

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

---

<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Education and Children's Services
<b>DATE</b>	24 June 2025
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Review of Spaces for Additional Support Needs
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	F&C/25/158
<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	Eleanor Sheppard
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Stephen Booth
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Andrew Jones
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	1.1.1, 1.1.2

---

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents the findings of a recent review of the use of space in Aberdeen's schools for supporting pupils with additional support needs.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee :-

- 2.1 Notes the findings of the review as outlined in this report;
- 2.2 Instructs the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to continue providing support to head teachers and staff in schools to make best use of the space available to them for supporting pupils with additional support needs, to reflect existing and emerging policies and guidance in this area; and
- 2.3 Instructs the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to ensure that the Council's specification of spaces for additional support needs in future new school buildings and school refurbishment projects continues to be regularly reviewed and updated, to reflect ongoing feedback received locally, and any relevant national and local guidance on the design of spaces for additional support needs.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 At its meeting on 17 September 2024, the Education and Children's Services Committee instructed the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord to: *carry out a review of spaces currently available within schools for supporting pupils with additional support needs, and in consultation with the Chief Officer – Education and Lifelong Learning, to report back to the Committee with recommendations for improving such spaces where this is required.* This report fulfils that instruction.
- 3.2 In conducting this review, officers in the Corporate Landlord cluster worked closely with colleagues in Education and Lifelong Learning to assess the ways

in which spaces in schools are currently being used to support pupils with additional support needs (ASN), and to identify examples of good practice.

- 3.3 The recent Exploration of Learners' Needs, carried out by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and reported to the Education and Children's Services Committee in November 2024 ([F&C/24/322](#)) was reviewed, with a focus on understanding how spaces should be designed and used for supporting pupils with ASN in future.
- 3.4 The findings and recommendations of a report on [Additional Support For Learning](#) published by Audit Scotland in February 2025, was also taken into consideration, in preparing this report.

#### The benefits of spaces for ASN

- 3.5 The Exploration of Learners' Needs report includes the findings of a questionnaire issued to schools, along with structured interviews held with staff in schools, and highlights that head teachers in both primary and secondary schools see real benefits in establishing separate spaces outwith classrooms, for use in supporting young people who can find mainstream classes challenging. These 'enhanced areas' were found to be used in a variety of ways across settings, with some learners accessing these areas occasionally for parts of the school day, and others spending the majority or all of their school time within these spaces.
- 3.6 In addition to creating enhanced spaces outwith classrooms for ASN support, consideration also needs to be given to mainstream classrooms, and the extent to which the classroom environment supports the needs of individual young people. The Exploration of Learners' Needs report highlights schools' effective use of the CIRLE Framework, for example. This advocates the benefits of setting up 'inclusive classrooms', where there is a focus on pupils' seating position in the room, the use of individual workstations and 'safe spaces', along with consideration of the need for window blinds and other measures where they are required to regulate lighting and/or noise levels for those young people who find elements of the physical environment overwhelming.

#### Current use of space for ASN

- 3.7 Aberdeen City's school estate consists of a wide range of buildings, which vary considerably in their age, design, condition and suitability. This means that there can be no one standard approach to providing enhanced spaces in schools to support pupils with ASN, as each building presents its own opportunities and challenges in terms of the spaces available for this.
- 3.8 It is clear that head teachers and staff in our existing schools make very good use of the space that is available to them, to ensure that pupils receive the additional support that they require. This often requires a flexible approach, and innovative use of a wide range of spaces to suit individual pupils' needs. Support is provided to schools by the School Estate Team to convert or re-purpose spaces outwith classrooms for use for ASN support as required, and

to make improvements to the learning environment within classrooms, where it is practical to do so and where funding allows.

- 3.9 Good examples of innovative use of space for ASN include Bramble Brae School, Heathryburn School and Aberdeen Grammar School, all of which have made very effective use of available space not required for classrooms to support the needs of individual young people. Brimmond School also makes use of a number of rooms of varying sizes to support pupils on a full time or part time basis, and Lochside Academy has an established 'ASN Hub' which is in a quieter area of the school and provides a secure learning environment for pupils with a range of support needs.
- 3.10 When planning our newest school buildings, spaces for ASN are designed to be used as flexibly as possible and to meet a range of needs. For example, in the new Riverbank School, two teaching spaces specifically for ASN have been provided, along with a quiet room, a sensory room, and a hygiene room, and the facilities have been located to ensure there is direct access from them to secure outdoor space. Designs for the planned new Hazlehead Academy incorporate an ASN Hub, comprising a suite of five classrooms, two sensory rooms, two quiet rooms, hygiene rooms, and access to outdoor space.
- 3.11 When planning major refurbishments of school buildings, specifications for ASN spaces can be more constrained by the availability of space and existing layout of the building, but designs are again intended to allow spaces to be used as flexibly as possible, to meet the varying needs of pupils within the school. For example, in the proposed Victorian Schools programme which would involve the refurbishment of ten of the oldest buildings in the school estate, which present some of the most significant challenges in terms of available space and building layout, the project brief includes a requirement to make creative and innovative use of spaces outwith classrooms, for the support of pupils with ASN.

