children's learning entitlements are set out in the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and are much broader than any single assessment can ever be. Learning experiences should not be designed around the imperatives of assessment.
- The use of assessment should be manageable and not create unnecessary and excessive workload for teachers and school leaders. Assessments should be designed in such a way that they do not distract teachers and school leaders from their core responsibilities for teaching and leading teaching and learning. Burdensome and unwieldy assessment policies and practices

undermine rather than enhance efforts to raise standards, particularly if the information and data they generate are of limited use to practitioners and learners.

Furthermore, looking at recent changes, it is unclear how the Quads aligns with the overarching recommendations of the national thematic inspection:

<https://education.gov.scot/inspection-and-review/hm-chief-inspector-reports-and-guidance/national-thematic-inspections/local-authority-approaches-to-supporting-school-improvement/recommendations/>

While the national inspectorate have identified where improvements are required, NIF, alongside ADES, Education Scotland and local authorities have decided to create their own self-evaluated framework without reference to the recommendations of the inspectorate. It is this inability to join up national policy creation which leads to an overwhelmed system and inhibits clarity of purpose and action.

NIF is unpopular among teachers and has been described by some as '*an absolute waste of teachers' time and energy*'. Others in their feedback have described it as '*the NIF rambles on, shambling its way through hours of meetings and meaning very little to classroom teachers - sooo many words - sooo little effect*'.

This frustration no doubt stems from the fact that Education Scotland have never produced clear exemplars of achievement at different CfE Levels and SNSAs at Primary 1 remain unfit for purpose – in that context, there is very little data which can be trusted. Teachers feel like they are being asked to paint the roses red.

This NIF processes feel very detached from the reality classroom teachers face, where they are seeing cuts to support services, library services, specialist provision for pupils and councils generally are continuing to operate under significant financial pressure. Equally the promised class contact reduction time under the SNP Manifesto has yet to materialise. Rather than

seek to provide challenge to improve, would it not be better to focus on support?

A key question which requires to be asked is whether the NIF, as an improvement activity, has had the desired impact and supported meaningful improvement at all levels. This is the starting question - the NIF should take time to evaluate its own impact before considering how to provide challenge outwards".

The national thematic inspection into Local authority approaches to supporting school improvement recommended:

*'Establish a national professional learning programme for local authority central officers. This will help to build capacity and professional knowledge in school improvement and effective support and challenge practices/*

So there should be a national professional learning programme but it needs to be a broad offer encompassing how to provide effective support and challenge. It also requires to be audited in terms of effectiveness and impact.

Finally, enclosed below was our priority motion at NASUWT Scotland Conference 2025 on the rise of far right extremism. In the current climate it is remarkable that there is no specific reference to equalities or community cohesion in the priorities and outcomes of the NIF. Schools are not immune from the surging levels of hate within communities and online.

*'Far-right Extremism and Hate Crimes*

*Conference believes that over the last decade the Government has peddled a hostile environment agenda which has created the conditions for hatred to flourish.*

*Conference notes with increasing concern the prevalence of hate speech on social media and beyond, seemingly with impunity.*

*Conference is appalled to see the language of the far right and right-wing extremist influencers permeating and becoming normalised, including amongst some of our young people.*

*Conference is deeply concerned about the climate and impact of racism, sexism and misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and religious hatred affecting the lives of children and young people.*

*Conference is further concerned that teachers with protected characteristics are being disproportionately targeted, with increased challenges to their authority, as well as abuse and assaults.*

*Conference agrees that if such behaviours go unchallenged, this creates a corrosive working and learning environment which can have a devastating impact on the health and welfare of teachers as well as the young people witnessing it.*

*Conference is concerned that current behaviour approaches in schools take little cognisance of prejudice-based abuse, in particular the use of restorative approaches and the impact of these on staff who have been abused.*

*Conference applauds NASUWT's long and proud tradition of defending communities threatened by the far right and believes that work must continue today and into the future.*

*Conference asserts that it is incumbent on all of us to work collaboratively to challenge hate speech at all levels and calls on the Scotland Executive Council to help change the narrative by:*

