



# Complex Needs Provision for Pupils with Significant and Complex Needs Guidance

## 1. Significant and Complex Learning Needs

The Doran Review of Learning Provision for Children and Young People with Complex Additional Support Needs (2012) identified that complex additional support needs may arise as a result of:

- the severity of one or more factors resulting in need, and/or
- the combined impact of a number of separate factors, one or more of which may be severe.

However, a rigorous, clearly bounded and universally accepted definition is extremely difficult to formulate because of the multiplicity of factors and the impact of specific contexts in different local authorities.

This guidance document specifically relates to children and young people with significant and complex learning needs. It aims to support a shared understanding of the children and young people to whom this term may apply within the Aberdeenshire context.

Aberdeenshire Council is committed to meeting the additional support needs of children and young people in their local mainstream school. The presumption of mainstream education forms the basis of planning for all children and young people, including those with significant and complex learning needs. At the early stages of the planning process there should be a focus on *need*, rather than *place*. That is, planning must start with the assumption that the child, or young person, will attend their local mainstream school. There should always be a full and authentic exploration of what a child or young person's needs are and what steps need to be taken to ensure they are met in their local mainstream school. This includes consideration of, for example, curricular adaptations, teaching and learning approaches, support strategies, environmental adaptations, communication requirements, specialist equipment or staff professional learning needs. A solution-focused approach is essential to overcoming any barriers to inclusion which are identified, with support from relevant education support services and multi-agency partners, as appropriate.

It is recognised that a very small number of children and young people will require access to specialist staff and resources beyond that which can be provided within a mainstream, or enhanced provision, setting due to the significance and complexity of their learning needs. This guidance aims to support planning and decision-making around education provision for those children with the most significant and complex learning needs and the consistent and equitable allocation of Complex Needs Provision across Aberdeenshire.



## 2. Planning and Decision-Making Framework

Children, young people and their families should be at the centre of all planning and decision-making.

Practice must also be taken in accordance with the following legislation and policies:

1. The legislative presumption of mainstream education for children and young people with additional support needs in accordance with the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000.
2. The Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended 2009), which requires Education Authorities to identify and assess children and young people with additional support needs, review the additional support needs identified, and the adequacy of the support provided.
3. Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) national and local policy, which places an expectation on other agencies to work in partnership with education to ensure that children and young people's holistic needs are identified, assessed, planned for and met.
4. The Equality Act 2010, which places a duty on schools and Education Authorities to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation of learners with protected characteristics and to actively promote equality of opportunity. This includes making reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils and providing auxiliary aids and services. There is a duty "to take such steps as it is reasonable to have to take to avoid... substantial disadvantage" to a disabled person caused by a provision, criterion or practice applied by, or on behalf of, a school or by the absence of an auxiliary aid or service.
5. The Children and Young People Act (2014) which places a duty on local authorities and schools to ensure the wellbeing of children and young people is safeguarded, supported and promoted.
6. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which has 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child's life and set out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all children everywhere are entitled to.

## 3. Complex Needs Provision Schools

Aberdeenshire's Complex Needs Provision includes four special schools and five provisions which are integrated within mainstream settings (often referred to as Integrated Complex Needs Provision). Both types of Complex Needs Provision meet significant and complex learning needs, with pupils accessing the Complex Needs Provision which their home address is zoned to.

There are currently 9 Complex Needs Provisions across Aberdeenshire:

**Anna Ritchie Special School:** Mintlaw cluster, Peterhead cluster



**Aboyne Primary/Academy:** Aboyne cluster, Banchory cluster

**Alford Primary/Academy:** Alford cluster

**Banff Primary/Academy:** Banff cluster

**Carronhill Special School:** Laurencekirk cluster, Portlethen cluster, Stonehaven cluster

**Ellon Primary/Academy:** Ellon cluster, Meldrum cluster, Turriff cluster

**Gordon Primary/The Gordon Schools:** Huntly cluster

**St Andrews Special School:** Inverurie cluster, Kemnay cluster, Westhill cluster

**Westfield Special School:** Fraserburgh cluster

#### 4. Access to facilities within the Complex Needs Provision

Some pupils, whilst well placed within their local mainstream, or enhanced provision school, may benefit from accessing a particular facility which is only available within their zoned Complex Needs Provision (e.g. swimming pool).

There is no requirement for an application to the Local ASN Forum to be submitted for a pupil to access the facilities of a Complex Needs Provision. Access will be dependent upon availability and should be negotiated locally.

Responsibility for risk assessing an activity and ensuring appropriate supervision arrangements are in place is the responsibility of the pupil's own school.

Reasonable travel distances for the pupil and costs to the local authority must be taken into account in advance of arrangements being put in place. Transport must be approved by the School Quality Improvement Officer.

Any additional costs associated with accessing the facility (e.g. lifeguard cover) are the responsibility of the pupil's own school.

#### 5. Complex Needs Provision Outreach

Outreach may be requested from a Complex Needs Provision to support mainstream and Enhanced Provision schools within their catchment area to meet the needs of a pupil with significant and complex learning needs.

