



Barnardo's NI response to Supporting Newcomer Pupils Public Consultation

October 2019

Introduction

Barnardo's NI is the largest children's charity in Northern Ireland. We work with approximately 12,000 children, young people and families annually across more than 40 different services and programmes. We are also a leading provider of schools-based support, reaching more than 25,000 children in schools across the UK and Ireland through our NI-managed social and emotional literacy programmes.

We deliver a wide range of services across Northern Ireland, from providing family support and early intervention, to working directly with children and families who have experienced adversity and need our support. We believe that every child deserves the best possible start in life, and our service provision reflects that philosophy.

Barnardo's NI has a well-established history of working with newcomer pupils and their families, particularly from an Ethnic Minority background, across a range of our services, including a Family and Learning Integration Project (FLIP) working in partnership with two primary schools in the South Belfast area. We also have two regional services which specialise in working with refugees, asylum seekers and unaccompanied children:

1) The Northern Ireland Refugee Support Service (NIRSS) was established as part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme in 2015 to support families with children displaced by the Syrian conflict.

2) The Independent Guardian Service was set up in 2018 to support children in Northern Ireland who are potentially victims of human trafficking and children who are separated from their families and their home countries.

This consultation response is informed by our service delivery in this area and by evidence drawn from our research “Feels Like Home: Exploring the experiences of newcomer pupils in primary schools in Northern Ireland”¹. Barnardo’s NI is disappointed that the scope of this public consultation has been limited to the function of the Intercultural Education Service (IES) and the additional funding provided through the Common Funding Formula (CFF). This is particularly frustrating as evidence from our ‘Feels Like Home’ research and the pre-consultation work conducted by the Department of Education (2018) highlights a range of ongoing challenges newcomer pupils and their families face which are beyond the stated scope of this consultation. In our view, this is a missed opportunity to comprehensively review the “Supporting Newcomer Pupils” policy to identify gaps and modernise how Newcomer pupils are supported in our schools. As the current policy “Supporting Newcomer Pupils” was adopted a decade ago, Barnardo’s NI recommends the Department conduct a complete review of the current “Supporting Newcomer Pupils” policy in order to ensure the needs of this group of children are met.

¹ Kernaghan, D. (2015) *Feels Like Home Exploring the experiences of newcomer pupils in primary schools in Northern Ireland*. Barnardo’s NI, Belfast. Access available here: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/feels-like-home-exploring-the-experiences-of-newcomer-pupils-in-northern-ireland.pdf>

Question 1: How could the current policy be improved to ensure that Newcomer pupils receive effective and timely support to achieve their full potential?

Drawing from our experience and research in the area of supporting newcomer pupils and their families, there are a number of areas for improvement that could be included in a revised 'Supporting Newcomer Pupils' policy as detailed below:

Children who have experienced Interrupted Education: Since 2009, there has been an increase of children living in Northern Ireland who have been displaced from their home country. There is no specific reference to children from a refugee or asylum seeking background in the current policy. Barnardo's NI works with many of these families through our Refugee Support Service and Independent Guardian Service, and we understand that these children need additional support as they may have experienced trauma related to war, persecution and displacement. It may also be the case that children from this background may have not had the opportunity to experience any formal education or may have had their education significantly interrupted. We are pleased that there is recognition of this outlined in the Options of Change. Barnardo's NI endorses the creation of 'Newcomers with interrupted education' as a distinct category within newcomer pupils and welcome the provision for this group to receive support that meet their specific needs. In our view, further consideration of the following issues is necessary:

- How is the 'Newcomers with interrupted education' category being defined?
- Who is eligible for being categorised as experiencing interrupted education and can this extend to other groups such as Travellers?
- What provision can be made for this group who require school-based counselling in a primary school setting?
- What additional supports should be provided for those pupils entering Key Stage 4 who have experienced interrupted education at this crucial stage

in their formal education to support their learning and educational attainment?

- Can provision for those newly arrived Key Stage 4 and Post-16 pupils who have experienced interrupted education be made through the existing Entitlement Framework?
- What additional funding is needed to meet the range of needs of this group of newcomer pupils? This should include funding for English language acquisition and mental health and emotional wellbeing support in line with a trauma informed approach.

