Narratives of inclusion: Representations of inclusion through policy and statistics in Scotland

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This paper begins with an overview of the discourse surrounding inclusion in Scottish education policy. Within Scottish social policy, there is a strong commitment to the principles of universalism, with an acceptance of the need for some degree of redistribution for certain children. Children with additional support needs are seen as a group requiring extra resources, but decisions on the nature of that support and which groups should be prioritised has been left to professionals, with little input from parents or children. Published statistics are generally used to suggest that steady progress is being made towards inclusion of children with additional support needs. A relatively low proportion of pupils are placed in separate special schools (about 1% of the total of the pupil population, and this has not changed for more than 40 years). The Scottish Government's statistical bulletin shows that a growing proportion of children with additional support needs are placed in mainstream schools, and that a lower proportion of pupils are being excluded. However, the expansion of children with additional support needs in mainstream may be attributed to a growth in the pupils who are counted as falling into this category, rather than a shift of children from special to mainstream settings. In addition, there has been a rapid reduction in the proportion of children receiving a statutory support plan (a CSP), which provides some guarantee of additional resources and stronger rights of redress.

A further story that tends not to be highlighted by official statistics is the strong association between the identification of certain types of stigmatised additional support needs, particularly learning disability and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and social class. The paper concludes by considering explanation for the current expansion of the additional support needs population. As suggested by Tomlinson in the 1980s, this may be attributed to professional interest, dilemmas of the comprehensive schools system and the economic crisis.

Introduction

Scotland is a country with a strong belief in education as the means of creating a strong democracy and a meritocratic social system (Devine, 1999). Many policy texts produced by the previous Labour and present SNP administrations express commitment to inclusion and social justice. In the run-up to the referendum on independence in 2014, the idea of a Scottish identity that is distinctly different from an English or British identity is being strongly promoted, with Scottish education being seen as exemplifying the distinctiveness of Scottish national identity. Some commentators such as Mooney and Scott (2012) have drawn attention to the danger that a focus on territorial justice may lead to the neglect of the social justice agenda, including policies designed to promote economic redistribution. In this paper, I consider the following questions:

(1) How is the concept of inclusion understood and enacted in Scottish policy discourse on additional support needs?

(2) How are statistics used to underpin the discourse of progress towards inclusion?

(3) What other narratives may be supported by statistics which may not be publicly available?

Social inclusion in Scotland: the gap between rhetoric and reality

Since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, reducing social exclusion and promoting inclusion have been major government preoccupations, in line with many other European governments. The decade between 1997 and 2007 was one of unparalleled economic growth across Europe, and therefore provided an excellent opportunity to narrow differences in educational outcomes between pupils from different social backgrounds. Policies such as *Closing the Opportunity Gap*, instituted by the Labour administration, aimed to reduce the gap between the bottom 20% of school achievers and the average, but failed in this endeavour. The SNP (Scottish National Party) which formed a minority administration in 2007 and a majority government in 2011, adopted some elements of Labour political discourse, but arguably placed a greater emphasis on economic growth rather than redistribution, seeking to create a 'wealthier and fairer society'. By way of illustration, the Skills Strategy (Scottish Government, 2007) identified, as one of its major aims, the achievement of equal access to and participation in skills and learning for everyone, including 'those trapped by persistent disadvantage'. Policies targeted at children, such as *Getting it Right for Every Child* (GRFEC) and the additional support for learning legislation are also frequently cited as examples of the government's commitment to improving the life chances and outcomes of 'the most vulnerable children', with a view to achieving social gains and also, in the words of Mike Russell, the Cabinet Secretary for Education, 'hard edged economic benefits' (Russell, 2011).

However, despite the rhetorical commitment to social justice expressed by successive Scottish government, like other European countries, Scotland remains a highly unequal society. As pointed out in the OECD report entitled *Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland* (OECD, 2007), whilst Scotland scores highly on PISA, it is only in the middle range of countries with regard to equity. In Canada and Finland (the most equal countries) only 11% of the variance in PISA scores is explained by a pupil's socio-economic status. Scotland lies at the mid-point of this spectrum, with 18.1% of variance explained by SES. In other countries, SES exerts an even stronger influence on pupil outcome, accounting for 20% of variance in France, 23% in Belgium, 27% in Hungary and 24% in Belgium. As is the case in other European countries, the current financial crisis is having particularly adverse consequences for young people in terms of obtaining employment. Those from socially deprived backgrounds are faring particularly badly, making up the majority of the More Choices More Chances group who are not in education, employment or training (Riddell et al., 2010)

Additional support needs policy and inclusion

Scottish education legislation has underlined the ongoing commitment to the inclusion of all children in mainstream schools. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 included a presumption of mainstreaming, establishing the principle that every child would be included in mainstream school unless this was detrimental to the education of that child or other children in the class, would involve unreasonable public expenditure or was against the wishes of the child's parents (Tisdall and Riddell, 2006). Education planning legislation passed in 2001 placed an obligation on local authorities to produce accessibility strategies to plan and record progress over time in creating inclusive environments, paying attention to policies and procedures, the physical estate and pedagogy and the curriculum (Scottish

Executive, 2003). The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (the ASL Act), amended in 2009, broadened the definition of additional support needs to include children with difficulties in learning for whatever reason, but also placed a duty on local authorities to assess and meet the needs of all children requiring additional support. The Record of Needs (RoN), a statutory document summarising children's difficulties in learning and the measures proposed by the local authority to meet these needs was abolished, and replaced by the statutory Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP). This document was intended to summarise the child's needs, which might stem from learning difficulties, disabilities or social factors, and the measures proposed by education and other agencies such as health and education to meet these needs. The rights of children with additional support needs and their parents were underpinned by enhanced rights to challenge local authority decisions on educational provision. Young people with additional support needs, their parents and children deemed to have legal capacity were entitled to access independent mediation, independent adjudication or the Additional Support Needs Tribunal (see Harris and Riddell, 2011, for further discussion of the Act's provisions with regard to dispute resolution and avoidance).

The provision of additional support was further underpinned by other programmes and initiatives. For example, Scotland's national curriculum, *Curriculum for Excellence*, incorporated the principle that all children are entitled to personal support which will enable them to benefit from available learning opportunities. From a broader children's services perspective, the *Getting it Right for Every Child* programme was intended to co-ordinate support from all children's services (education, health and social work). Whilst not underpinned by primary legislation, the programme aimed to improve the learning outcomes and life chances of all children, by ensuring they are safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included.

Scottish education legislation was reinforced by British equalities legislation. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, extended to education in 2001, prohibited discrimination against disabled pupils in schools, which was defined as failing to make reasonable adjustments or treating a disabled person less favourably for reasons associated with their disability. The Equality Act 2010 placed a duty on all public sector bodies to produce equality schemes, monitoring progress towards more equal outcomes in relation to protected grounds, including disability. Under the terms of the 2010 legislation, all providers of educational services, including independent schools, are obliged to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils by providing auxiliary aids and services.

