

Discussion Paper: Specialist school-age childcare services supporting children with disabilities, complex needs and additional support needs

September 2022

SOSCN Specialist Services Forum

SOSCN oversees a forum for specialist out of school care (OSC) services supporting children with a variety of disabilities, complex and additional support needs. Currently the group has representation from the following services: COJAC (Glasgow), Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (FCSS) (Aberdeenshire & Highland), Lincluden OSC (Dumfries & Galloway), Saturday Café (Glasgow), SHiP (Perth & Kinross), Sight Scotland (Edinburgh), SNAP (Highland), SupERkids (East Renfrewshire), and the Yard (Edinburgh, Fife & Dundee). Over time we intend to expand membership of this group to include other specialist services supporting children with disabilities, ASN and complex needs.

This paper draws on discussions and input from the forum, and highlights particular issues faced by specialist services. Whilst many of these are also common in mainstream services, they are more acutely felt within specialist services. It should also be noted that aspects of this discussion paper can relate to mainstream services which provide support for children with disabilities and ASN.

Not just an anti-poverty issue- it is one of rights and equality

Many families where there are children with disabilities, complex or additional support needs, face additional and costly expenses. Often, due to a lack of any or affordable specialist support, parents are unable to take up employment; this in turn means that many such families are living in poverty. Although being able to access specialist services relates to anti-poverty initiatives it is more fundamentally a rights and equality issue- we believe all children, and their families, should be able to access appropriate childcare regardless of their needs, family's economic status or household location.

Furthermore, there already exists a legal obligation for local authorities to provide services and support to disabled children, unfortunately all too often this does not appear to be met in local authorities across Scotland. Under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995,

“Local authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in their area and, so far as is consistent with that duty, promote the upbringing of children in need by their families by providing a range and level of services appropriate to the children's needs.” (p29 Scotland's Children. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance).

The guidance further states,

“The local authority itself is unlikely to provide all the services which may be needed by children with or affected by disability in an area. Local authorities

should promote and make use of the voluntary and private sectors in providing services, taking into account local circumstances.” (P30)

Funding

Delivering specialist childcare services costs more per place than mainstream childcare due to higher staffing ratios, specialist equipment, specialist transport etc. The true cost per place cannot be charged to parents, therefore services are required to access additional grant funding which are time-consuming application, monitoring and evaluation processes.

General funding to all childcare services through national and local governments (and also some other funding and grant awarding bodies) often has a cap on grant applications which does not recognise the higher costs associated with running specialist services/delivery of specialist places, therefore a grant of £10,000 in a mainstream service does not go as far in a specialist service. This is not equitable- grant programmes must be mindful of (and therefore flexible to) the additional costs associated with providing support for children with disabilities, complex and additional support needs.

Staffing

Across childcare we know that there is a crisis in terms of recruitment and retention, this however is more acutely felt in specialist services where mainstream ratios do not apply: children will require more adult support. Ratios could be 1 member of staff to 3 children, 1:2, 1:1 or even 2:1 etc. Staffing shortages therefore have a corresponding effect on the numbers of children which can be supported. Currently, children with higher staffing support requirements may not be able to access services as from a business model perspective the service may not be able to accommodate the child.

Capacity and demand

As mentioned above, staffing shortages affect the number of places that can be provided. However, even if there were a full staffing complement in place, demand currently outstrips capacity – all services report that they have a waiting list for places. Furthermore, many services report that service users often travel considerable distances to access their service demonstrating a lack of, but need for, locally-based specialist childcare services across the country.

Premises

Most of the specialist services have their own premises with indoor and outdoor spaces designed and adapted specifically to meet the children's needs, however, some are based within shared spaces. Mainstream childcare can be difficult to provide in shared spaces (schools, community centres etc) however this is magnified when delivering services to children with disabilities, complex needs and ASN due to the need for additional resources and equipment. There needs to be more dedicated premises and spaces both in terms of premises but also in the wider community eg. playparks, access to leisure spaces etc.

Resources

As highlighted above specialist services require additional equipment and resources to meet the needs of the children which all creates pressure on finances and space.

Transport

For families and services without their own transport, it can be difficult for children to access the service and for services to take children on trips and outings due to costs, lack of suitable vehicles, or a lack of direct travel routes. Local authorities sometimes provide transport support to families and services, however, this kind of support seems to be in decline. The specialist childcare services need to be included within local authority transport plans and services for children with disabilities both term-time and holiday.

Training

In SOSCN's most recent annual workforce survey, ASN training was identified as a focus for workforce development. The workforce in mainstream services, in particular, are looking for further skills to support children- what is available is limited, often difficult to access and expensive.

Registration with Care Inspectorate & SSSC

'Daycare of children' registration with the Care Inspectorate does not sufficiently or accurately reflect the level of support and practice within specialist services, neither does the corresponding qualification requirements within the SSSC. Specialist childcare services supporting children and young adults (beyond the age of 18) require a different legal definition and associated qualifications. Some services which provide care for children below and above 18 years of age have had to register as a 'support service' meaning that the childcare element of their work is not recognised, and these services were ineligible for additional financial support during the COVID pandemic.

Rurality

Delivering mainstream group childcare can be difficult to deliver in rural areas due to costs, transportation, staffing, premises etc and it is more acutely felt in the delivery of specialist childcare places. A recent report by the Scottish Government highlighted the lack of specialist provision, and the difficulties of delivering these services despite there being a demand in rural areas.

Recommendations:

- Delivery of, and access to, specialist childcare services for children with disabilities, additional support and complex needs should be recognised as a rights and equality issue, and not solely linked to anti-poverty initiatives.
- Local authorities need to be held accountable, under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, for any lack of specialist support services.
- Specialist services should be a funding priority and any funding needs to recognise the higher costs associated with delivering such services.

- Greater recognition of, and access, to affordable and relevant training and qualifications.
- Guaranteed access to specialist childcare services in all local authorities and locally to families who require them, this includes rural locations.
- A review of Care Inspectorate registration options for specialist services.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Weblinks to services:

COJAC	https://cojacentre.co.uk
FCSS	https://www.fcss.org.uk/our-settings/
Saturday Café	https://saturdaycafe.co.uk
SHiP	https://www.ship-perthshire.co.uk
Sight Scotland	https://sightscotland.org.uk/kidscene
SNAP	https://snapinverness.org.uk
SupERkids	https://superkids.org.uk
The Yard	https://www.theyardscotland.org.uk

Reading:

Children (Scotland) Act 1995

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/36/contents>

Scotland's Children. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2004/10/scotlands-children-children-scotland-act-1995-regulations-guidance-volume-1-support-protection-children-families/documents/0023700-pdf/0023700-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/0023700.pdf>

In May, the Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities (SCLD) published research with parents of children with learning disabilities as to their experiences of using early learning and childcare services. Although the report does not consider school-age childcare, the issues resonate with school age childcare.

Building Blocks: Exploring the barriers and facilitators to Early Learning and childcare for children with learning disabilities in Scotland.

<https://www.sclد.org.uk/sclد-launches-early-years-report/>

References

Scottish Government (2022), 'Assessing school age childcare in rural and island areas'

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/assessing-school-age-childcare-rural-island-areas/>

Scottish Out of School Care Network, (2022) 'Workforce Survey 2021 Results'

<https://soscn.org/downloads/research/osc-workforce-survey-results-2021.pdf>