



## **Barnardo's Scotland response to Empowering Teachers, Parents and Communities to Achieve Excellence and Equity in Education: A Governance Review**

**January 2017**

Barnardo's Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Governance Review of Education in Scotland. Our services work in and with schools and nurseries across the country providing support to children, young people, parents and staff. The services we provide range from working in partnership to strengthen relationships within schools and reduce the risk of exclusion, to building the capacity of nursery and primary staff to take a nurturing, attachment based approach to early learning. The fundamental changes proposed by the review are likely to have an impact on:

- The types and scale of support that Barnardo's Scotland provides and therefore on the children, young people, parents and staff we support.
- The relationships that we and other third sector providers have with education authorities particularly as they relate to commissioning and wider children's services planning.

This response is based on these two perspectives.

### **General Comments**

In our experience there is a great deal of willingness across nurseries, schools and at a Local Authority level to ensure that all children get the most from their education. We welcome the focus on closing the attainment gap and we are working in a number of local authority areas to support the development of nursery and primary schools which take a nurturing approach to education including the school environment. We have also developed good relationships with education authority staff who see the benefit in taking an authority wide approach to tackling the attainment gap.

The proposals in the consultation paper do not give details on how priorities will be set between schools and local authorities and the relationship this will have with Children's Services Planning in Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs). Some parents have told us that services at a local authority level can seem remote and are often limited in what they can offer. However we have also heard that there are benefits to be gained from services provided across an area rather than being left to individual schools choosing whether or not a particular service is a priority for them. The Authority wide approach can secure equity of provision, or where required ensure resources are targeted at those schools and communities in most need.

There needs to be more clarity on what system will be in place should a parent have an issue with a school's decision on whether or not to provide a service to their child. The consultation is overly focussed on 'in school' factors and how these are approached. Governance in education needs to be seen in the context of wider community 'out of school' factors, including the socio economic make up of a particular learning community.

### **What are the strengths of the current governance arrangements of Scottish education?**

Barnardo's Scotland's view of the current governance arrangements is informed by our relationship with both schools and Education Authorities.

In our experience there is good integration between children's services within some local authorities. For example where Education and Social Work join up to make Children and Families departments and share budgets it means that negotiations around services can be carried out through one single point of contact which ensures alignment with the strategic priorities set within the local Children's Services Plan. It follows that the devolution of budgets and decision making to school level will mean that from a third sector perspective there will be a need to negotiate service provision with a number of different schools. The additional time and duplication of activity agreeing a model of service provision on a school by school basis arguably is resource that could more usefully be deployed in direct service delivery.

Many of the children and young people we work with often have a difficult relationship with the school and consequently with school staff. This can involve challenging behaviour that requires intensive work with both the child or young person and the family. This work takes place in partnership with school staff.

Despite this strong partnership working there are parents – as well as children and young people themselves – who may want the school to take/or not take a particular course of action. Where there is disagreement, under the current system the Education Authority will have a role to play in supporting the school to explore potential solutions. This can be as an arbiter where relationships between the school and the family are strained or in supporting the school to take to look at different options such as keeping a child or young person in school when exclusion is under consideration. The Education Authority can, and will, often advise on where schools can access further support to maintain a child or young person within their placement (from a third sector organisation for example).

We would be concerned that this mutually supportive relationship between the family, the school, the authority and outside support could be undermined through increased devolution or if strategic oversight and direction lies at a regional level creating more of distance between the school, parents, children and the governance structures. It is unclear from the consultation document how situations like this would be managed.

In our experience one of the strengths of the current governance arrangement is that there is recognition that a partnership approach to working with children, young people and parents who face multiple adversities is the most effective way to achieve positive outcomes. Moreover, as part of this partnership approach, commissioning is focussed on work with the family and in many cases the wider community. Education authorities have a key role to play in this as there will be strong awareness at authority level of those agencies in the community which can support the school.

We would be concerned if a situation arose where schools were left isolated from the local community and community agencies or were unaware of the support available to work with vulnerable children, young people and their families. It is important to guard against a situation where, in the context of devolved budgets, resources normally available to support these children are pulled into the 'school day' rather than specialist support outwith the school building where it is required.

As outlined above, partnership between schools, education authorities and the wider community are crucial in supporting vulnerable children and young people. A key part of this is recognising that whilst school populations are different, many of the issues that vulnerable children and their families face are very similar. Our work in local authorities providing family support in

partnership with schools demonstrates this and is recognised by the education authorities who have brought in support for all schools in a particular area. We would be concerned that decisions taken on a school by school basis would result in schools picking from a 'menu' of interventions rather than a model of practice which can be embedded across areas, generating the type of transformation in culture and practice sought.

Our experience of the current system is that challenges are approached from the perspective of 'how can we do this together' and therefore, we would be concerned if the suggested changes to governance led to any dilution of partnership working.

### **What are the barriers within the current governance arrangements to achieving the vision of excellence and equity for all?**

As outlined above Barnardo's Scotland's experience of schools and education has been characterised by positive partnership working.

We also recognise that leadership plays an important part in defining the culture of a school and a local authority area. The approach taken by senior leaders will have an impact on how education is delivered in a particular area. Approaches to how schools work with vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people can often vary depending on the interest and expertise of a particular Head Teacher. As a result there are risks with more decisions being taken at school level as, understandably, Head Teachers could be restricted by their knowledge, experience and the demands of their operational role. In this respect we support the Scottish Government's mandatory head teacher qualification.