To summarise, since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1997, there has been considerable continuity between Labour and SNP policies in promoting the principles of inclusion, achieving a broader understanding of needs of children requiring additional support to benefit from education and promoting cross-agency working to achieve these goals. However, the achievement of these goals has been limited by the worsening economic climate. In Scotland, approximately 25% of local authority funds are raised by the council tax, a local property tax which has been frozen since 2008. As costs have risen, this freeze has forced local authorities to cut services and borrow more funds to meet their existing commitments. In return for agreeing to a council tax freeze, the Scottish Government struck an agreement with local authorities to abolish the hypothecation of funds, so that money earmarked for additional educational support was no longer ring-fenced for this purpose, and could, if the local authority chose, be spent instead on maintaining roads. A major reduction in the block grant from Westminster to the Scottish Government has also led to squeezed local authority funding, which is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. In some local authorities, this has led to many classroom assistants being made redundant.

In the following sections, we consider the outcomes of inclusive education policies as reflected in special school placement patterns, the use of statutory documents to underpin support for children with additional support needs and patterns of exclusion from school.

Has the policy of inclusion led to a shift away from the use of special schools in Scotland?

Figure 1 shows the total pupil population in primary, secondary and special schools over the period 1998 to 2011. As can be seen, there has been a steady drop in numbers in primary schools from 1998 onwards. In secondary schools, numbers have been declining less and the drop in numbers is only noticeable in the last 3 years. This probably reflects the impact of measures, such as the educational maintenance allowance, aimed at encouraging pupils to stay on at school post 16. The pupil population in special schools has remained stable over this period, suggesting that there has certainly not been a major shift towards mainstream. However, changes have happened in relation to the population of special schools. Whereas a significant proportion of children with visual and hearing impairment used to be educated in special schools irrespective of their academic abilities, currently 70% of children with visual impairments and 80% of children with hearing impairments are educated in mainstream schools (Weedon et al., 2012). Children with sensory impairments in special schools and units tend to have additional learning disabilities. Particularly in the case of children with visual impairments and learning disabilities, these difficulties are often associated with very premature birth.

Figure 1:   Number of pupils in state-maintained schools, 1997-2011
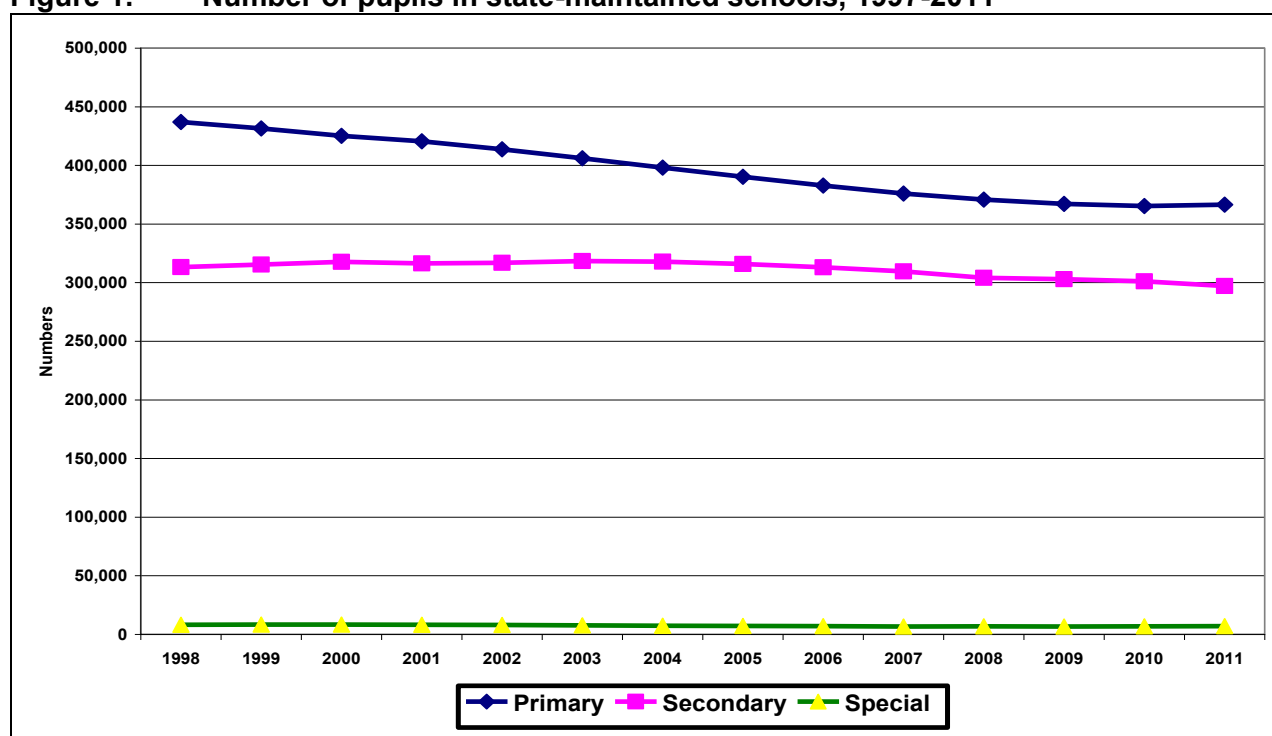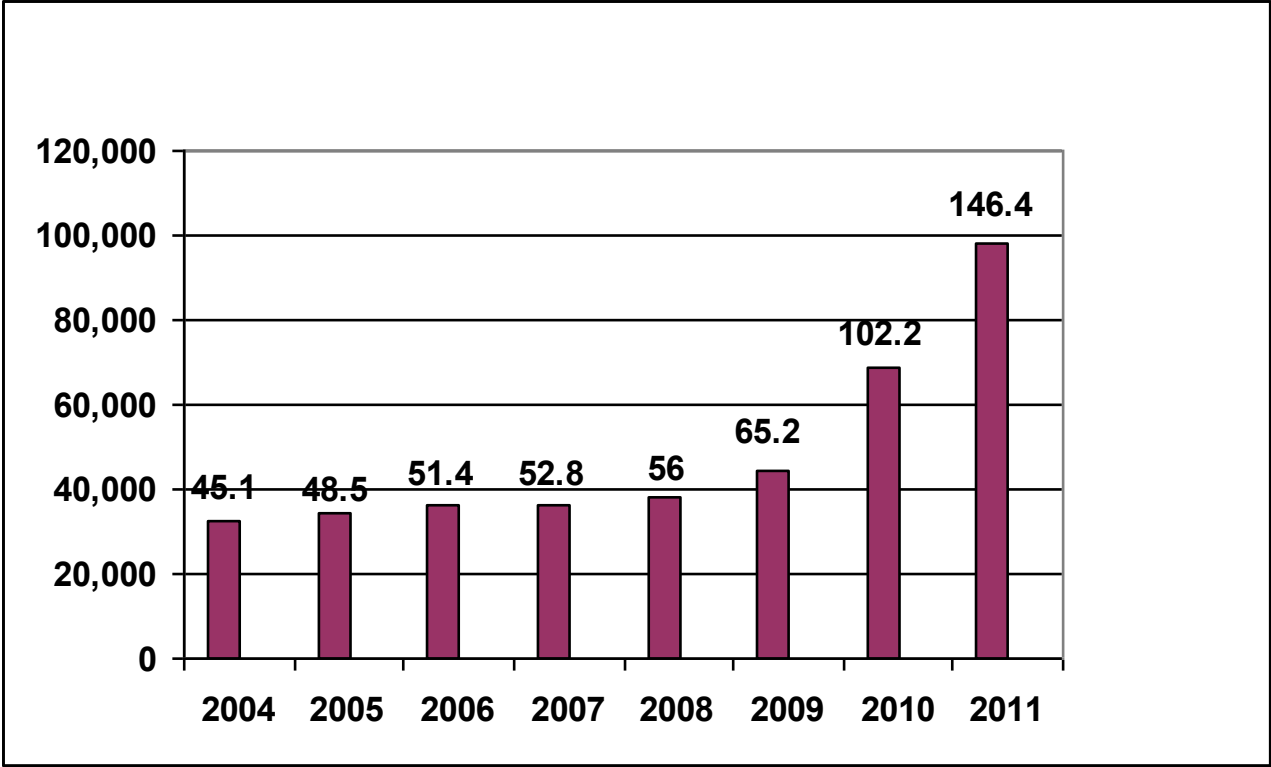

Source: Scottish Government, 2011e

Table 1:   Number of pupils in state-maintained schools, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2011, and percentage of total population

School sector	1999		2002		2005		2008		2011	
	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
Primary	431,414	57.1	413,713	56	390,260	54.7	370,839	54.4	366,429	54.6
Secondary	315,356	41.8	316,903	42.9	312,979	43.9	303,978	44.6	297,109	44.3
Special	8,311	1.1	7,981	1.1	6,975	1	6,756	1	6,973	1
Total	755,081	100	738,597	100	713,240	100	681,573	100	670,511	100

The proportion of children with additional support needs in mainstream schools

On the basis of the number and proportion of children in mainstream and special settings, there is little evidence of a major shift of children with additional support needs from special to mainstream, despite the anxieties sometimes expressed by teachers' unions. However, data published by the Scottish Government suggests a slightly different picture, showing a steady increase in pupils recorded as having additional support needs in mainstream schools. In 2004, children with additional support needs made up 4.5% of the total pupil population, whereas in 2011, this proportion had risen to 14.6% (see Figure 2).

Figure 2:   Number of pupils with ASN, 2004-2011 (the figures on top of the bars show rates per 1000 pupils of the total pupil population)

Source: Scottish Executive and Scottish Government Annual Pupil Census

Scottish Government statistics also show that there has been a steady increase in the number of children with additional support needs spending all of their time in mainstream classes (figure 3).

Figure 3:   Proportion of time spent in mainstream classrooms by pupils with additional support, 2005 - 2011
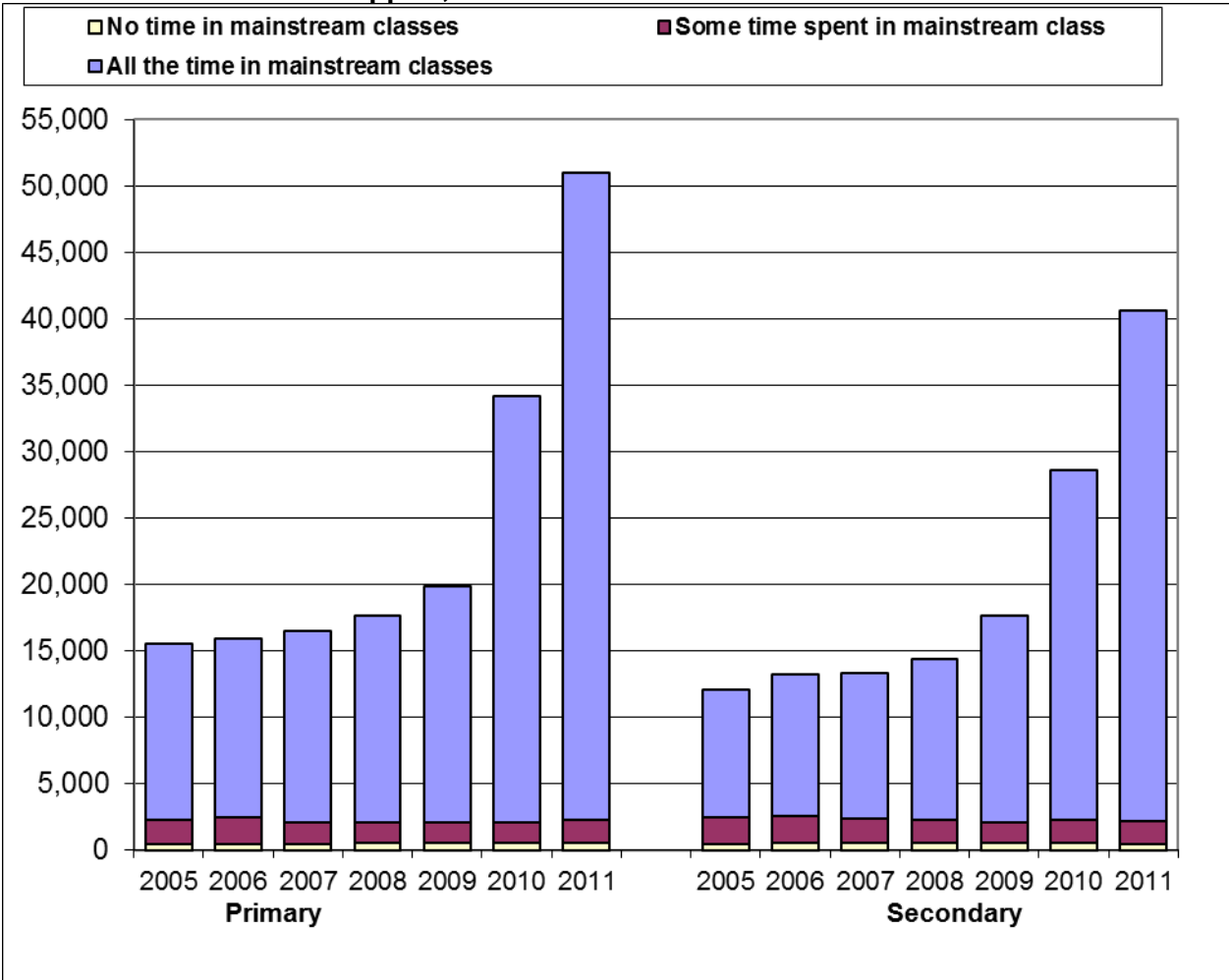
Source: Scottish Government, 2011

What accounts for the rapid increase in the number and proportion of children with additional support needs?

