

SEN Response

Organisation on whose behalf this reply is made: NSPCC

Introduction

1. The NSPCC is the lead voluntary child protection agency in Northern Ireland and is unique among charities in having statutory powers by virtue of 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. This is achieved through a combination of service provision, lobbying, campaigning and public education.
2. The NSPCC employs approximately 150 staff in Northern Ireland providing a range of services. These include therapeutic work, family support, assessment, support for children who display sexually harmful behaviour, Young Witness, Independent School Counselling, 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.
3. The NSPCC's comments on this consultation document draw on the experience and expertise of our practitioners in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of vulnerable children, including those with special education needs and disabilities who access our services, in particular, those within our education programme; the NSPCC Independent School Counselling and NSPCC ChildLine CHIP's services within special and mainstream schools and the work of the NSPCC Education Advisor.
4. The NSPCC welcomes the opportunity to comment on this consultation document '*Every School A Good School - The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion*' produced by the Department of Education. In particular, we welcome;
 - the holistic and child-centred aim of the document which seeks to "ensure that every learner fulfils his or her full potential" (p2);
 - the proposed approach which embodies prevention, early intervention' and partnership working across professional disciplines and sectors including education, health and social care.

However rather than respond to each of the individual consultation questions set out in the response document, we have confined our

comments and response to those which relate to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children within the education system.

Additional Education Need (AEN)

5. The NSPCC agrees with the rationale underpinning the proposed development of an inclusive framework to facilitate the development of “quality provision tailored to the needs of individuals and groups of children” (p7). We also welcome acknowledgement of the multiplicity of barriers to learning which inhibit some children from fulfilling their potential, as reflected in the conceptualisation of AEN.
6. NSPCC has significant experience of providing support to children and young people through our independent school counselling service within both special and mainstream schools. The service is accessed by a wide range of children including those with special education needs and disabilities and other vulnerable children including Looked After Children, children on the Child Protection Register and children involved with other support agencies e.g. Social Services and CAMHs. All these children require support in coping with complex issues, such as domestic violence, Deliberate Self-Harm and sexual and physical abuse.
7. McElearney et al (2007) documented 17.3% (88) of the children using the NSPCC Schools Counselling service were identified by their teachers/ counsellors as having a special education need: 9.9% (51) had a statement of SEN while a further 2.7% (14) were on the Code of Practice. Of the other 82.7%, 4.9% (25) were on the child protection register, 6.1% (31) were Looked After Children and 26.1% (133) were involved with other agencies including PSNI, Social Services, GP, Education Welfare/Psychology/Behaviour Support and voluntary support agencies.
8. NSPCC’s experience of providing this service to children and young people in schools supports the need for a broad conceptualisation of AEN. However while we welcome a broader and more inclusive definition/concept such an approach will need significant investment in order to meet the needs of all children with AEN.

We recommend

A clear equitable process is developed and a set of criteria/ thresholds is established for assessing children’s needs and allocating resources across the four themes that constitute AEN

A separate funding stream which allocates appropriate and adequate resourcing is made available to ensure that the proposed model is effective in meeting the individual needs of all children across the four theme areas

Professional development

9. The proposals presented in this consultation document have significant implications for the training and development of the whole school staff including teachers, classroom support assistants and all other professionals who will provide support within the context of the proposed three stand model; Within School, Within School plus External Support and Co-ordinated Support Plans. The NSPCC welcomes this proposal yet acknowledges the challenge this presents for the existing school workforce and resourcing.

Our experience of delivering the NSPCC Independent Schools Counselling Service has highlighted the importance of training and supporting teachers to make appropriate referrals and therefore appropriate use of external support services, as proposed in this consultation document. It is imperative that schools have an effective positive discipline strategy in place that is implemented alongside external support services so that children's behaviour and support needs are managed effectively and appropriately.

10. NSPCC is currently completing a research study funded by the DE Pupil Support Unit exploring the development of a preventative child abuse education programme in Northern Ireland. This research engaged approximately 70 teachers (at all levels of responsibility & experience working across controlled, maintained, integrated and Irish medium schools across all Education and Library Boards areas) in 14 focus group discussions with the aim of exploring their views and identifying their training and support needs with regard to teaching a preventative child abuse education programme. The early findings have significant implications for the training, development and support of the whole school staff including teachers.

11. We would highlight the following findings which are relevant to the consultation proposals:

- Many of the skills and competencies required to enable professionals deliver on the proposals set out in this consultation are similar to those required within the context of a preventative child abuse education programme and the DE PEHAW programme. We recommend where possible the opportunities to develop and build transferable skills and competencies across all DE programmes are recognised and developed.
- Findings emerging from focus groups within mainstream and special schools highlight the significant role played by Classroom Support Assistants and Allied Health Professionals (within the special school setting) in providing support to children with Special Education Needs and Learning Disabilities. This asserts the importance of and need for multi-professional whole

school staff training and development that is inter-professional and focussed on integrating a team of professionals to provide effective support to children.

- Early findings suggest the following may need to be considered in relation to the professional development of teachers; that teachers across sectors and school management types may be at different starting places regarding training and development; need for different types of training – skills as well as emotional/professional readiness to deal with sensitive issues; accessibility and sustainability of programme of training, development and support in longer term (see attached interim report of research for more detail).

We recommend;

Resource and develop a comprehensive package of training, development and support which contributes to sustainable practice development within schools

This package should take account of transferability of skill set across all DE programme areas including SEN Review, PEHAW and preventative child abuse education; inter-professional and multi-professional working

References

McElearney, A., Adamson, G., Shevlin, M., Tracey, A., Muldoon, B. and Roosemale-Cocq, S. (2007) 'Independent Schools Counselling: Profiling the NSPCC Service Experience', *Child Care in Practice*, 13: 2, 95-115

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