- (i) promoting positive stories of NASUWT members whose activism challenges far-right narratives;*
- (ii) providing training for members on difficult/challenging conversations;*
- (iii) providing updates, training and webinars on equality issues, promoting and empowering allies to stand up for the rights of all;*
- (iv) campaigning for earlier support and education on hate speech at primary schools, recognising that, by secondary school, many pupils may already have been exposed to far-right narratives;*
- (v) building solidarity with other trade unions and the STUC to ensure the movement remains vigilant and united against the threat of far-right populism which seeks to dismantle our values and democratic principles;*

*(vi) offering ongoing solidarity with migrants, supporting community organisations such as Maryhill Integration Network (MIN) in their work to bring people seeking asylum, refugees, migrants and the settled inhabitants together, recognising our country owes a huge debt of gratitude to those who have chosen to live in Scotland, both recently and across past generations and*

*(vii) lobbying the SQA and Education Scotland to ensure appropriate inclusion of race equality and anti-racist practice and content in the development of new or adapted course specifications, and relevant guidance.'*

### **3. What else should be considered regarding improvement at school level?**

NASUWT survey data shows that just 2% of teachers in Scotland say that the pupils they teach who have additional support needs (ASN) always receive the support they are entitled to, with over a third (35%) saying these pupils rarely or never receive the support they need.

While the number of pupils with ASN in Scottish schools is rising and their needs are becoming more complex, funding, support and the number of places in specialist provision are all dwindling.

While 92% of respondents said the number of pupils they teach with ASN has increased in the last five years and 93% said the needs of the pupils with ASN that they teach have become more complex during this time, 69% said that the level of support received by pupils they teach with ASN has decreased over the last five years.

Funding and resource pressures are evident with nearly half (47%) saying that there are pupils in their school who have been identified as needing specialist provision, but remain in their mainstream school because specialist settings are full. 43% said their local authority has reduced the number of places in specialist settings in order to manage budgets.

Over half (53%) said the number of specialist teachers employed to support pupils with ASN in their school has declined in the last five years. 62% said the number of specialist support staff has decreased during this period.

Unsurprisingly therefore, 94% said that the workload of teachers and school leaders in their school has increased as a result of underfunding for specialist services for ASN.

Only 2% of respondents say they always receive the support they need to teach pupils with ASN effectively. 46% say they rarely or never receive the support they need.

Over half (54%) of respondents who teach in specialist or alternative provision said they had been physically assaulted by a pupil in the previous year. 59% said they had been threatened with physical assault and four in five had experienced verbal abuse. Nearly half (49%) said they experienced such abuse daily or more than once a day. Two-thirds said the abuse is increasing in severity.

Only 14% said their school always takes appropriate action to address behaviour incidents when they are reported and just 4% said the same about local authorities.

Delegates at the NASUWT Scotland's Annual Conference 2025 called for the Scottish Government and local authorities to fundamentally rethink how they fund, plan and staff ASN provision.

The results of our survey only underlined the recent damning report by Audit Scotland which heavily criticised the Scottish Government's failure to adequately fund, plan or resource its presumption of mainstream policy. While we welcomed the commitment from the Cabinet Secretary to look at what more might be done to support additional support needs in schools, the detail on that has not been swiftly forthcoming: we urgently need to see detail about

who and what will be involved in this review. Any discussions should certainly not be limited to just COSLA and local authorities.

Teachers are now routinely being placed in a situation where they are expected to teach children with such high level and complex needs that they require almost one-to-one support at the same time as teaching the rest of their class.

This is a betrayal of the duty of care which employers owe to both those pupils and to teachers. Pupils, teachers and families are being failed by the current system of ASN and the presumption of mainstream policy, under which children and school staff are being left to sink or swim.

Teachers desperately want to do their best for all the pupils they teach, but are being set up to fail by a system which is not fit for purpose.

The Scottish Government and COSLA needs to bring together the various agencies and groups who work with children and young people to develop a plan to rebuild and transform ASN provision so pupils and teachers receive the support they are entitled to expect.

A continued failure to get to grips with the crisis in ASN provision will have a far-reaching and long-lasting impact on young people's future life chances, the Scottish economy and on the recruitment and retention of teachers. The evidence for action and change has never been clearer.

## **FUNDING**

### **4. How and how well are schools being funded to deliver high quality education to our learners?**

Class teachers have more learners who have an additional support need 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.

