

Not included, not engaged, not involved:

A report on the experiences of autistic children missing school

Thank you for supporting *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved* – here's your update

In September 2018 we launched [Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved](#), a report on the experiences of autistic children who have missed school. In that report we made nine recommendations which, if listened to and implemented, will have a positive impact of the educational experiences of all autistic children.

Here's what we've been doing since September to make sure our recommendations are met!

October	<p>The Cross Party Group on Autism had a special meeting on education. Cross party groups are an opportunity for politicians from all parties to come together to learn about issues and discuss what can be done.</p> <p>This meeting was convened by Annie Wells MSP, and attended by the deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP, Alexander Burnett MSP, Daniel Johnson MSP, Johann Lamont MSP and Mark McDonald MSP. We are very grateful to the autistic people and family members who shared their stories during the meeting.</p>
November	<p>Representatives from our three charities met with the Mr Swinney to discuss Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved.</p>
December	<p>Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved was debated in Scottish Parliament. This was a really exciting day for us and MSPs had so much to say that the debate was extended by half an hour! Mr Swinney stated that the Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved report had given him “pause for thought and has resulted in my holding back the publication of the updated mainstreaming guidance to make sure that we properly address the issues that are raised in the report.”</p> <p>Also in December we met with Mr Swinney to give him an open letter, which was signed by almost 3,000 supporters like you.</p>
January	<p>A debate was held in the Scottish Parliament to examine the policy of mainstreaming in education, in which Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved was cited. This shows that momentum is really building around the issue.</p>
February	<p>Next week Mr Swinney is visiting one of our supporters, Suzanne, to hear about her son's experience at school. Suzanne has a really powerful story and we are pleased that Mr Swinney is making time to meet with her and understand how the statistics in our report have affected real people.</p>

At the end of this month, Mr Swinney is hosting a meeting to discuss whether autism training is needed for teachers and what it should look like. That meeting will be attended by representatives from the Scottish Government, the General Teaching Council Scotland, Education Scotland, COSLA and The Educational Institute of Scotland, among others. We think it's a really important step forward in our campaign.

You can find information on Mr Swinney's response to our open letter – and our thoughts on what he has said – below. Like us, you may feel it is a disappointing response from the person who has the power to create an education system that truly does it right for every child in Scotland.

We have now met with Mr Swinney four times in the past five months to discuss [Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved](#). That's a real achievement and we are grateful to all of our campaign supporters for helping to make those meetings happen. We know that Mr Swinney is listening! But now we need him to take action. And our three charities will keep campaigning until he does.

Yours sincerely,

Children in Scotland

The National Autistic Society Scotland

Scottish Autism

PS Would you like to tell us what you think of Mr Swinney's response to the open letter? Or about your family's experience of the education system? We are always looking for stories to support our campaign. Please email your story to contact@notengaged.com

For information: by contacting this email address, you are agreeing for your information to be processed by Scottish Autism and shared with the National Autistic Society and Children In Scotland, solely for the purposes of the Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved campaign.

What we asked for	What Mr Swinney said	What we think
Stop unlawful exclusions.	<p>“Unlawful exclusion is completely unacceptable and should not be used under any circumstances.”</p> <p>He also says that the Scottish Government's school exclusion guidance has recently been updated.</p>	<p>We agree with Mr Swinney's statement, but his statement alone does not and will not stop this unlawful practice from happening. He needs to take action.</p> <p>We are interested in what impact the revised guidance will have, and will seek reassurance in how it will be monitored in relation to unlawful exclusions. We would also like to know if the experiences of autistic people fed into this update.</p>
Reduce the number of formal exclusions of children with additional support needs.	<p>Mr Swinney acknowledges that the rate of exclusion per 1,000 pupils who have additional support needs is more than four times higher than those who have no additional support needs, and says that he wants to reduce this disparity.</p> <p>Again, he highlights the updated school exclusion guidance and stated all exclusions should be recorded.</p>	<p>While Mr Swinney talks about taking steps to reduce exclusions, he doesn't acknowledge our request for schools to be provided with resources to support this (these already exist for schools in England and can be easily and inexpensively replicated).</p> <p>Mr Swinney says all exclusions should be recorded, but we know this isn't happening and he doesn't say what he will do to make sure it happens going forward.</p>