It is clearly important to examine the underlying reasons for the apparent increase in the number and proportion of children identified as having additional support needs, and being educated in mainstream classes. Examination of data collection criteria and procedures suggest that most of the change may be attributed to the expanded definition of additional support needs, rather than changes in incidence or educational placement patterns. Scottish Government data are derived from the annual school census which takes place in September of each academic year. Each school is required to complete a statistical return, and the reliability of the data is entirely dependent on the accuracy and consistency of the figures which are entered. The task is often delegated to the school administrator, and there does not appear to be any moderation or checking of data, so those completing the form may interpret questions and categories differently.

In 2004, when the additional support for learning legislation was enacted, just over 4% of children were identified as having additional support needs.   At this point, Scottish Government guidance to those making census returns was to only include children with CSPs, RoNs and Individualised Educational Programmes (IEPs).   A number of local authorities, including Edinburgh and Glasgow, decided to institute their own local plans, known as Additional Support Plans and Multi-Agency Support Plans, which meant that children with these plans, who were undoubtedly receiving additional support, did not appear

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in the official statistics. In 2009 and 2010, there appeared to be increases in the number of pupils with additional support needs. Scottish Government sources indicate that these hikes reflect improved recording practices in the largest Scottish local authority, reflected in its census returns. The significant increases in the number and proportion of children with additional support needs in 2010 and 2011 (see figure 2) reflects local authority responses to the 2009 legislative changes, which required the counting of all children receiving some form of additional support, irrespective of their support plan. The new category entitled 'Other types of support needs' includes *'Child Plans, short term or temporary support and support that is not covered in the CSP or IEP*' (Scottish Government, 2011). It is likely that these changes fed through gradually which is why there is a significant increase in both years.

It should also be noted that there are major differences between local authorities in the proportion of children with additional support needs, indicating wide differences in identification and recording practices (see figure 4). The percentage of the pupil population identified as having additional support needs varies from 35% in West Dunbartonshire to 7% in South Lanarkshire. Such major variation is an artefact of who gets counted, rather than differences in the occurrence of educational and social difficulties.

Figure 4: **Total ASN population in each authority as a percentage of the total pupil population, 2011**
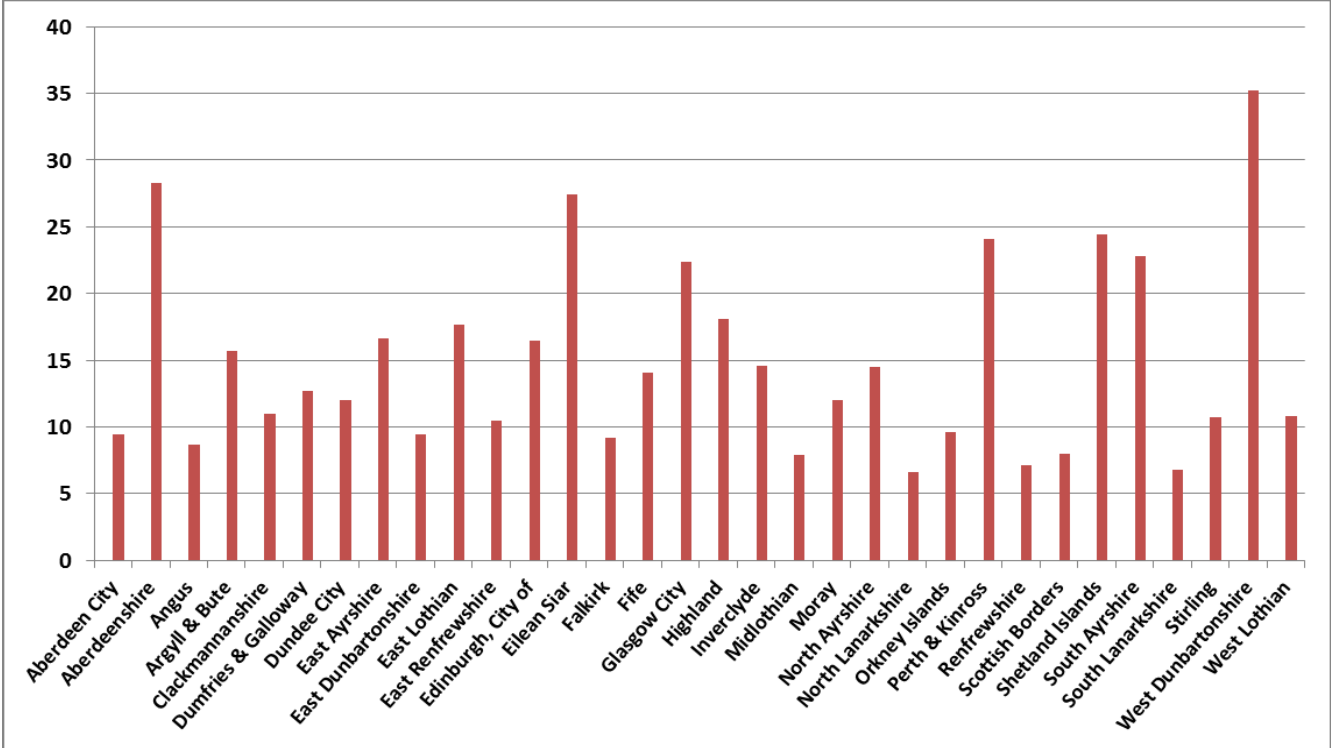
Source: Scottish Government, 2011

What changes have there been in relation to categories of difficulty?

Until 2006, data were recorded in relation to a pupil's principal learning difficulty (this is still the basis on which statistics are gathered by the Department for Education in England). In 2006, the practice in Scotland changed, so that schools were asked to record all difficulties of each pupil with additional support needs, rather than identifying the pupil's principal difficulty only. From 2006 onwards, pupils with multiple support needs have been included in *all* categories for which they require support. For example, a pupil with a visual impairment and a learning disability will be recorded in both of these categories. This has led to an increase in some categories, particularly those which are non-normative and like to occur alongside others, particularly social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Table 2 shows the number

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of children in particular categories in 2008 and 2011. Whilst over this period the proportion of children with ASN has apparently trebled, some categories have increased more rapidly than others. As shown in figure 5, in 2008, learning disability was the largest category, however, by 2011 social, emotional and behavioural difficulties had become the largest, more than doubling over a three year period.