The purpose of Complex Needs Provision Outreach is to further develop the knowledge, skills and confidence of staff to meet the needs of a pupil with significant and complex learning needs. Responsibility for planning and delivering the curriculum remains the responsibility of the pupil's own school.

Outreach may take the form of:

1. Professional consultation/advice on areas such as:



- Curricular planning
  - Individual Education Planning
  - Individual Behaviour Support and Risk Assessment Planning
  - Support Strategies
  - Environmental adaptations
  - Signposting to other sources of support
2. Block of co-operative/team teaching
  3. Professional Learning sessions for staff

It may occasionally be helpful for the Complex Needs Provision staff member who is providing the outreach to contribute to Child's Plan meetings. In such cases, their role is to provide advice and support around meeting the pupil's needs within their current educational setting, rather than to make placement recommendations or to act as a direct conduit to the Local ASN Forum. It remains the responsibility of the pupil's own school to lead discussions with the parent and other professionals, at both an informal level and through Child's Planning processes.

Requests for Complex Needs Provision Outreach should be submitted to the Local ASN Forum using the Complex Need Provision Request Form ([Appendix 1](#)).

## 6. Complex Needs Provision Placements

In a small number of cases, the Team Around the Child may consider the suitability of a Complex Needs Provision placement for a child or young person. This will only follow extensive consideration of how best to meet the pupil's needs within their local mainstream setting. For pupils already attending an Aberdeenshire school, there will be robust evidence of an ongoing cycle of assessment and intervention, in accordance with Aberdeenshire's Staged Intervention Model which can be found on the [Aberdeenshire Inclusion, Equity and Wellbeing Website](#)

The Complex Needs Provision Profile below, along with the Complex Needs Provision Request Form (Appendix 1) are designed to support the Team Around the Child to carefully consider whether it **may** be appropriate to recommend that a child, or young person, accesses a full-time place within a Complex Needs Provision.

However, there are no set "criteria" for a Complex Needs Provision and no threshold which determines that a place must be offered. There is a finite number of Complex Needs Provision places which are allocated based on priority of need. The level and complexity of needs within a pupil population will vary over time and between cohorts. The threshold for accessing a Complex Needs Provision place will therefore shift in response to this and will also involve professional judgements based on knowledge, experience and relative population level comparisons.

The local authority has a duty to meet the additional support needs of children and young people that it is responsible for educating. This duty remains regardless of whether, or not, a child or young person is offered a Complex Needs Provision



placement. It is important that parents and carers are reassured that this duty will be fulfilled.



**Complex Needs Provision Profile**

Any child or young person being considered for a Complex Needs Provision place will have been assessed at Level 3 of Aberdeenshire’s staged assessment and intervention process and **conditions 1, 2 and 3 below must be met.**

Conditions 4-8 below will be relevant to some, but not all, children and young people with significant and complex learning needs.

- 1. Enduring, complex and/or multiple additional support needs that require long-term multi-agency involvement detailed within a Child’s Plan

**and/or**

Long-term input by one or more multi-agency partners to the child or young person’s Individual Education Plan

**and**

- 2. Significant difficulties with holding, organising and integrating new knowledge and skills, to the extent that it is likely to affect how they learn throughout their life and will therefore require highly individualised education planning

**and**

Significant long-term learning difficulties, which cannot be attributed to experiential gaps, across multiple cognitive domains, such as:

- a) Expressive Language: non-verbal or significantly limited expressive language
- b) Receptive Language: significant difficulties understanding spoken language that cannot be attributed to hearing loss or English as an additional language
- c) Executive function: significant difficulties planning, making decisions, problem-solving, thinking flexibility, responding to feedback, inhibiting responses which has a significant and enduring impact upon all aspects of daily functioning
- d) Attention: Significant difficulties with regulating, selecting, shifting and sustaining attention which has a significant and enduring impact upon all aspects of daily functioning
- e) Social Cognition: Significant difficulties in recognising, understanding, accurately processing and effectively using social cues in real world situations, which has a significant and enduring impact on daily functioning

**and**



<p>3. Requires long-term use of the Aberdeenshire ASN Progression Framework Extended Early Level Curriculum to plan, track and monitor progression in learning. In a small number of cases, small and very specific learning targets beyond these levels may be supported.</p> <p><b>or</b></p> <p>Requires National 1 and National 2 SQA senior phase curriculum, although in a small number of cases, small and very specific learning targets beyond these levels may be supported.</p>
4. Complex medical needs that require NHS care plan / protocols.
5. Requires long-term support with intimate care.
6. Requires long-term support with mobility.
7. Behavioural support needs.
8. Family wellbeing / vulnerability of socio-economic deprivation / multi factors of deprivation.

### 7. Complex Needs Provision Capacity

The minimum capacity of a Complex Needs Provision is determined by a ratio of 6-8 pupils per 1 full-time equivalent Complex Needs Provision Teacher, in accordance with SNCT guidance on class sizes. The actual ratio will be determined by the complexity of need within the cohort of pupils accessing the provision at any given time.