<p>Improve the availability of specialist teachers.</p>	<p>Mr Swinney says that overall teacher numbers have increased and mentions the number of pupil support assistants employed in Scotland's schools.</p>	<p>His response doesn't answer our call. We specifically called for an increase in the number of support for learning teachers.</p> <p>We appreciate that the number of support staff in schools has increased but feel that pupils, staff and the school community also need the support of staff who have a responsibility for planning and adapting learning support.</p> <p>We are disappointed that Mr Swinney does not give the number of specialist teacher numbers. We believe the numbers were not commented on as we know there has been a drop in specialist teachers. In fact they are the lowest number of these teachers since 2010.</p>
<p>Review the availability of appropriate placements for autistic children.</p>	<p>Mr Swinney says that parents, carers and young people themselves can make placing requests.</p> <p>He states that placements should be about "how best the child's needs will be meet."</p> <p>Mr Swinney also highlights that draft guidance on the presumption to mainstream education was paused, due to him wanting to reflect on our reports findings.</p>	<p>We are very clear about the entitlement of parents, carers and young people to make a placing request but are also keenly aware that placing requests vary significantly in outcome and in some areas the initial decision is predominantly a rejection.</p> <p>Mr Swinney says that placements are about how best to meet their child's need, but families tell us that placing decisions are often based on costs.</p> <p>We also know that the timings of placing request decisions are often difficult for children and young people in terms of good educational and transition planning.</p> <p>While placing request decisions can be challenged, it is largely our experience that this is a route that parents do not wish to take because it is stressful and time-consuming.</p> <p>With regards to the draft guidance on mainstreaming, we want to know what is happening with this pause, its process, and how we can work with the Scottish Government on this important issue.</p>

<p>Enhanced teacher training both for new and current teachers to improve their understanding of autism.</p>	<p>Mr Swinney says that student teachers gain sufficient knowledge of the most common additional support needs (including autism), and that existing teachers have a requirement to undertake continuing professional development (which could include autism).</p> <p>He also makes reference to the Autism Toolbox, which is being refreshed, and refers to the development of an online module to support school staff in their 'understanding of inclusive practice'.</p>	<p>We are most disappointed with this response.</p> <p>We are aware that most teacher training universities include elements of autism awareness in their inclusion or additional support needs module, but we are calling for this to be consistent and mandatory.</p> <p>While we appreciate that many condition-specific organisations make regular requests for relevant training to be included in Initial Teacher Education, it is our belief that student teachers do not currently gain enough knowledge of the most common additional support needs (including autism).</p> <p>We believe that, due to the prevalence of autism and the evidence supporting the pedagogical approach to best support pupils, a specific focus on autism in Initial Teacher Education is essential.</p>
<p>Introduce a minimum number of hours of education for children who are out of school.</p>	<p>Mr Swinney states that there has never been a minimum number of hours provision in place when children are not in school education.</p> <p>He says that the Additional Support for Learning Act requires local authorities to meet needs of individual children, rather than have prescribed set of hours.</p>	<p>Previous guidance for children who are unable to attend school due to ill health indicated that they should expect 3-7 hours of education per week. As a result of the research carried out and extensive conversations with families, it is our understanding that this guidance provided a very helpful reference point for planning.</p> <p>We will speak to families again to determine whether the guidance in the Additional Support for Learning Act provides enough encouragement for local authorities to provide an education out of school.</p>
<p>Improve access to online learning.</p>	<p>Mr Swinney says that it is the responsibility of local authorities to provide education to pupils outside of school when they are excluded.</p> <p>He references GLOW, the Scottish Government funded online learning platform.</p>	<p>We don't believe that GLOW is the answer. We need to guarantee the quality of online, out of school learning so that those who are out of school do not miss out on their education.</p> <p>We want to work with the Scottish Government and local authorities to undertake an audit of the available online tools.</p>
<p>Take a whole school approach to raise awareness and understanding of pupils with additional support needs, including autism.</p>	<p>Mr Swinney states that implementing the curriculum is the responsibility of local authorities.</p> <p>He also mentions the Autism Toolbox and online module (as discussed above.)</p>	<p>We believe that the Scottish Government needs to show more leadership and direction on this issue. While it is right that local authorities are responsible for implementing the curriculum, Scottish Government should set standards for how autism is discussed in schools.</p>

<p>Raise awareness of children's rights to additional support for learning with children, young people and families.</p>	<p>Mr Swinney highlights that the Scottish Government funds Enquire, a helpline for advice about additional support for learning.</p> <p>He goes on to say that local authorities have a duty to publish their additional support for learning policies.</p>	<p>As our report highlighted, data from the Enquire helpline shows that most of its enquiries relate to autism – 46% of all enquiries in 2017.</p> <p>In addition, the National Autistic Society Scotland's Education Rights Service supported 377 families in 2017-18, with 57% stating that they had concerns around the support that was being provided by their school or the local education authority.</p> <p>The need for both these services highlights that families in Scotland do not fully understand their rights.</p> <p>We believe local authorities need to do more to ensure their additional support for learning policies are published clearly, prominently and in an accessible way.</p>
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