Table 2: Reason for support for pupils with Additional Support Needs, by gender, 2008 and 2011, Rate per 1,000 pupils

	2008			2011		
	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
Pupils for whom reason for support is recorded	34.0	76.4	55.5	107.6	183.8	146.4
Learning disability	9.2	17.0	13.2	15.8	27.7	21.9
Dyslexia	3.3	8.9	6.1	12.3	23.5	18.0
Other specific difficulty	2.9	5.6	4.3	10.00	17.0	13.6
Other moderate learning difficulty	5.9	10.6	8.3	17.2	27.3	22.3
Visual impairment	1.6	2.1	1.9	3.3	4.4	3.9
Hearing impairment	1.2	1.6	1.4	2.7	3.2	3.0
Deafblind	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Physical or motor impairment	3.6	5.2	4.4	6.3	11.5	9.0
Language or speech disorder	4.0	8.9	6.5	9.1	19.9	14.6
Autistic spectrum disorder	1.9	12.4	7.2	3.5	19.5	11.6
Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties	5.0	18.9	12.0	16.4	44.0	30.5
Physical health problem	2.2	3.1	2.7	7.0	9.0	8.0
Mental health problem	0.3	0.4	0.3	1.2	2.1	1.6
Interrupted learning	0.6	0.9	0.8	2.1	2.8	2.4
English as an additional language	1.8	2.3	2.0	15.3	16.5	15.9
Looked after	1.4	1.8	1.6	6.0	6.8	6.4
More able pupil	0.4	0.4	0.4	2.5	2.6	2.5
Other	2.2	4.3	3.2	11.5	18.3	15.0

Source: Scottish Government,
Note: pupils with more than one reason for support will appear in each row

Figure 5: Reason for support for pupils with Additional Support Needs, 2008 and 2011, Rate per 1,000 pupils
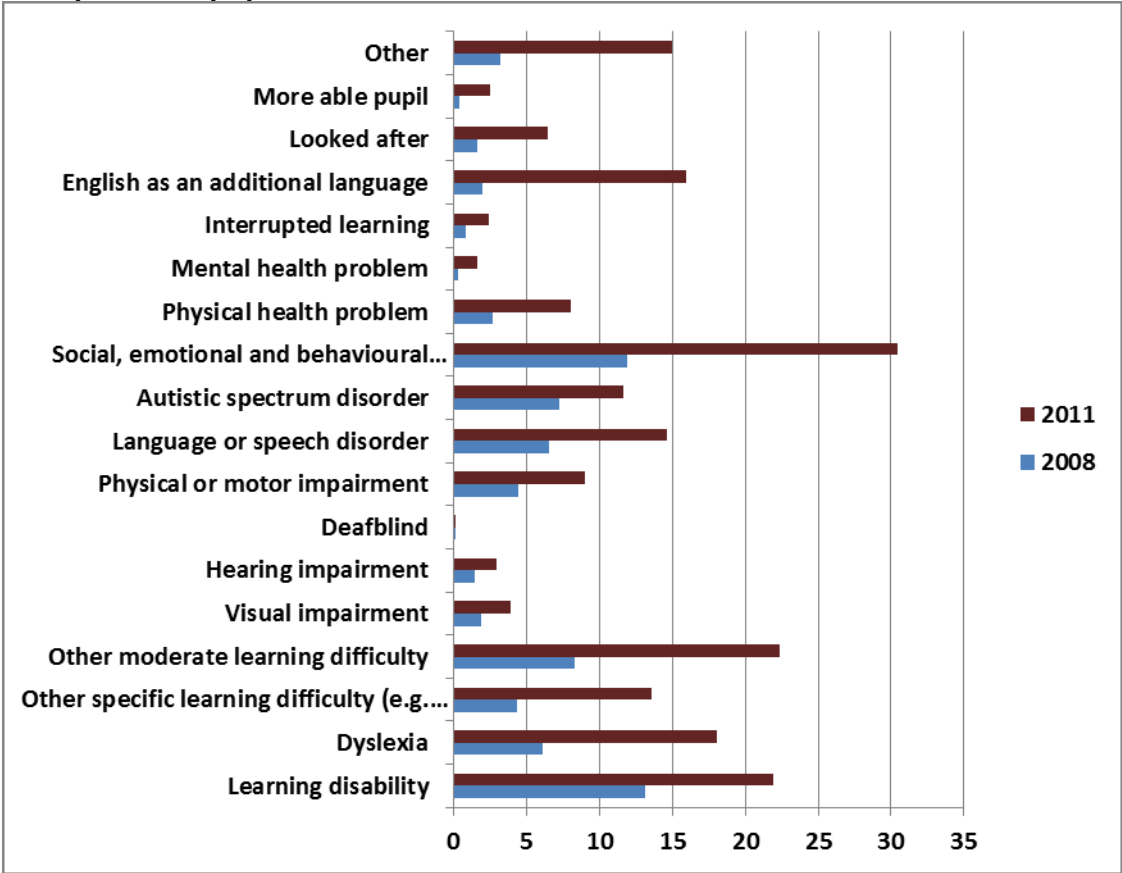
Source: Scottish Government, 2009 and 2011

The expansion of the use of the category of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties is particularly significant, given its particularly close association with social deprivation compared with other categories (see figure 6 below). This shows that all types of difficulty are more likely to be identified in the most deprived compared with the least deprived areas in Scotland. However, whereas normative difficulties such as physical and hearing impairment are only slightly more likely to be identified in poorer areas, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties are five times more likely to be identified in poorer neighbourhoods.

Figure 6: **Reason for support by SIMD quintiles[1], as proportion of those with the same ASN, 2011**
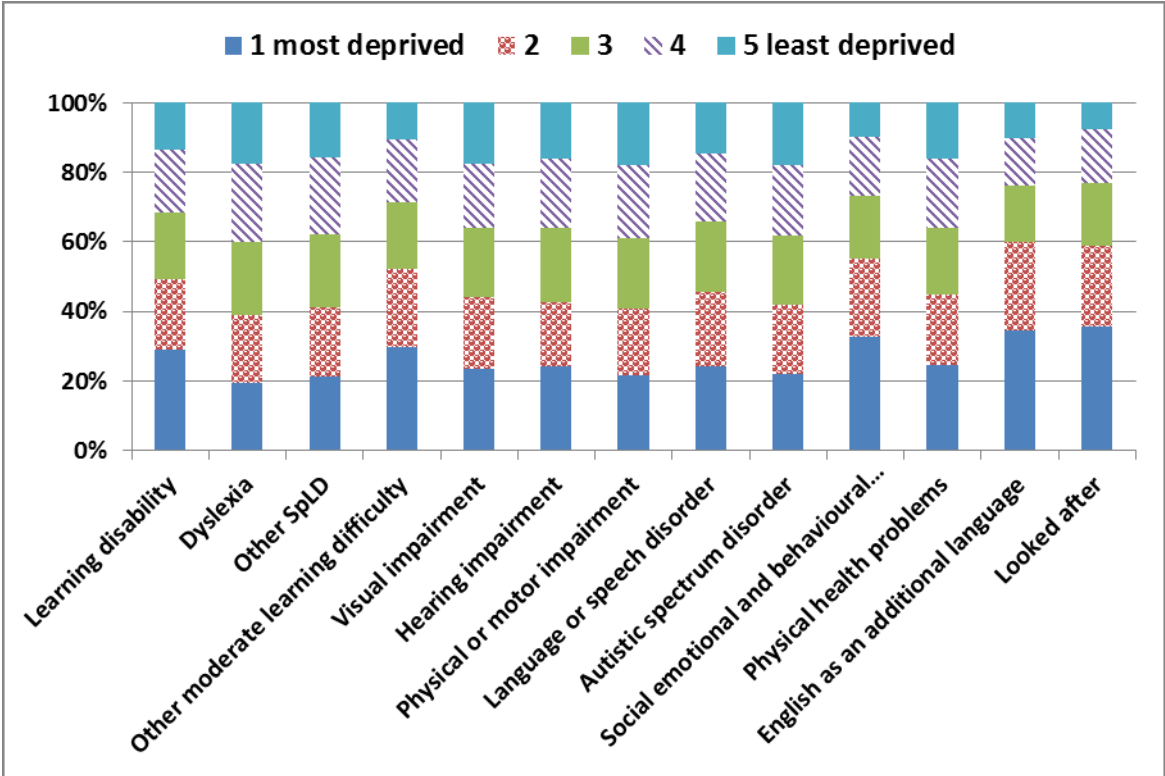