Special Educational Needs: The challenges facing newcomer pupils who may have special educational needs should be addressed within the updated Newcomer Pupil policy. The language barrier creates an additional dimension to identifying and supporting newcomer pupils who may have special educational needs. Research² shows that teachers reported difficulty in being able to discern between the language barrier and a potential learning problem for newcomer pupils. This uncertainty about the root of the problem may result in a newcomer pupil waiting long periods before they receive SEN support.

English Language Comprehension: Evidence from teachers highlighted concerns about the depth of newcomer pupils' English language comprehension in terms of being able to understand and respond to more complex texts and instructions³. The lack of English language in terms of reading and writing has the potential to affect all subjects due to its cross-curricular nature and impede a child's educational achievement. This lack of comprehension was particularly apparent in older newcomer pupils in Key Stage 2 which would suggest that some newcomer pupils may enter post-primary school with low levels of literacy. As this has the prospect of limiting newcomer pupils' attainment throughout the rest of their education, it is important that this is addressed in the updated policy

² Kernaghan, D. (2015) *Feels Like Home: Exploring the experiences of newcomer pupils in primary schools in Northern Ireland*. Barnardo's NI, Belfast.

³ Ibid

and steps are taken to increase newcomer pupils' comprehension of English language in primary schools.

Use of Technology: As technology has now become an integral part of the education system, the updated policy should provide options for schools to access technology that would be educationally beneficial. An evidence review should be conducted by DE to ascertain how newcomer pupils could benefit from online programmes and tools to support their education and learning acquisition. In our 'Feels Like Home'⁴ research, newcomer pupils told us that they would like greater access to computers and other resources so they could translate for themselves.

Engaging Newcomer Parents: While much positive and creative work has been done by schools to communicate with newcomer pupils parents, there is not a standardised approach. This should be addressed in the updated policy. Our 'Feels Like Home'⁵ research identified ways in which newcomer pupils parents needed support in terms of their child's education. Areas requiring further work with parents of newcomer pupils generally were identified as raising awareness of the importance of:

- education for young children, particularly in terms of pre-school and Foundation stage;
- regular school attendance;
- homework; and
- practicing English with their children outside of school.

Post Primary Transfer System: Reference needs to be made in the updated policy to arrangements to support parents' navigation of Northern Ireland's post-primary transfer system. While the current system is unregulated, newcomer pupils may be placed at a disadvantage as their parents are unaware of the

⁴ Kernaghan, D. (2015) *Feels Like Home: Exploring the experiences of newcomer pupils in primary schools in Northern Ireland*. Barnardo's NI, Belfast.

⁵ Ibid

application process, cannot easily understand the current system or do not have the means to pay for some tests. It is also the case that both AQE and GL transfer tests do not offer the tests in other languages which is a barrier to newcomer pupils in participating in these tests and limits the choice of post primary schools they may attend.

Question 2: What additional support services should be available to schools with Newcomer pupils?

Drawing from our evidence and practice, Barnardo's NI has identified a number of additional support services that should be available to schools with Newcomer pupils:

After-School Provision: An increase in after-school activities for newcomer pupils could provide support with homework and English language acquisition. Social activities after school would also provide newcomer pupils with the opportunity to integrate with others and learn new skills. These practices within education have been identified as essential to underpinning effective integration by the Home Office⁶ and may be delivered in a range of ways including by the community and voluntary sector.

Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing: It is Barnardo's NI long held position that school-based counselling services should be available for all school pupils regardless of age. We particularly advocate for school-based counselling for pupils with traumatic backgrounds including asylum seekers, refugee children and unaccompanied children. Additional provision, in terms of interpreters, for these children may be necessary to overcome the language barrier.

⁶ Home Office Indicators of Integration framework (2019) Available here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf

Parental Support Services: It is important that a holistic approach to newcomer families is taken by schools in order to facilitate successful parental engagement and integration into the wider society. This may take the form of assisting parents to navigate each aspect of school life ranging from admissions, uniform purchases, assessment and examination and the social life of a school. Work such as that undertaken by our Family Learning and Integration Project (FLIP) which provides additional support for English language for newcomer pupils' parents by providing English classes in school and assistance with parenting and wider family support from a school site could also be beneficial.

Teacher Training: Offer extensive training opportunities for teachers and other school staff to provide specific strategies to teach children who have English as an Additional Language. Training could also provide:

- examples of a model lesson for classes with newcomer pupils and approaches to deal with the broad range of abilities, languages and cultures present in the classroom.
- how to use translation and interpreting services to communicate with newcomer pupil parents. This should include guidance around the issues of using children for interpreting purposes for other children or adults.
- awareness for teaching staff to develop a trauma informed approach in schools which would be particularly pertinent in supporting refugee children or other children who have experienced disruption.