#### Challenges for schools

- 3.12 Despite these examples of good practice and the innovative and flexible approaches taken across our schools to provide the highest possible levels of support to young people, the Exploration of Learners' Needs report does highlight that there is room for further improvement. The report notes that 39% of primary pupils and 44% of secondary pupils said they sometimes find the school environment overwhelming, and suggests that learning environments in some schools may not always be appropriate for learners with sensory or dysregulation difficulties.
- 3.13 The report highlights that there is a need to ensure learning environments are designed from a child positioned perspective, using natural colour schemes, appropriate lighting and acoustic controls, and direct outdoor access. Whilst this approach is already taken with the specification and design of our new school buildings and in major school refurbishments, it can be much more difficult to achieve similar standards in our existing schools.
- 3.14 Where pupil numbers are close to or exceed the school's capacity, classroom space can be at a premium, and this can create further challenges for ensuring

there is sufficient space available outwith the classrooms to provide appropriate additional support for individual or small groups of pupils.

- 3.15 Where a school does have some spare classroom capacity, in many cases this is used to create enhanced spaces for ASN, but if pupil numbers at the school begin to rise, it is often necessary to re-purpose some or all of the enhanced spaces to be used as mainstream classrooms, to ensure the school continues to operate within national class size limits. This can negatively impact the school's ability to support its pupils with ASN.
- 3.16 When designing new mainstream schools, the extent to which dedicated space for meeting pupils' support needs can be provided, alongside mainstream classrooms, can be limited, especially where the new school project is externally funded. Scottish Government funding for new school projects is allocated based on metrics devised by the Scottish Futures Trust, where there is an expectation that two-stream primary schools will be designed to provide an overall 7.5 square metres of floorspace per pupil, and secondary schools will provide 10 square metres per pupil. All classroom space, circulation space and ancillary rooms (including space for meeting pupils' support needs) must be included within this allocation, and any floorspace over and above this metric would not be covered by the external funding and would be required to be funded directly by the Council. This limits the extent to which additional space for pupil support can be provided within a new school design.
- 3.17 At a national level, the Audit Scotland report on Additional Support for Learning highlights the increasing proportion of pupils in mainstream schools (40%) who require additional support, and raises concerns that this is not currently reflected in national funding formulas, in maximum class sizes, and in the design of new school buildings.
- 3.18 Locally, there is evidence that the numbers of children requiring access to hygiene rooms and nappy changing facilities whilst in school are growing, and that the age of children requiring these facilities is also increasing. This has implications for the specification of equipment within the facilities, as nappy changing units are increasingly required to be larger and stronger than the units previously specified for younger children. Similarly, the requirement for hoist and sling equipment in mainstream schools to assist in the manual handling of older children requiring this type of support is expected to continue to increase.
- 3.19 The increasing requirements of pupils with other types of physical support needs are an important consideration when planning and designing the use of space in schools. As the technology available to support young people with physical disability improves and becomes more widespread, there are implications for the space requirements in schools to accommodate this equipment and to allow the young people to move around with ease. Powered wheelchairs, for example, are generally becoming larger, and the space required for these can be considerably greater than the square metre per pupil allocation which is used for external funding for new schools, or when calculating existing schools' capacity. The impact of this increases considerably when there is more than one wheelchair user in the same class or year group within a school.

#### Implications for future planning: new school buildings

- 3.20 The Audit Scotland report on Additional Support for Learning recommends that Scottish Government and councils should assess the appropriate numbers of pupils in a class, and consider the design of schools to reflect the current and changing needs of the pupil population. Whilst the numbers of pupils in a class are determined at a national level by regulations and SNCT agreement, and are therefore largely outwith the control of the Council, there are opportunities for us to maximise the benefits to pupils with ASN, through the design of our new and refurbished buildings.
- 3.21 When specifying and designing new school buildings and when planning major refurbishments of our existing schools in Aberdeen City, the requirements for spaces to support ASN are given very careful consideration, and are discussed in detail with head teachers, school staff and other stakeholders to ensure that the needs of existing and future pupils, are met as far as practically possible. Post occupancy surveys of new school buildings are also carried out to assess the effectiveness of the spaces provided, and the results of these are used to inform and adapt specifications for future building and refurbishment projects.
- 3.22 The findings of this review of ASN spaces highlights the importance of continually reviewing our approach to the design and specification of new and refurbished school buildings, to reflect on the changing needs of young people and the requirements for support within mainstream classrooms and in enhanced spaces.
- 3.23 New or refurbished school buildings will require to remain compliant with current national standards and guidelines, including legal obligations in respect of class sizes, and for projects which are externally funded, criteria for maximum space allocations will be a key consideration when determining the extent to which space can be allocated for ASN use.