Scottish Government, data supplied by government statistics department, Feb. 2012
1.SIMD 2009 is used here

Variations in the identification of types of support need by local authority

The element of subjectivity in the identification of children's difficulties is evident in the major variation by local authority in relation to the proportion of children identified as having particular types of difficulty. Even within normative categories such as visual impairment, where one would expect similar incidence and a fairly high degree of commonality in identification, there are significant differences, with Stirling recording more than eight primary aged pupils per 1,000, whilst Edinburgh records only 1 per 1,000 (see figure 7). This suggests a much higher threshold for the identification of visual impairment in Edinburgh.

Figure 7:   Proportion of pupils known to each local authority with a visual impairment in mainstream schools, rate per 1000 by sector[1]
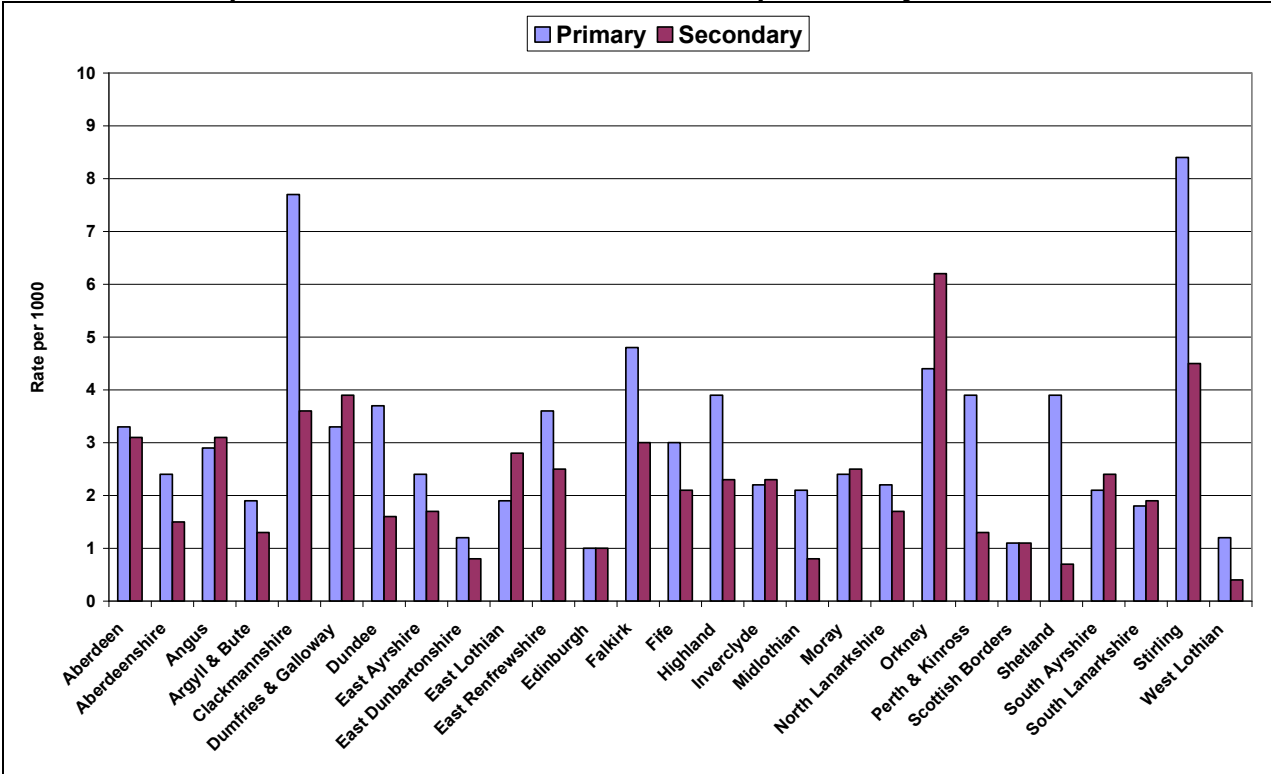
1. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0038/00387066.xls   (supplementary data 2011)

In relation to non-normative categories, such as social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), there is even wider variation across local authorities as can be seen in figure 8.

