

Families of ASN children moving to Midlothian for more garden space claim

The high number of pupils with additional support needs (ASN) in Midlothian schools has been partly put down to a desire from families to find homes with gardens and trampolines.

A meeting of the local authority's police and performance committee heard Michelle Strong, the council's education chief operating officer, confirm the percentage of ASN youngsters in their classrooms was higher than neighbouring council areas.

And she said part of the reason was parents migrating into the county for better homes for their children.

Speaking after Councillor Kelly Drummond asked about a rise in numbers, Ms Strong said: "Midlothian has a higher percentage of children with additional support needs than many of our other local authorities. We have seen quite a sharp rise over the last couple of years.

"Part of that is migration from neighbouring local authorities to buy housing where there is a garden, for example, and they can have a trampoline and can support their children in a different way so our percentage is significantly higher and that does make it more challenging to be able to meet that

range of need within one class.”

Her comments came as the committee heard levels of attainment in primary and secondary schools remained below the national average for literacy while secondary schools had seen a rise in numeracy attainment which kept it above the national average for the second year running.

A report looking at attainment levels across P1, P4, P7 and S3, said: “The improvements in primary combined Literacy and Numeracy which were evident in session 2022/23 have been broadly consolidated in session 2022/24, with very little change in the overall figures, remaining above pre-pandemic levels.

“However, the figures are below both the National and comparator figures for 2023/24.

“In S3, attainment was higher in Numeracy than it had been in 2022/23, as well as being above National and comparator figures. In Literacy, attainment decreased and was below National and comparator levels (but still above prepandemic levels).”

Councillor Derek Milligan, chairing the meeting, questioned whether the rising number of ASN pupils in mainstream classrooms was having an impact on attainment and whether it should be factored into the attainment targets.

A recent report by Audit Scotland said 40% of pupils in Scottish schools now have additional support needs.

Ms Strong said in Midlothian they were looking at ‘40, 50 and sometime higher percentages’ in their classrooms.

She said: “We are looking at how we support the mainstream teacher in terms of their practice and some of the children are supported in the classroom with extra staff to support them to meet the expected levels.

“Additional support needs has risen across the country and we need to make sure Midlothian is doing as well as the national average if not better.”

In primary schools the average literacy level for last year was 72.34% compared to the national average of 73.99% and numeracy was at 76.82% compared to the national rate of 80.29% .

Literacy in S3 was at 84.43% compared to the national average of 88.31% and numeracy at 91.59% compared to the national figure of 90.32%.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter