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children



Barnardo's
Scotland

**Barnardo's Scotland response to Empowering Schools: A consultation
on the provisions of the Education (Scotland) Bill**

January 2018

Barnardo's Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Scottish Government consultation on the provisions of the Education (Scotland) Bill. 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. We are working in attainment challenge areas and through Pupil Equity Funding to support children and families within a school environment and within their communities.

Our original response to the Governance Review can be found here:

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/barnardo_s_scotland_response_-_educational_governance_review.pdf

We believe our comments from the previous consultation still apply, particularly in respect to the new governance structures, so have used this response to highlight further areas for consideration ahead of the introduction of the proposed legislation.

Key messages

- A stronger focus on health and wellbeing is needed in discussions around the attainment agenda, and in particular the **impact of trauma and adversity on a child's ability to learn.**
- We would like to see a commitment from the Scottish Government to embed the **NHS Education Scotland Trauma Knowledge and Skills Framework** within education.
- We welcome moves to improve parental engagement. It is important that **schools adopt a family learning approach** which draws parents and other agencies to the school.

"The link is absolutely cast-iron: adversity before someone goes to school leads to failure when they get to school" **Sir Harry Burns**

"We are never going to close the attainment gap until we address ACEs. Children cannot learn properly when they are suffering from trauma. Let us get them talking about feelings, and teach them to be kind and loving individuals who matter" **Gail Ross MSP**

Trauma informed practice

Jenny Gilruth MSP in a recent debate on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) said:

"I can think of pupils whom I taught who experienced a range of adverse experiences before they even crossed the school gates. How was that information communicated to me as a professional? Sometimes, it was not, because the school was not informed. Sometimes, I would catch the guidance teacher after a staff meeting. Often, however, teachers simply would not know about the adverse experiences that were impacting on their pupils before the school day had even begun. "No homework today? Detention for you." "Can't complete today's task? Stay in over lunch." "Don't have a tie on? Go to the headie." ¹

It was also noted during this debate that the language of ACES and early trauma rarely features in the discourse around closing the poverty related attainment gap. We want to see a stronger focus on health and wellbeing in the discussions around the attainment agenda, and in particular the impact of trauma and adversity on a child's ability to learn. Mental health is a key part of the Scottish Government's national policy agenda yet there is a distinct lack of joined up thinking when it comes to the role schools can play in improving young people's mental health and wellbeing.

A recent survey of teachers by SAMH found that many were concerned that the imperative for schools is less on health and wellbeing, and more on literacy and numeracy.² This is an issue we have highlighted in previous consultation responses.³ Children will not be able to access education if their health and wellbeing has not been addressed, and there is a general concern that the programme of reform for Education is too focused on more easily measurable outcomes such as literacy and numeracy.

¹ <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11323&mode=pdf>

² <https://www.samh.org.uk/documents/welltrained.pdf>

³ http://www.barnardos.org.uk/barnardo_8217_s_scotland_response_to_scottish_government_-_national_improvement_framework_consultation_on_measuring_the_attainment_gap_and_milestones_towards_closing_it.pdf

School-wide approach to responding to trauma

The Trauma Knowledge and Skills Framework⁴ developed by NHS Education Scotland is a critical document for the entire workforce, particularly those working with children and young people.

We understand NHS Education Scotland is currently developing Scottish Trauma Informed Leadership Training. We would like to see a strong commitment from the Scottish Government that this training will form part of the new Head Teacher qualification and be a central focus in the development of the proposed Headteachers' Charter.

As Leaders of Learning, Head Teachers should know how to lead in relation to trauma so they can support the embedding of trauma informed practice in their schools. This is wider than just teacher or staff training; Leaders are responsible for all the systems around them, ensuring a school-wide approach to trauma awareness and response.

All staff should be supported by senior management to deal with disclosures from children, so that they not only respond appropriately to the child but are also supported themselves around any trauma they may experience or be dealing with.

Responses & behaviours associated with early trauma can often manifest themselves in a school environment, and are too often misconstrued as bad behaviour requiring discipline rather than support. Bainsford Primary School in Falkirk recently got rid of their 'Behaviour Policy' and are starting to develop a Collaborative Agreement on Behaviour. This is the kind of good practice we hope will be shared and replicated through Regional Improvement Collaboratives.

In schools where we have delivered our social and emotional learning programmes such as PATHS, Head Teachers have noticed decreasing numbers of children being sent to them to discuss behavioural issues, and numbers of exclusions have dropped, in some areas by a significant amount.

Senior leadership is key to ensuring that this kind of trauma-informed practice is embedded in all schools across Scotland. When our children feel happy, safe and secure they are better able to learn.

Parental and Community Engagement

The consultation states that parents are the main educators in their children's lives, particularly in the very early years. The consultation also states that children and young people who have parents who are engaged in their education have more successful outcomes. This reflects our experience working in schools with children and their parents, before and beyond the school gates.

⁴ <http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/media/3971582/nationaltraumatrainingframework.pdf>

We support the proposal in the consultation to widen the legal definition of parental engagement. Our work with families tends to be with those who are not necessarily engaged in Parent Councils or Forums, but as the consultation sets out, often it is parental engagement in learning outside of school which offers the greatest potential to impact long term outcomes.

We also welcome the commitment to a national action plan on parental engagement and family learning, as well as the commitment to introduce a home-school link worker in every school to support parents. We already have link workers in some schools in Glasgow through Pupil Equity Funding, alongside our PATHS programme⁵

Through our work in schools we have found that involving parents in the school means involving them in their child's learning. 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.

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 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.

Any new provision in the Education Bill around parental engagement should include a commitment to creativity in terms of reach into communities, not just expecting families to come into the school. This will also be of benefit for children and young people who are non-attenders, many of whom we work with.

We would again reiterate the importance of trauma-informed practice within the school. Many parents who may find it difficult to engage with their child's learning will have experienced their own trauma and adversity; it is imperative they receive support for this in order to be a strong protective factor for their own children. This support could be from statutory services or third sector but schools have a role to play in recognising where support may be needed and signposting where necessary.

Contact: Nicki Wray – Policy and Public Affairs Officer –
nicki.wray@barnardos.org.uk 0131 446 7033

⁵ <http://www.pathseducation.co.uk/what-is-paths/paths-across-the-uk/scotland/>