Question 3: How could schools best be supported and encouraged to embrace and share best practice in supporting Newcomer pupils?

In both our “Feels Like Home”⁷ research and DE’s school focus groups and visits, the role of the Intercultural Education Service (IES) has been highlighted as an area for improvement. It was suggested that greater awareness is needed around the supports the IES can provide and that there is potential to extend the scope of their work further. As recommended in our research report, a service such as the IES is well placed to develop and coordinate formal links between schools to share their experiences and good practice relating to newcomer pupils.

Other ways to disseminate best practice amongst schools would be the publication of examples of good practice on an annual basis by the Department of Education. This could include updates on new initiatives such as the bilingual story book, “When the Lights Go Out”⁸, for children in schools in Northern Ireland which was commissioned by the Education Authority.

It may also be useful to identify ‘Newcomer Champions’ within schools and structures such as the IES, Education Authority and Department of Education who could be both a point of contact, raise visibility of newcomer pupils’ issues and be able to focus on ways of sharing and embracing best practice for these pupils.

⁷ Kernaghan, D. (2015) *Feels Like Home: Exploring the experiences of newcomer pupils in primary schools in Northern Ireland*. Barnardo’s NI, Belfast.

⁸ Further information is available here: <https://www.eani.org.uk/news/education-authority-launches-bilingual-story-book-for-school-children-in-northern-ireland>

Question 4: In your experience, are Newcomer pupils given opportunities to maintain their home language(s) in school? What are the difficulties / challenges in facilitating this?

Since 2015, Barnardo's NI has established a Family Learning and Integration Project (FLIP)⁹ in South Belfast funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. FLIP works with parents of children aged 0 – 11 years old who attend either Holy Rosary or Fane Street Primary Schools with the aim to help parents gain skills to support their children's learning and aid with community integration. Specifically, Barnardo's NI has created in partnership with the Ulster University, a 'Language Made Fun' play based programme designed to support the English Language development of multilingual Newcomer pupils whilst promoting the maintenance of their home language.

Barnardo's NI believes that it is positive for children to maintain their home language as it is beneficial for their educational development and retains ties with the child's family and country of origin. This issue was explored with teachers in our 'Feels Like Home'¹⁰ research. The majority of teachers stressed the benefits of being bilingual and the importance of newcomer pupils retaining their first language. However, there was mixed views about whether children should be allowed to communicate in their first language in class. The main concern about children only working and socialising with others who shared a mutual language was that their English language acquisition could be harmed. Evidence based guidance from the Department of Education would be welcome in this area.

⁹ Further information about Barnardo's NI FLIP service is available here: https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Barnardos_final_FLIP-Report_web_1.pdf

¹⁰ Kernaghan, D. (2015) *Feels Like Home: Exploring the experiences of newcomer pupils in primary schools in Northern Ireland*. Barnardo's NI, Belfast.

Question 5: Should schools be required to report on how they use their Newcomer funding? If so, how do we ensure this reporting remains proportionate to the amount of funding received?

As with all public funds, schools should be accountable for how they use newcomer pupil funding. Drawing from our research, Principals supported the need for accountability for this funding but did raise concerns regarding how this may result in a lack of flexibility and a concern about the disproportionate impact reporting may have on schools with smaller numbers of newcomer pupils.

Question 6: Should there be different levels of funding depending on whether the pupil is at primary school or post-primary school? Should there be additional funding provided to help support pupils who have experienced disruption to their education (i.e. those pupils who have been out of school for a long time or who have never been to school before)?

In our view, the review of the Common Funding Formula (CFF) recommended by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee¹¹ is a good opportunity to create a new model of funding which places the needs of the child at the centre. Barnardo's NI considers that the current 'one-size-fits-all' payment provided as part of the CFF fails to adequately address the wide variations in need among Newcomer pupils. We believe it is more appropriate to fund 'tiers' of intervention which provides the flexibility of meeting this group of children's needs. It is our view that newcomer pupils would benefit from a multi-tiered system of support as a useful way to ensure that the needs of each individual child are identified and funded in a systematic way. For example, a multi-tiered system of support can operate on

¹¹ House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, *Education funding in Northern Ireland Ninth Report of Session 2017–19*, 17th July 2019. Available here: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmniaf/1497/1497.pdf>

three levels with pupils who are identified as struggling more receiving additional funding. In the case of newcomer pupils this may look like the following:

Tier One: This may consist of an universal screening for all newcomer pupils to ascertain their English language level (using Common European Reference Language as is the current practice) and to identify the educational, linguistic and pastoral support needs of the individual child. The creation of a Personal Education Plan which sets goals, charts progression and is monitored effectively for all newcomer pupils should also be incorporated into the updated policy.