#### Implications for future planning: existing school buildings

- 3.24 As highlighted earlier in this report, the wide range of age and design of our existing school buildings mean that there can be no single approach to providing spaces for supporting pupils with additional needs. Flexibility and innovative use of the spaces available will continue to be key to ensuring that all of our schools are supported in delivering the best possible support for learners. The School Estate Team will continue to work closely with head teachers and staff in schools to maximise the use of available space and to repurpose spaces where appropriate, to ensure the individual needs of young people can be met.

#### Summary and recommendations

- 3.25 In summary, the review of ASN spaces has demonstrated that there is a range of good practice across our school estate, with schools taking a creative and flexible approach to make best use of the space available to provide appropriate support to pupils with ASN. A number of key challenges have also been

highlighted, for both our existing school buildings and also for the design and planning of our new and refurbished buildings. Whilst some of these challenges may require decision making and policy change at a national level, there are some important considerations for the way in which we need to plan and manage our school estate at a local level going forward.

- 3.26 It is therefore recommended that the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord is instructed to continue to provide support to schools in making best use of the space available for supporting pupils with ASN, reflecting any new local or national policies and guidance in this area which may emerge in the future.
- 3.27 It is also recommended that the Council's specification of spaces for ASN in future new school build and refurbishment projects continues to be reviewed regularly, to take account of any new guidance on school design and to reflect on feedback received from our existing school users.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Existing budgets will continue to be used to help meet the cost of making adjustments within school buildings, to ensure that spaces are used effectively for ASN support.
- 4.2 Any changes to Council specification of spaces for ASN in new school buildings would be incorporated into future budget planning for new schools within the General Fund Capital Programme.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Under Section 4 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning ) (Scotland) Act 2004 every education authority must make adequate and efficient provision for the additional support required by each child or young person having additional needs and monitor and review that support.
- 5.2 Section 17 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 provides that it shall be the duty of an education authority in the performance of their functions under sections 1 to 6 of the Act, to provide for their area, sufficient accommodation in public schools and other educational establishments under their management to enable them to perform their said functions. In addition, an education authority shall maintain and keep efficient every public school, and other educational establishment under their management, and shall from time to time provide such additional accommodation as may be necessary to enable them to perform their functions under the Act and may, provide, alter, improve, enlarge, equip and maintain schools and other educational establishments within their area.

#### **6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

## 7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H)  *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	No significant risks identified			
<b>Compliance</b>	Failure to plan effectively for the use of space for ASN leading to the Council being unable to fulfil its duty to make adequate and efficient education provision	The recommendations within the report will help to ensure effective planning for the use of space for ASN in schools.	L	Yes
<b>Operational</b>	No significant risks identified			
<b>Financial</b>	No significant risks identified			
<b>Reputational</b>	Risk of not effectively meeting the needs of all learners	The recommendations within the report will help to ensure spaces are available to help support learners with ASN	L	Yes
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	No significant risks identified			

## 8. OUTCOMES

<b><u>Council Delivery Plan 2024</u></b>	
	<b>Impact of Report</b>
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>  <u><b>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</b></u>	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following ACC Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise attainment and achievement</li> <li>• Support improvement in the health and wellbeing of children and young people</li> <li>• Maximise the impact Of Early Learning and Childcare</li> </ul>
<b><u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026</u></b>	
<b>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes</b>	<p>The recommendations support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 3 - 95% of all children will reach their expected developmental milestones by their 27-30 month review by 2026. Providing appropriate spaces in schools for ASN will support children with additional support needs in achieving their potential.</p> <p>The proposals also support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 6 – 95% of children living in our priority neighbourhoods (Quintiles 1 &amp; 2) will sustain a positive destination upon leaving school by 2026, and the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 8– 100% of children with Additional Support Needs /Disabilities will experience a positive destination by 2026. Providing appropriate spaces in schools for ASN will help to ensure all young people can achieve their potential and have access to a positive destination.</p>

## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>Integrated Impact Assessment</b>	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	Not required
<b>Other</b>	N/A

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Education and Children's Services Committee, 26 November 2024: [Agenda Item 11: Behaviour Action Plan \(F&C/24/322\)](#)
- 10.2 Audit Scotland, February 2025: [Additional Support for Learning](#)



## 11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

<b>Name</b>	Andrew Jones
<b>Title</b>	Service Manager
<b>Email Address</b>	<a href="mailto:ajones@aberdeencity.gov.uk">ajones@aberdeencity.gov.uk</a>