

The Early Years Team
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
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15th December 2010

Re: NSPCC response to Early Years 0-6 Strategy

The NSPCC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Early Years (0-6) Strategy. Our comments are confined to our views on the vision and general direction of the Early Years Strategy as it relates to child protection.

The NSPCC is the lead voluntary child protection agency in Northern Ireland and is unique among charities in having statutory powers by virtue of its Royal Charter and the Children (NI) Order, 1995. The NSPCC's authorised status is recognised in the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 in relation to public protection arrangements. The NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children by seeking to influence legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours for the benefit of children and young people. This is achieved through a combination of service provision, public affairs, campaigning and education. The NSPCC employs approximately 150 staff in Northern Ireland providing a range of services. These include therapeutic work, family support, assessment, support for young people with sexually harmful behaviour, young witness support, counselling services in schools, Independent Visiting Services for young people in the care system, Child Protection in Sport and ChildLine. In addition, the NSPCC operates a 24 hour national Child Protection Helpline.

Comments on the Draft Strategy

While we consider the vision statement, which outlines a commitment to ensuring every child is enabled to reach its potential by giving each child the best start in life, is laudable we do not think the general direction of the strategy capitalises on this vision, as its primary focus is on formal learning outcomes.

We would welcome a broader focus and a commitment to the development of a more integrated strategy which includes health and social care as well as education. It is our view that there is a lack of clarity how the commitments outlined in the strategy will be achieved, what will be prioritised and what and how these will be funded. Our view is the document should be revised and re-issued for further consultation

We believe the evidence for investment in young children is compelling and from the perspective of the NSPCC we believe that early intervention strategies which focus on supporting children and families can be beneficial in helping break the cycle of abuse. Consequently we are supportive of an Early Years Strategy which puts the needs of children at its centre but to be fully effective we believe this should be an Executive driven strategy which has the commitment of all relevant Government Departments.

Yours sincerely

Neil Anderson

NSPCC National Head of Services for Northern Ireland