Figure 8: **Proportion of pupils known to each local authority with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in mainstream schools, rate per 1000 by sector[1]**
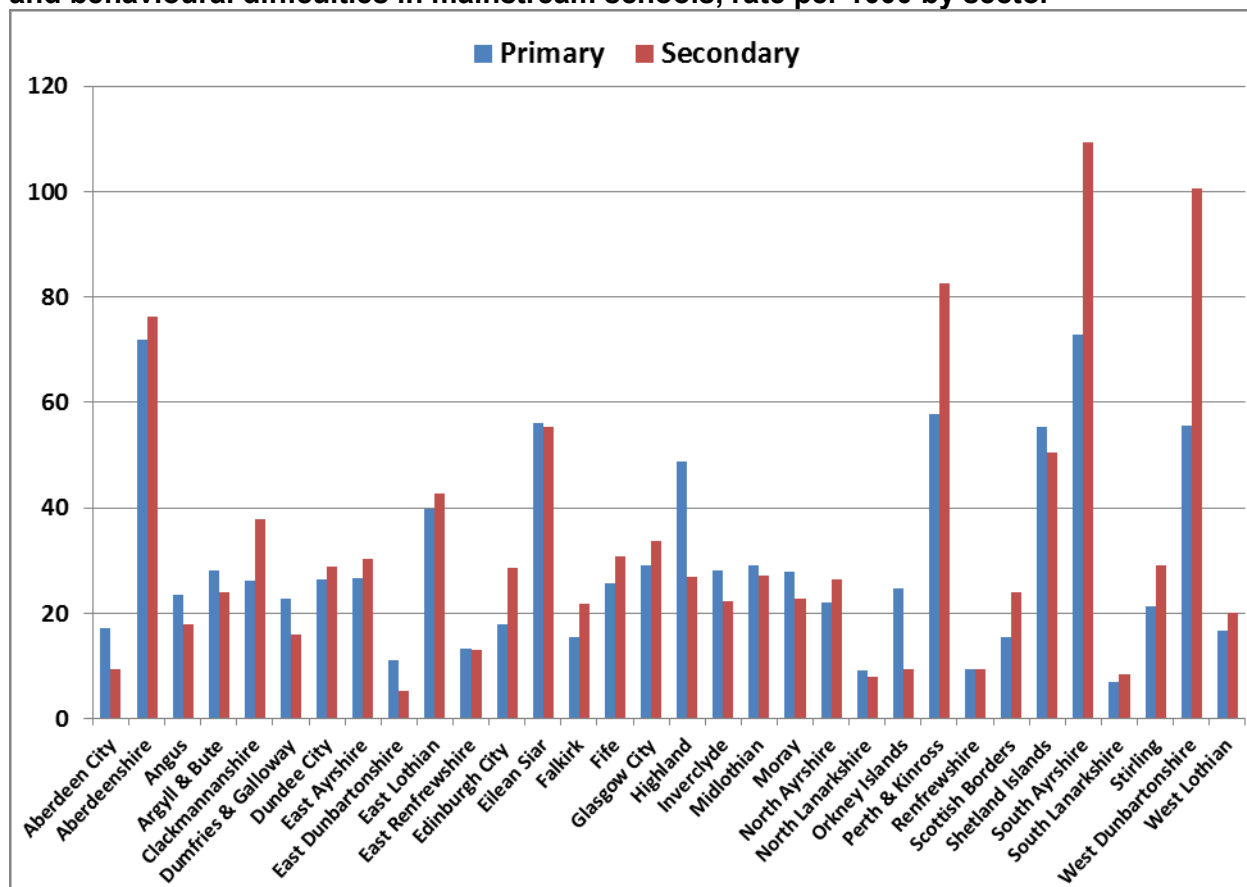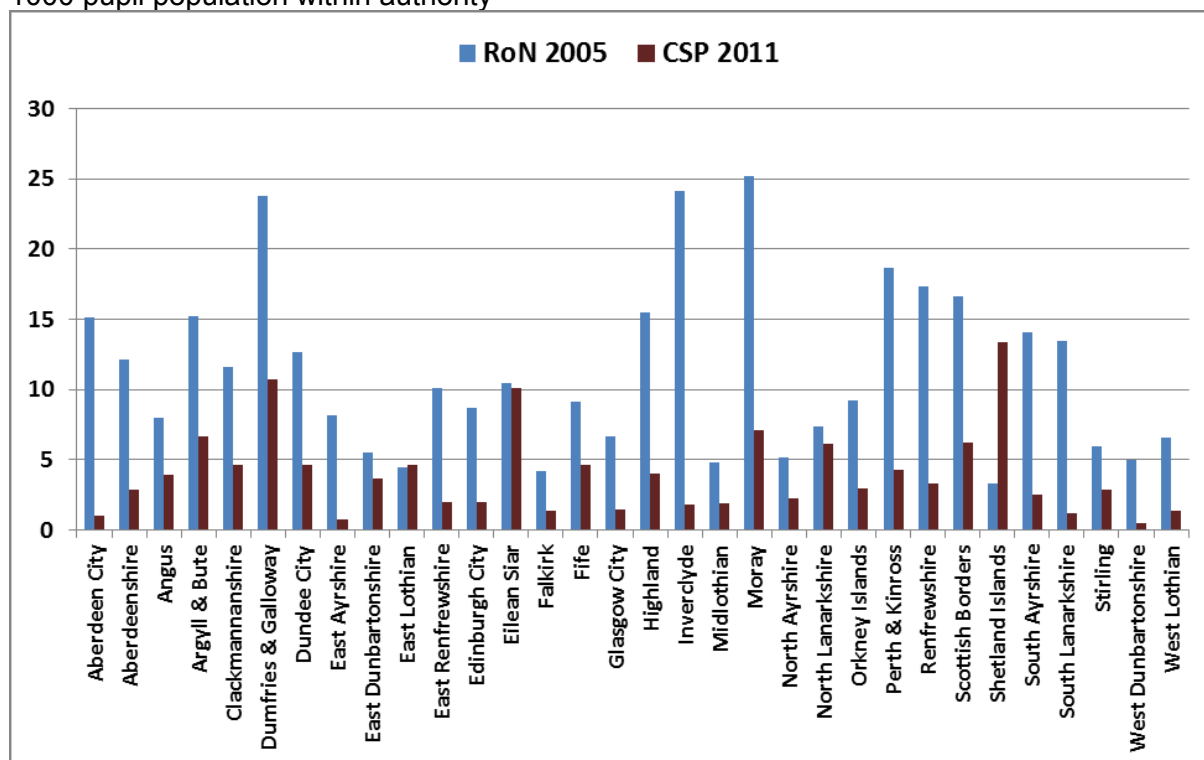

Source: Scottish Government, 2011

The declining use of statutory support plans

As discussed elsewhere (Riddell and Weedon, 2010), local authorities were extremely worried in the run-up to the implementation of the additional support for learning legislation because they feared that they would be compelled to assess and make expensive provision for a much wider group of children. They lobbied the Scottish Government to abolish the Record of Needs (RoN) (the statutory document recording the child's difficulties and the measures proposed to meet their needs) on the grounds that it was impossible for the local authority to commit resources to individual children. Bowing to pressure from parents, the Scottish Government at a belated point in the consultation proposed that a new statutory document, the Co-ordinated Support Plan, should replace the RoN. This document was intended to summarise the child's additional support needs and the measures proposed by education, health and social work. As noted above, parents or young people could seek redress through the tribunal or independent adjudication if they felt that the specified needs were not being met, although references to these bodies could only address educational provision. Since the passage of the legislation, although there has been an increase in the number of children identified as having additional support needs, there has been a decrease in the number and proportion of children with statutory plans (CSPs) compared with the number of children who, prior to the passage of the Additional Support for Learning legislation, had RoNs. In 2002, approximately 2% of the total pupil population had a RoN. At the time of writing, the proportion of pupils with a CSP was was less than 0.5% of the total pupil population. This is half the percentage that the government estimated when the legislation was introduced, and about one thirtieth of COSLA's estimate (the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities).

Figure 9: A comparison between RoNs in 2005 and CSPs in 2011 by local authority, rate per 1000 pupil population within authority

Source: Scottish Executive, 2006; Scottish Government, 2012, supplementary tables

As reported earlier, one of the problems with the RoN system reported by both local authorities and parents was the extent of local variation in their use, ranging from 0.3 per cent to 2.5 per cent of the pupil population. However, as illustrated by figure 9, the degree of variation between local authorities in relation to CSPs is much greater, ranging from 0.05 per cent of the pupil population in West Dunbartonshire to 1.3 per cent in Shetland. It has to be noted that Shetland has a small pupil population and a small fluctuation in the number of pupils with CSPs will affect the percentage to a greater extent than in larger authorities. However, it is worth noting that Shetland the proportion of pupils with CSPs in 2011 is greater than those with RoNs in 2005 and in Eilean Siar the proportion has remained constant. This in contrast to Inverclyde and Moray where there has been a considerable change with far fewer CSPs than RoNs. Overall, there has been a decrease in the use of statutory plans and there appears to have been an increase in local authority variation with regard to the use of CSPs.