For more details see on the impact of underfunding of education on ASN:  
<https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/public-audit-committee/correspondence/2025/asl-nasuwt-to-pac-30-sept-25.pdf>

On current data teacher numbers in Scotland increased by 63 between 2024 and 2025, meaning the government has fallen short of its target to restore numbers to 2023 levels. The Cabinet Secretary for Education said in 2024 she had given councils an extra £69 million to achieve this target. The data shows in fact that in half of local authorities teacher numbers actually decreased in 2025. The failure to increase teacher numbers significantly also means it is now impossible for the Scottish government to deliver on another pledge, made in 2021, to employ at least 3,500 more teachers and 500 more classroom assistants over this Parliament, which ends in 2026.

Where two thirds of local authorities have failed to honour the commitment to return teacher numbers to 2023 levels, this starkly underlines the systemic failures within the system around auditing how money is spent.

Work around staffing data too is moving at a snail's pace at the Strategic Board for Teacher Education (SBTE) and NASUWT has been calling for a shared definition as a crucial starting point, for example, assessing what is deemed to be a vacancy across different local authorities. Work in this area must move at pace.

## **5. What could be done to make things even better than they are?**

The NASUWT advocated that the Scottish Government should adopt the following key principles to underpin its school funding system. These are that the funding system for all state-funded schools should:

- provide equality of opportunity and equitable access for all learners, including through the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum, and contribute to raising educational standards for all pupils and narrow the achievement gap;

- ensure that all schools are funded on the same basis, which should not result in anomalies between schools where their needs and circumstances and the expectations upon them are the same;
- reflect the additional costs related to pupil deprivation, socio-economic circumstances, school location and setting;
- ensure the provision of, and access to, high-quality education and related support services for children and young people, including vulnerable children;
- provide equality of entitlement for all learners to be taught by qualified teachers and for the recruitment, retention and development of a world-class workforce in every school or setting as critical components in delivering better outcomes for all children, and that these entitlements must not be based on parents' ability to pay;
- be clear and transparent so that school budgets are based upon clearly identified and agreed sets of expectations about what work schools should do and the performance expectations that will apply to them;
- be fit for purpose, taking account of local circumstances and needs and the expectations on schools and local authorities, while promoting public and professional confidence in the system;
- be sufficient in ensuring that the global amount available for the funding of schools takes full account of education priorities and needs and promotes fairness, equity, inclusion and social cohesion;
- ensure that changes to the funding for schools do not result in detriment to colleges or early years provisions, which are also essential in providing education for school-aged pupils;
- be responsive to changing needs and circumstances;
- be predicated on consultation and democratic involvement at national, local and institutional levels, including full recognition of school workforce trade unions;
- promote stability for schools and enable schools to plan and organise their priorities in the longer term, and help to minimise turbulence;
- support the best use of resources, through arrangements for strategic planning of local provision, institutional collaboration, economies of scale and the pooling of resources to meet locally identified educational needs; and

- ensure that schools in receipt of state funding should not be able to make a profit and that they demonstrate the provision of good value for money.

## **6. What else should be considered regarding funding for education?**

NASUWT has called on the Scottish Government to do more to improve workforce planning, with increasing feedback from supply teacher members suggesting that they are struggling to secure work. We have repeatedly urged the Cabinet Secretary, Jenny Gilruth, to address weaknesses in workforce planning alongside campaigning against councils seeking to make cuts in teacher numbers.

Yet the Cabinet Secretary appears to be shifting the onus for the dysfunctional teacher supply system onto newly qualified teachers, rather than taking responsibility for a system that is clearly failing teachers, pupils and the taxpayer.

We have a situation where thousands of teachers are being trained at public expense for jobs that don't exist; all the while, those teachers who do have permanent posts are drowning in workload.

The Cabinet Secretary and COSLA need to agree to work together at pace to meet commitments to increase teacher numbers and prevent a further waste of so much talent and potential from our school workforce.

Teachers also need to be allocated sufficient time to fulfil their responsibilities. Currently, there are competing demands on their time from other roles and responsibilities, workload pressures, including those arising from cuts to resources and staffing in schools and in external services and agencies, a lack of support (including admin support), all contributing to teachers often feeling isolated and unsupported. The Scottish Government committed to reduce class contact time for teachers and this commitment must be expedited.

## **GOVERNANCE**

### **7. How well are school leaders being supported and empowered to enable them to deliver high quality education to our learners?**

Teachers need a better deal.