### 8. Request process

Requests for Complex Needs Outreach should be made by the pupil’s school.

Requests for Complex Needs Provision placements should be made as follows:

- for those pupils who are already enrolled with an Aberdeenshire school: named person
- for a child or young person moving into the area: the child or young person’s zoned school, with support from the local Educational Psychologist
- for pre-school children: named person, or lead professional, in collaboration with the child’s zoned primary school and with support from the local Educational Psychologist

A recommendation for a Complex Needs Provision place must be documented through Child’s Plan Meeting processes. Any disagreement about the decision to apply for a Complex Needs Provision place must be fully discussed and clearly recorded within the record of the meeting.

A request may not proceed without full parental consent.



A request should not proceed based on parental preference alone in the absence of robust assessment information which evidences the likely need for such a placement.

The Complex Needs Provision Request Form ([Appendix 1](#)) should be used for both Outreach and Placement applications.

All requests should be submitted to the chair of the Local ASN Forum along with a copy of the Child’s Plan, a record of the most recent Child’s Plan meeting and a copy of the pupil’s Individual Education Plan (if the pupil is already enrolled with a school).

### 9. Local ASN Forum

When considering requests for Complex Needs Provision placements, a representative from the Complex Needs Provision setting may wish to carry out observations in advance of the Local ASN Forum meeting. The purpose of this observation is not to carry out an assessment of the pupil’s needs, which should already have taken place through Child’s Planning processes. Rather, it is to support the local ASN Forum to moderate and prioritise requests and to consider the most appropriate next steps if a placement is not offered. However, such observations may not be required and Local ASN Forums are encouraged to adopt the least intrusive approach.

The outcome of the request may be:

No further action by Local ASN Forum	
Signposting to other sources of advice, supports, services or facilities (This may include, for example, advice regarding further assessment or planning, signposting to other supports such as Educational Psychology, the suggestion of accessing facilities within the Complex Needs Provision)	
Enhanced Provision Outreach	
Enhanced Provision Blended Placement – see Blended Placement Guidance <a href="#">Aberdeenshire Inclusion, Equity and Wellbeing Website</a> (For Primary 3 onwards)	
Enhanced Provision Placement (For Primary 3 onwards)	
Complex Needs Provision Outreach	
Complex Needs Provision Blended Placement – see Blended Placement Guidance <a href="#">Aberdeenshire Inclusion, Equity and Wellbeing Website</a>	
Complex Needs Provision placement	





In the event of a placement being offered an Outcome Letter ( <a href="#">Appendix 1 of the Local ASN Forum Guidance</a> ) should be sent to the referrer	
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The outcome should be shared with the professional who completed the request form, with a clear reason given for the forum’s decision. It is the responsibility of the referrer to advise the parent/carer and the Team Around the Child of the outcome and to lead planning around next steps.

Decisions relating to specialist placement applications (i.e. Enhanced Provision or Enhanced Provision Blended Placement) are communicated to the person who made the request by email by email using Forum Outcome Letter [Appendix 1](#) or using the table in section 9 of the [Enhanced Provision](#) or [Complex Needs](#) request form. This ensures transparency of decision-making in the event of a complaint or legal challenge.

It is the role of the Local ASN Forum to allocate places that are currently available, or that can be reliably predicted as becoming available either in the near future, or at the next key transition stage. There is no waiting list for Complex Needs Provision places. An unsuccessful request may be re-submitted to a future Local ASN Forum meeting. At this point the request will be considered alongside any other requests and the place will be allocated based on priority of need. It is the responsibility of the Local ASN Forum to update zoned schools on placement availability.

### 10. Blended Placements

In some instances, the Local ASN Forum may offer a blended placement between the pupil’s mainstream, or enhanced provision, school and the Complex Needs Provision.

Some pupils may benefit from this temporary arrangement which allows them to access a blend of experiences between their mainstream or enhanced provision school and their zoned Complex Needs Provision. The purpose of a blended placement is to intensively support specific areas of the pupil’s development, whilst also supporting the pupil’s local mainstream, or enhanced provision, school to further develop staff knowledge, skills and confidence in supporting that pupil.

Whilst blended placements can be highly beneficial for some pupils, they are not suitable for all due to the transitioning demands they place on the pupil. The offer of a blended placement should therefore revert back to the named person/lead professional and Team Around the Child for consideration of suitability.

Reference should be made to the guidance on Blended placements, which can be found on the [Aberdeenshire Inclusion, Equity and Wellbeing Website](#)

Revision Date	Summary of Changes
October 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated in alignment with ASN Forum Guidance – addition of Outcome Letter (Appendix 2)</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Update of Request/Outcome Form to reflect this addition</li></ul>
December 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Addition of section 7: Complex Needs Provision Capacity to align with information already in Local ASN Forum guidance</li></ul>
April 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reword – changed from staged intervention model to staged assessment and intervention process.</li></ul>