The decline in the use of statutory plans since the passage of the additional support for learning legislation is important, since in order to open one of these plans it is obligatory to conduct a formal assessment which is likely to be multi-disciplinary and to record the additional support to be provided by health, education and social work. Given the ongoing reductions in local authority funding, it is unsurprising that fewer firm resource commitments to individual children are being made. Whilst there has been a major increase in the proportion of children labelled as having additional support needs, we do not know anything about the nature of the support which these children are receiving, nor its effectiveness.

Has the policy of inclusion led to a reduction in exclusions?

In Scotland, pupils may be temporarily excluded from school or, in 1% of cases, removed from the register. Figures on school exclusions document a trend towards a reduction in rates of exclusion since 2006 (Scottish Government, 2011).

Table 3: Cases of exclusion and rate per 1,000 pupils by type of exclusion, 2004/05 to 2010/11

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	201-11
Exclusions in total	**41,974**	**42,900**	**44,794**	**39,717**	**33,917**	**30,211**	**26,844**
Of which:							
Temporary exclusions	41,703	42,726	44,546	39,553	33,830	30,144	26,784
Removed from register	271	264	248	164	87	67	60
Exclusion rate per 1,000 pupils	**58.1**	**60.4**	**63.9**	**57.5**	**49.9**	**44.7**	**40.0**
Of which:	57.8	60.0	63.5	57.3	49.7	44.6	39.9
Temporary exclusions	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Removed from register							

Source: Scottish Government

Government data indicate a strong association between school exclusion, disability, additional support needs, being looked after by the local authority and deprivation (table 4).

Table 4: Cases of exclusion and rate per 1,000 pupils by looked after status, disability, additional support needs and Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD 2009), by sector, 2009 – 2011

	2009-10		2010-11	
	Cases of exclusions	Rate per 1,000 pupils	Cases of exclusions	Rate per 1,000 pupils
Assessed or declared disabled	798	70	N/A	N/A
Not assessed or declared disabled	29,114	44	N/A	N/A
Looked after by local authorities	3,875	355	N/A	N/A
Not looked after by local authorities	26,336	40	N/A	N/A
Pupils with Additional Support Needs	7,651	174	8,406	121
Pupils with no Additional Support Needs	22,261	35	18,267	30
Lowest 20% of SIMD (Most deprived)	13,076	91	11,372	79
Highest 20% of SIMD (Least deprived)	1,614	12	1,579	12

Source: Scottish Government 2011, Scottish Government, 2012

In its statistical bulletin on pupils in Scotland of 2011, the Scottish Government attributes this trend to 'the adoption of a wide range of approaches to manage behaviour and a range of provision beyond the classroom where needed for children with social, emotional and behavioural needs. Identification of behaviour issues and intervention at an early stage prevents the need for exclusions in many cases' (Scottish Government, 2011). However, there may be other reasons for this decrease. Dips in exclusions in 2002/03 and 2007/08 coincided with the publication of Scottish Government guidance on exclusion, strongly advising that it should be used as a very last resort. Additional requirements were placed on schools to document the processes which led up to exclusion and to institute meetings between the school and parents.

Recent reports from England (Children's Commissioner, 2012) and from Wales (Butler, 2011) document the existence of informal or illegal exclusion from school. Recent research conducted by Harris and Riddell (2011) on dispute resolution in England and Scotland also documented the

use of illegal exclusions of children with additional support needs, with parents being phoned up at work or home and requested to remove the child from school. Whilst illegal exclusions is, by its nature, under the radar, it is impossible to know to what extent the apparent drop in exclusion reflects the situation on the ground or is indicative of a growing trend towards unlawful exclusion.

Conclusion

Scottish education has generally been shaped by ideas rooted in meritocracy and universalism, with some focus on redistribution. Over the past decade and a half, there has been an increasing focus on the inclusion of children with additional support needs, with this principle enshrined in legislation passed in 2000. Official statistics have been used to demonstrate that children with additional support needs are increasingly being included in mainstream classes, and that fewer children are being excluded from school. There is little, evidence, however, to suggest that there has been a major transfer of children from special settings to mainstream, since the proportion in special schools and settings has remained constant for a long period of time, and indeed may be slightly increasing.

Since the passage of the additional support for learning legislation, official statistics suggest there has been a quadrupling of children identified as having additional support needs. However, this has been achieved by widening the definition of which children are counted, so that now children with any type of plan are included. It is important to note that at the same time as the proportion of pupils with additional support needs has expanded, the proportion of those with a statutory support plan has diminished. This is significant, because a statutory support plan is perceived as providing some guarantee of additional resources and stronger rights of redress. So whilst there has been a major expansion of the additional support needs population, the extent to which these children are actually receiving additional resources is uncertain.

How can we explain this expansion? This is a question to be explored in the key informant interviews to be conducted in the second part of this research. Scottish government informants might suggest that the growth of the additional support needs population indicates the success of the inclusion policies pursued by successive administrations, with the goal of identifying and meeting the needs of all children with learning difficulties in mainstream schools. An alternative explanation might be offered by Sally Tomlinson, who discussed an earlier expansion of the special needs system in the 1980s. In a 1985 paper, Tomlinson suggested that the expansion might be attributed to professional vested interest, comprehensive school dilemmas and the declining youth labour market. Analysis of the consultation process leading up to the passage of the additional support for learning legislation suggests that local authorities and education professionals were enthusiastic about the idea of an expanded ASN population, using humanitarian arguments relation to individual needs which, Tomlinson suggests, may act as a smoke screen for professional self-interest. The expansion may clearly be seen as a response to the dilemmas of the comprehensive school system. Scotland is anxious about its declining performance in PISA tests relative to England and other developed countries. The new national curriculum, Curriculum for Excellence, is based on the assumption that, rather than offering the same academic curriculum to all children in comprehensive schools, some children should be steered into vocational courses which will better meet these needs. Critics of the new curriculum, such as Paterson (2009) suggest that it might be seen as a major departure from the Scottish tradition of democratic intellectualism, which was based on the principle that all children, irrespective of their social background, should have access to high status knowledge. Finally, the identification of growing numbers of children with learning deficits, particular clustered into the non-normative and highly stigmatised category of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, may be used as an explanation and justification of their lack of employment. This may be a useful deflection of attention from the main source of the problem, which is the collapse of the youth labour market across Europe in the wake of the on-going crisis of capitalism. In 1985, Tomlinson suggested that the concept of special needs may have become an ideological rationalisation which obfuscates the educational, political and economic needs actually served by the expansion. The same argument might be used in relation to the current expansion of the additional support needs population in Scotland.

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