Politicians must commit to transformative change which will support every child, young person and teacher to thrive. Children's lives and futures are being damaged by systemic failures to support teachers, including a failure to: address excessive workload burdens such as unnecessary bureaucracy; improve teacher wellbeing support; improve workforce planning and modelling; and tackle the Additional Support Needs crisis. We need urgent investment in education in Scotland: to our schools, our colleges and our wider support services for children and families.

More teachers and headteachers are leaving the profession prematurely, whilst targets to train the next generation of teachers are being missed, holding back a generation and damaging our country's prospect.

Our children and young people deserve better.

### **8. What else could be done to make things even better than they are?**

We believe that investing in a brighter future for our children starts with investing in our teachers:

a) Teachers' working conditions are children's learning conditions. The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers and the conditions in which they work. Yet, since 2010, teachers have endured rising levels of workload, unsustainable working hours and declining real-terms pay. The Scottish Government needs to ensure that it is Getting It Right For Every Teacher if it wants to achieve its ambitions of Getting It Right For Every Child.

- b) An effective system would ensure there are an appropriate number of teachers to meet educational needs and that teachers have an entitlement to secure employment, as well as a right to work in a healthy and safe environment where they are treated with respect.
- c) Prejudice and discrimination deny people their fundamental human rights, limit opportunity for everyone and undermine the cohesion of schools, communities and wider society. Every teacher should feel confident that they can progress and succeed in their chosen career and be supported to work free from discrimination and harassment. Racism, sexism and misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and religious hatred affect the lives of children and young people, too, and, where such behaviours go unchallenged, create a corrosive working and learning environment which can have a devastating impact on the health and welfare of teachers and young people.
- d) Poverty continues to decimate the lives of children and young people, affecting their ability to get to school and engage in learning, which thereafter has long-term impacts on educational attainment, wider wellbeing and future life chances. There are measures the Government can take to improve outcomes for struggling pupils and their families.
- e) NASUWT's mission is to create the conditions that enable teachers to secure the best educational opportunities for all children and young people. Our mission is imprinted with key values – equality, democracy, justice and solidarity. All of these are the hallmarks of an inclusive and progressive society and the key ingredients for quality public education, which is the lifeblood of the economy and society as a whole. Educational improvements are best supported when they sit within a wider framework of rights and entitlements and where systems and systems change are managed appropriately. NASUWT has been clear in its manifesto the asks which would improve the current system.

For more details see: <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/static/b9d703a7-1243-4536-8a0f93de6e156c1a/Scottish-Parliament-Election-2026-NASUWT-Manifesto.pdf>

## **9. What else should be considered regarding the governance and oversight of schools and school education?**

- centre the voice of teachers in any system reform, including curriculum and inspection;
- establish a Charter of Entitlements for pupils and teachers linking teacher rights to pupil entitlements. This would underline how teacher wellbeing and student success are interdependent – teachers' rights and pupils' rights are two sides of the same coin;
- ensure better collaboration across services for children, with effective multi-agency working and joined-up government at both national and local levels. There is too much siloed working in the Government and other national agencies which, if addressed, would ease teacher workload and improve pupil outcomes at little or no cost
- ring-fence education funding to ensure that monies intended to fulfil national commitments (e.g. on teacher numbers or pupil equity) are used appropriately;
- monitor the reform of national agencies, particularly Education Scotland, Qualifications Scotland and HMIE, to ensure they embed the voice of teachers within their structures, communicate effectively with the profession and provide useful supports for teachers, rather than unwarranted stress and workload;
- negotiate agreements which secure ethical development and application of artificial intelligence and digital technologies in education;
- establish a workload taskforce to review why key recommendations from the Curriculum for Excellence Working Group on Tackling Bureaucracy (2015) were not fully implemented, with a particular focus on: Forward Planning in the Primary Sector; Assessment in the Secondary Sector; Self-Evaluation and Improvement Planning; Monitoring and Reporting;
- commit national resources to re-establishing programmes to support the mental health and wellbeing of teachers, establish a national entitlement to professional supervision for teachers and recognise psychological safety as a fundamental workplace right; and

- agree a consistent and publicised national approach to supporting supply teachers across local authorities, recognising the vital contribution they make to securing high educational standards for all children and young people.

**10. Are you content for your views to be referenced in the report?**

Yes

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**General Secretary**