Tier Two: Support associated with this Tier could be for newcomer pupils that have been identified as being able to benefit from small group interventions for either language or educational support.

Tier Three: Support at this level would be for pupils who require intensive individualised support. This may be in terms of school readiness, English language acquisition, social or emotional issues or special educational needs.

In this way, the child is placed firmly at the centre of the process and the educational needs of the child can be met regardless of age or school setting. With the introduction of the new category of 'interrupted education', there is an opportunity to adjust funding models from the school setting to funding the needs of the individual child. We know from our practice experience of working with children with interrupted education through the NI Refugee Support Service and Independent Guardian Service that these children face particular challenges in terms of school readiness, language barriers, accessing the curriculum and facing cultural differences. Furthermore, challenges faced by this group can be compounded by special education needs, disability, illness or the impact of

trauma. Funding should reflect these challenges and be accessed at the points of need throughout the school year rather than at a fixed time.

Question 7: Should there be a limit on the maximum amount of total Newcomer funding a school can receive? Should there be a minimum amount of total Newcomer funding that a school can receive (this could benefit schools with very low numbers of Newcomer pupils)?

As outlined previously, Barnardo's NI believes that the current method of funding schools through the Common Funding Formula is inadequate. We believe funding should be based on the assessed needs of the individual child. Working within the current system, Barnardo's NI recommends a minimum amount of funding should be provided to schools with low numbers of newcomer pupils to ensure 'meaningful support'. Further consideration is needed as to the definition of 'very low numbers' and this funding should be allocated after assessment is conducted on the needs of the newcomer pupils. We are not in favour of limiting the maximum amount of newcomer pupil funding a school can receive.

Question 8: Should there be a limit to the number of years that a pupil is eligible for Newcomer funding? What would be reasonable and how could ongoing need be assessed / shown?

According to evidence supplied by the Education Authority which stated that most newcomer pupils take between 4 – 6/7 years to achieve the B1 threshold, Barnardo's NI supports the proposal for extending eligibility for newcomer pupil funding from 3 to 5 years. It should remain the case that additional support will be provided for those pupils who do not meet this threshold after 5 years. In our view, the use of a Personal Education Plan for newcomer pupils would provide a way to assess and monitor progress in terms of English language acquisition across this period.

Question 9: Do you have any additional comments?

Data: Data collected in the Annual School Census should record 'Country of Origin' and 'First Language' in addition to ethnicity to provide greater demographic detail of newcomer pupils and the range of language needs schools may face on a year to year basis. It would be particularly important to collect data around the new 'Interrupted Education' category in order to assess how well the supports put in place meet the needs of these newcomer pupils.

Workforce Development: The current formal training provision related to English as an Additional Language should be reviewed for: (i) pre-service teachers; (ii) in-service teachers; and (iii) classroom assistants to ensure the workforce are equipped with knowledge and specific strategies to support newcomer pupils' development and comprehension of the English language.

Addressing Bullying in Schools: Barnardo's NI is a long standing member of Northern Ireland's Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) and we have recently contributed to an Effective Responses to Bullying Behaviour Supplement: Supporting Schools when Addressing Incidents of Bullying Motivated by Race, Faith, Culture and/or Nationality/National Identity¹². It would be beneficial for all school staff to be aware of the new guidance and for this resource to be referenced and included in the updated 'Supporting Newcomer Pupils' policy.

¹² Fox, E., McIlwaine, P., Moley, T. and McKittrick, N. (2019) *Effective Responses to Bullying Behaviour: (ERTBB) Supplement Supporting Schools when Addressing Incidents of Bullying Motivated by Race, Faith, Culture and/or Nationality/National Identity*. Access here: <http://www.endbullying.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/ERTBB-RFCN.pdf>

Monitoring and Evaluation: We recommend that the Department of Education monitors and reviews this policy in a timely matter. This is essential to ensure that the needs of newcomer pupils have effectively been identified and met.

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