

Mixed messages on ASN support



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PRIOR to the passage of the Additional Support for Learning Act in 2004, about two per cent of pupils in Scotland had a statutory support plan.

When the co-ordinated support plan (CSP) replaced the record of needs (RoN) in 2004, the Scottish Government promised there would be no decline in the proportion of children receiving them.

This has clearly not been the case. Since 2011, there has been a year-on-year reduction in the number of CSPs opened, and if this trend continues they may virtually disappear.

Should we be concerned? Our research, conducted over the past 30 years, suggests ongoing tensions between local authority and parental views of CSPs.

Councils are largely unconcerned about the decline in the use of CSPs, regarding

them as cumbersome and time-consuming.

A number of councils question parental and children's rights to mount legal challenges through the Additional Support Needs Tribunals for Scotland and are unhappy about the allocation of resources to individual children.

Local authorities argue they prefer to use other types of plan, such as Child's Plans, despite the fact these are not specifically education enforceable rights associated with them.

Parents, on the other hand, believe statutory plans are important to ensure children's needs are properly assessed, recorded and reviewed.

There are mixed messages from the Government on the importance of CSPs. In 2009, new duties were placed on councils to provide CSPs for looked after children and, in 2018, a range of new rights were given to children aged 12-15, including the right to request a CSP.

At the same time, the Government has failed to ensure

councils fulfil their existing duties, effectively ignoring the declining use of CSPs.

At a time when budgets are being squeezed, a number of changes are needed.

Firstly, the qualification criteria for a CSP should be simplified, so that a child should be entitled to a statutory support plan if they require support not normally available in school.

Secondly, there should be training for local authority and school staff, so there is better understanding of the system in general, including statutory entitlements.

Finally, the delegation to schools of responsibility for drawing up and reviewing CSPs has clearly not worked, and there needs to be a team within each council with clear responsibility for the administration of CSPs. In the current social and economic context, statutory plans are more important than ever to support the rights of children with ASN and their families.

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