# Mothers advocate for better support in Scotland's education system for ASN children



Rebecca Smith, Natalie Blue, and Lamond—three mothers advocating for families of children with additional support needs (ASN)—have come together to highlight the challenges they face in Scotland’s education system. Through their organisation, Empower:ED Scotland, they are working to address what they describe as a "crisis" in support for ASN families, amplified by recent government austerity measures impacting disabled individuals and rising discrimination against ASN children.

The alarming rise in the number of children diagnosed with conditions such as autism coincides with a significant decline in the resources available in schools. The proportion of children with ASN has soared to approximately 40.5% in Scotland, a figure that has doubled since 2014. Yet, during the same period, the number of teachers trained to support these children has diminished, with the teacher-to-student ratio worsening from 1 to 40 in 2013 to 1 to 89 in 2023.

“The temperature has dropped,” said Lamond, who recounted her struggles as a learning disability nurse and a parent of an autistic daughter. She explained how mainstream schools, which many children with ASN are supposed to attend under the policy of inclusion, have failed to meet their unique needs. She illustrated the detrimental effects this can have on their well-being, stating, “Her education broke down. She was out of school for years. The school environment just didn’t meet her needs.”

Blue shared her experiences with her six-year-old son, who has autism, and described the trauma he endured in mainstream education. “He’s been out of school for more than a year,” she stated, emphasising the emotional toll on both the children and their families. Smith, a teacher who requested anonymity, echoed this sentiment, detailing how her own son faced isolation during his nursery years, leading to substantial regressions in his development.

The trio advocates for the development of "intermediate schools," an educational model that would bridge the gap between special and mainstream schools. Lamond noted that, despite their pressing needs, no such institutions exist in Scotland. “Children like her daughter just aren’t able to cope in a mainstream setting. They suffer sensory overload. It can be hell on Earth for them,” she explained, highlighting the importance of tailored educational environments.

The plight of ASN children is compounded by systemic issues and societal stigma, with parents often feeling alienated and powerless. The parents described an experience of continuous fighting against inadequate systems, sometimes yielding little more than "box-ticking exercises." Blue explains, “It took from January to September last year to assemble a multidisciplinary meeting about my son’s education. But he’s still out of school. It's a systemic problem.”

The negative impacts of mainstream education extend beyond academic performance, with many ASN children facing mental health challenges as a direct result of their experiences in school. Lamond remarked that “the system is making children unwell at the cost of an inclusion ethos,” as increasing cuts to state support, totalling £5 billion, were seen as exacerbating poverty among disabled populations.

While the Australian government faces criticism for its austerity measures, recent comments by UK Health Secretary Wes Streeting regarding the "overdiagnosis" of mental health issues have heightened concerns among families. Lamond described such rhetoric as part of a broader “stigmatising” trend directed at the disabled community.

Furthermore, the parents pointed out that mainstream education often fails to properly support ASN children, resulting in behavioural issues that are mischaracterised as misconduct. “We’re supposed to be giving children an education which ties in with their needs and abilities," Kieran stated, reflecting the frustrations of many ASN parents who argue that the current system is not only detrimental to their children’s education but also to their mental health.

The ongoing battle for adequate support and services illustrates the need for policy reform to better accommodate the growing number of ASN children in Scotland. As Lamond succinctly put it, "the pathway through the education system [is] horrendous … It’s draining."

In summary, parents like Smith, Blue, and Lamond articulate a compelling call for significant changes in the educational landscape for ASN children. They call for intermediate schools, additional resources, and systemic reforms that adequately address the needs of these children, all while battling societal perceptions that marginalise their experiences.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.gov.scot/policies/schools/additional-support-for-learning/> - This link provides information on additional support for learning in Scotland, highlighting the challenges and initiatives to support children with ASN.
* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/additional-support-learning-action-plan-progress-report/> - This document outlines the progress made in Scotland towards improving support for children with additional support needs, aligning with the concerns raised by parents.
* <https://connect.scot/news/hearing-voices-parents-children-additional-support-needs-read-about-campaign-group-empowered> - This article discusses a parents' campaign group in Scotland, which highlights the struggles of families with children who have additional support needs.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/streets-pledges-to-tackle-shortages-in-nhs-mental-health-services> - Although not directly related, this link would provide context on broader mental health challenges, though specific data on the UK's response to mental health overdiagnosis wasn't found; it is noted for broader context on health discussions in the UK that might influence discussions around ASN children.
* <https://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/summary-statistics-for-schools-in-scotland/> - This page contains statistics that could provide data on the number of pupils with additional support needs in Scotland, though it doesn't directly address the rise in diagnoses or the specific challenges faced by these families.