



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Charities welcome commitment to improve support for autistic learners with initiatives, including enhanced Professional Learning for all teachers

Three Scottish charities have welcomed new measures developed in partnership with the Scottish Government (SG), the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), Education Scotland (ES) and the Scottish Council of Deans of Education (SCDE) to improve autism awareness and training within schools and educational settings. The measures are a direct outcome of the findings from the ground-breaking *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved* report, published in 2018.

Children in Scotland, the National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism have worked with the Scottish Government and partners to agree a number of changes that will ensure new teachers receive a common baseline of content on autism during their initial teacher education (ITE) programmes. This will form part of the most comprehensive set of measures anywhere in the UK to ensure all teachers have access to the most up to date information on how to support autistic learners.

The announcement by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP, comes following Children in Scotland, National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism's *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved* campaign that found a third of parents surveyed had their child unlawfully excluded from school in the last two years. A lack of knowledge in how to best support and include autistic children in education was cited as the primary reason for these exclusions.

The measures agreed with the Scottish Government, GTCS, ES, SCDE and the three charities include:

- Revisions to the framework used by the GTCS to accredit programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Accreditation will require an outline of how a programme is designed to develop and promote equality and diversity with a specific reference to a range of neuro-development differences, including autism.
- Inclusion of reference to the key areas of additional support needs, including autism, within the revised GTCS Professional Standards for Teachers which are to be used from summer 2021. These Standards set the benchmark for what is expected of teachers and which support their professional learning. GTCS has recently published a Professional Guide for registrants on autism to support its revised Professional Standards.
- Development of a common baseline of content on autism during the delivery of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes.
- HM Inspectors continuing to consider how well the needs of all children and young people with additional support needs, which includes autistic learners and their specific needs, are being met.



- Ongoing development of the 'Autism toolbox' for new and more experienced teachers. <http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/>
- Creation of a community of good practice sharing in autism across the country for education professionals.
- Creation of an implementation group to support embedding these changes.

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP, said: "I am pleased to publish our autism action plan which has been developed in partnership with a number of organisations, including Children In Scotland, the National Autistic Society Scotland, Scottish Autism, Education Scotland, the General Teaching Council for Scotland and the Scottish Council of Deans of Education.

"Despite the challenges of the pandemic, a significant amount of work has already been undertaken by our partner organisations and I thank them for their exceptional efforts in recent months. Through this collaborative working we will ensure that our autistic learners have the right support in place at the right time to improve their educational experiences."

Suzanne is a mother of an autistic son and has been involved in the *Not Included* campaign. Her son Callum was initially excluded (a decision now overturned) but is now being well supported in his high school. Suzanne says: "Autism awareness training for teachers would make a huge difference – at the moment there is a lot of emphasis on when things go wrong, outbursts or meltdowns for example – it's important however that things don't get to this stage. Autism awareness training would help teachers create a better teaching environment, avoiding sensory over stimulation and understanding the importance of keeping calm. In the past if Callum got upset – teachers got upset too and things became a vicious circle. Thankfully things are now going well for Callum and staff are much better at supporting him and involving me in discussions. It now feels like they are working with me not against me."

Sally Cavers Head of Inclusion at Children in Scotland, said: "Children in Scotland has welcomed the response to the *Not Included* report, including this announcement and the way organisations have worked together to secure these significant changes. However, it is critical for autistic children and children with additional support needs that we also focus on the other areas identified in the report to make sure we are doing our very best for children in our education system. This is especially true now following a very challenging year in relation to learning for many children and young people with additional support needs."

Nick Ward, Director of National Autistic Society Scotland, said: "This package of changes will be life-changing for pupils and new teachers alike. It is the most comprehensive approach to ensuring high quality autistic education for new teachers in the UK and will ensure that hundreds of autistic children will have a better school experience. We welcome today's announcement and thank the Deputy First Minister and all of the organisations involved. We must now ensure that all teachers have the opportunity to undertake the training and that it is informed fully by the experiences of autistic children and their parents."



Charlene Tait, Deputy Chief Executive Officer at Scottish Autism, said: “As an organisation that has been calling for greater support and resources for those teaching autistic children, we warmly welcome this commitment from the Scottish Government. We know that hundreds of autistic children are not receiving an education that meets their needs, which is detrimental to both their education and their overall well-being. It is therefore essential that teachers are able to build an understanding during their initial teacher training of how autistic children think and learn. This training and knowledge has the potential to make significant improvements in the educational experiences of autistic children, however there is still much to be done.”

As part of the charities' *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved* report published in September 2018, a survey of 1,417 parents and carers of autistic children revealed that many autistic children were not receiving the support they need to succeed at school and achieve their potential.

- More than a third (34%) of respondents said their autistic child had been unlawfully excluded in the last two years - with almost a quarter (22%) saying this happened multiple times a week.
- 13% of respondents said their autistic child had been formally excluded from school in the last two years.
- 28% of respondents said their autistic child had been placed on a part-time timetable in the last two years.
- 85% of respondents said their autistic child did not receive support to catch up on work they had missed.
- 72% of respondents felt that school staff having a better understanding of how their child's autism affects them, including their communication needs, could have helped their child.

(ENDS)

Notes to editors:

For more information, please contact Bill Shaw, PR Consultant for Scottish Autism at bill@billshaw.uk.com (mobile 07974 720669) or Rob Holland at the National Autistic Society Scotland at rob.holland@nas.org.uk or by calling 079 5805 7363.

About the *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved* report and campaign:

- The full report is available at www.notengaged.com
- A total of 1,417 survey responses were received, with responses from every local authority in Scotland.
- Results are of a self-selecting sample of parents whose children had experience of missing time from school in the last two years.



About the partners:

- Children in Scotland is the leading national charity working to improve children's lives. Its vision is that all children have an equal chance to flourish. Children in Scotland manages Enquire, the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning. www.childreninscotland.org.uk
- The National Autistic Society Scotland is a leading charity for autistic people in Scotland and their families. They provide local specialist help, information and care across Scotland to autistic people, their families and carers. Their Education Rights Service provides impartial, confidential information, advice and support on education rights and entitlements. www.autism.org.uk
- Scottish Autism is an organisation dedicated to enriching the lives of autistic people. They are the largest provider of autism-specific services in Scotland, providing a wide range of innovative support for children and adults, including a residential school for autistic pupils in Alloa. Across all of their services there is a focus on improving quality of life. www.scottishautism.org

What is autism?

- Autism is a lifelong disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world.
- There are approximately 56,000 autistic people in Scotland.
- According to the Scottish Government there are over 6500 school age autistic children.
- All autistic people have difficulties with communication and social interaction.
- Autism is a spectrum condition. This means autistic people have their own strengths and varying and complex needs, from 24-hour care to simply needing clearer communication and a little longer to do things at work and school.
- Although everyone is different, people on the autism spectrum may:
 - be under or oversensitive to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light or colours, which can make everyday life extremely difficult
 - be unable to or find it harder to speak, need longer to process information or find it hard to hold conversations
 - experience intense anxiety around unexpected change and in social situations
 - become so overwhelmed that they experience debilitating physical and emotional 'meltdowns' or 'shutdowns'.
- Without the right support or understanding, autistic people can miss out on an education, struggle to find work and become extremely isolated.