Our experience would support a view that one size does not fit all in the approach to supporting vulnerable children and young people, and how a school works with parents will be different depending on a number of factors. In our experience the current system of governance already offers a high level of autonomy to individual establishments and allows for a range of differing approaches in how schools offer support.

We have a concern that the most vulnerable children and families could be lost in this process particularly if any new system were to create a greater level of inconsistency in support. If a new system of governance is put in place we must ensure that those children who are disabled, have learning difficulties or behavioural problems are fully supported as part of the school community. If budgets are devolved there needs to be clear guidance and instruction on how

support for these children is prioritised within schools and how the wider school community will be involved in decision making.

There needs to be stronger links to wider planning and to Children's Services Planning groups to consider how resources are deployed, connecting in providers (including those from the third sector) to schools, to better meet need.

Whilst we recognise that there are pressures on public sector budgets, decisions need to be taken on the basis of a child or young person's needs. In the course of our work we know that support to children with complex needs can be expensive. We would hope that any changes in governance arrangements were carried out on the basis that schools should be driven by the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people in their care.

**Should the key principles below underpin the approach to reform? Are there other principles which should be applied?**

As the national approach to improving outcomes and supporting the wellbeing of our children and young people in Scotland, Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) should form the foundation of any approach to reorganisation of services which support children, young people and families.

There has been a concerted effort over a number of years to embed the GIRFEC principles of a child centred, joined up, early intervention approach in our culture, systems and practice. We would like to build on this and ensure the progress we have collectively made in this endeavour is not lost in any further change process.

Getting It Right for Every Child has established a 'whole system' approach to providing services to children that is flexible and responsive, seeking to offer the right help at the right time from the right people. This means that regardless of the role that any individual organisation plays in supporting children and young people there is a shared approach which recognises that better outcomes are secured by services working together with families. To sustain and strengthen this, any approach to reform should retain a commitment to collaborative and multi-agency working at all stages and put in safeguards to ensure organisational change does not take us away from the values and principles of GIRFEC.

**How can children, parents, communities, employers, colleges, universities and others play a stronger role in school life? What actions should be taken to support this?**

As we mentioned in response to the question on principles, the key to those who are part of school life having a stronger role is to ensure that GIRFEC is embedded across all schools. As noted above GIRFEC has established a 'whole system' approach to providing services to children that is flexible and responsive, seeking to offer the right help at the right time from the right people.

In Barnardo's Scotland's experience, involving parents in the school means involving them in their children's learning. As the children we work with have a number of challenges we take a particular approach. Where a child or young person has a wellbeing need, they and their parents will always be involved in discussions and planning around how that need can be met. This acknowledges the significant role the family play and will continue to play in supporting the child long after the school have ceased to be involved.

Our Edinburgh Community Support Service for example takes an integrated approach to keeping children in school, working alongside statutory Additional Support for Learning services to support children both inside and outside the classroom, working holistically with the community and the whole family. Our services in Inverclyde and Renfrewshire work in partnership with parents, nurseries and schools to help close the educational attainment gap for the most disadvantaged children and young people.

We have also been involved in 'team around the school' approaches where we have been invited to work alongside Additional Support Needs teams to look at how schools and structures can change and adapt and become more nurturing environments.

This work is co-ordinated by the Education Authority supporting agencies to come together around the school using a child planning model.

It is very important that schools adopt a family learning approach which draws parents and other agencies to the school. We provide training for teachers and parents in a number of schools which has increased the engagement of disadvantaged parents and families with the school and the engagement of school staff with the local community.

For many parents engaging with the school, a family learning approach is preferable to more formal Parent Teacher Councils where, unless there is support in place, some parents can feel intimidated and not able to contribute. A family learning approach also ensures that parents are equal partners in the child's education.

### **Additional comments**

In consulting with our services and staff working in education there were a number of issues that were discussed where concerns were expressed or clarification sought.

There was a concern that the proposals to devolve budgets to schools and create regional boards will be creating an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy. More clarity was needed on where the checks and balances that currently exist within local authorities will lie. We gave an example above of where Education Authorities can provide support to schools to keep challenging pupils in school rather than exclude them or move them on and also provide a buffer between parents and the school in situations where there is conflict.

A particular concern was that there will be a need to ensure there is consistency of educational provision across a local authority area in relation to support for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people. We would not want to see a situation where competing priorities within a school cluster or education region could lead to inconsistency of support.

As an organisation involved in the commissioning process we would welcome clarification on how commissioning with schools will work in practice. We are concerned that the knowledge of the services available to support schools will be lost if commissioning takes place on a school by school basis. Clarification is also needed on how best practice and evidence of what works is applied across a school cluster.

Under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 Children's Planning Strategic Groups will be responsible for children's services planning. How will education be represented on these strategic groups? Unless they are a part of this discussion it will be difficult to negotiate on commissioning services to support (and integrate with) schools. We would welcome clarity on how any new governance arrangements will be integrated with current planning systems. It is critical that education and educational priorities are part of the spectrum of support for children and families and are aligned with wider shared priorities within Children's Services Plans and the Local

Outcome Improvement Plans that Community Planning Partnerships are required to prepare under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

If we fail to take a systems approach there is a risk we will be unable to deliver the GIRFEC vision of improving outcomes and supporting the wellbeing of all of our children and young people in Scotland.

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