

Briefing paper scope

Additional Support for Learning

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland

July 2024

Background

In 2020, a review of additional support for learning (ASL), chaired by Angela Morgan OBE (the Morgan Review), concluded that the implementation of ASL legislation in Scotland was 'fragmented and inconsistent' and that 'many aspects of the ASL system needed to be improved'.

In May 2022, the Accounts Commission published a [blog on ASL](#). It highlighted that the ASL needs of school pupils were not consistently being met and it raised concerns about their rights, and equality issues.

The Scottish Government established a multi-agency ASL Project Board to address the Morgan Review's recommendations. It first met in October 2022; continues to work on a broad range of issues; and plans to produce an updated progress report and action plan in August 2024.

In May 2024, the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee (ECYPC) published a report following its [inquiry into ASL](#). This outlined significant challenges that the Scottish Government, councils and a range of other organisations urgently need to address. The Committee requested that Audit Scotland looks into crosscutting spend on ASL.

Why is this important?

ASL is relevant to many children and young people and their parents and carers, and challenging for national and local government alike:

- Overall, 37 per cent of pupils in publicly-funded primary and secondary schools have recorded ASL needs.
- The number of pupils with recorded ASL needs increased by 84 per cent between 2014 and 2023 and continues to rise.
- There are significant equality aspects. For example, the proportion of pupils with recorded ASL needs in Scotland's most deprived areas is over double that in least deprived areas.
- A planned assessment and reporting framework more suited to pupils with ASL needs has not yet been developed.
- The indications are that ASL costs are increasing. Scottish councils spent an identifiable £926 million on ASL in 2022/23, but we know that this does not capture all relevant spend.

Councils' approaches to ASL vary, and there is wide variation across councils in both the percentage of pupils recorded as needing ASL and in councils' spend on ASL. However, significant data gaps make it difficult to understand why these variations occur.

What will the briefing paper look at?

It will look into how well the Scottish Government and councils are addressing the demand for ASL. In particular, it will cover:

- How well do the Scottish Government and councils understand ASL demand?
- How do the Scottish Government and councils allocate and deploy resources to meet ASL needs?
- How well are the Scottish Government and councils monitoring the provision of ASL and its impact on children and young people?
- How effectively are the Scottish Government and councils addressing the challenges around ASL?

The planned scope of our work

The audit work relating to councils will focus on education departments and their partnership working with councils' other services, the NHS and third sector bodies. We will address ASL in primary and secondary school stages.

We will not consider the provision of ASL in early learning and childcare settings, or in colleges and universities. The audit will not directly engage with parents or carers, but we will draw on published information already available about their views.

How will we do the work?

The briefing paper will largely draw on published documents, along with statistical and financial data. This will include taking account of findings and recommendations of previous work in this area, such as:

- The 2020 Morgan Review.
- The 2022 Accounts Commission blog.
- The 2024 ECYPC's inquiry.
- The work of the ASL Project Board.

We will survey all councils. We will also hold interviews with national bodies, a sample of councils, and engage with Audit Scotland's Youth Advisory Group and Equality and Human Rights Advisory Group.

What do we want to happen?

The purpose of the briefing paper is to support improvement in the provision of ASL by highlighting and making recommendations relating to:

- Challenges for the Scottish Government and councils in implementing legislation and statutory guidance on ASL.
- Trends in ASL need/demand.
- Trends in ASL resourcing.
- Areas where published data about ASL could be more useful.
- Progress by the Scottish Government and ASL Project Board.
- Good practice, where possible.

Timetable

We plan to publish the briefing paper on behalf of the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission in early 2025.

Contact

If you have questions, please contact Mark McCabe at mmccabe@audit-scotland.gov.uk. For information on how we collect, use and store personal information, please refer to the [privacy notice](#) on our website.



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