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Each Child Belongs

Response from the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education to the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' which sets out the Government's proposals for reforming the delivery of services for children, young people and families.

Participation through Service Collaboration

The proposals in the Green Paper for improving child care are significant and cover a wide range of services and issues. As CSIE's work concentrates on promoting inclusion and challenging segregation in education we are confining our comments to the proposed changes in the Green Paper which have a bearing on this – notably the plans for improved collaborative working, planning, management and accountability across children's services using new forms of extended schools, children's centres and children's trusts as the focus for delivery.

The need for health, education and social services to work more closely together for the benefit of children is a major theme of the Green Paper. Suggestions for multi-disciplinary teams, joint assessments, greater sharing of information, and joint inspections are all put forward as ways of achieving this. These ways of working have much potential for promoting participation and improving children's lives by making services easier to access, avoiding duplication, guarding against neglect and mistakes and generally trying to make sure that help for children takes account of their lives as a whole rather than fragmenting efforts across different professional boundaries and organisational structures.

Parents who have worked with this Centre provided examples of the stress and anxiety caused by services not working together and the difficulties caused by having to co-ordinate often disparate and sometimes conflicting professional roles and expertise into a personal support system which works for their child. We are aware that parents, usually mothers, have had to give up their professional careers, to take on the role of case manager for their own child in order to try and co-ordinate services effectively. It is not unusual for parents to have to negotiate with up to twenty different professionals about the needs of one child.

Similarly, the proposals for creating the new post of Director of Children's Services, and Lead Council Member for Children in local authorities, as well as the new national positions of

Minister for Children and Children's Commissioner, also have potential for improving management and accountability. Such posts will have the opportunity to take a wide perspective to ensure that different strands of child support are amalgamated into a proper framework which never loses sight of the humanity and dignity of the child at the centre and the overarching priority to make sure the principles of non-discrimination, best interests of the child, optimal development, and the right to involvement in decisions, as embodied in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, are upheld and routinely followed as a basis for services.

History of Exclusion

There is much to be applauded in the Green Paper and much hope for the future. However, the extent of the culture changes required and the huge challenges involved should not be underestimated. The history of human services has been marked by a tendency to respond to human difficulties by relying on processes of specialisation and of exclusion which has had the effect that our most vulnerable children – children with physical impairments, children experiencing learning difficulties, abused or neglected children, ill or dying children and children with no-one to look after them – have often been treated as if they are fundamentally different, as if they are less than human, as if they do not belong in ordinary society .

In recognition that unfortunately services do not automatically fulfill their aspirations to empower and good intentions can not guarantee success, CSIE would like to urge caution regarding the new extended role envisaged for schools.

The potential role of schools as a base for better co-ordinated children's services

(variously described as 'one-stop shops', 'extended schools', 'full-service schools'), as envisaged in the Green Paper, is very much in line with the development of inclusive schools with the capacity to cater for the full diversity of children, whatever their needs and abilities, which CSIE and others have been urging for many years.

Dangers of Segregation

However, it is unclear from the Green Paper to what extent this concept will be applied to all schools and to what extent children will have to move from their local areas and local schools to benefit. If the concept is only to be applied to some schools in each LEA then we are concerned that this could

have a segregating effect by taking children out of their local areas, and by creating stigma and prejudice through identifying some pupils as needy or different enough to be removed from their usual settings for 'special' services. Our concerns are the same concerns as apply to segregated 'special' schools.

Furthermore, if the 'one-stop shop' concept is to be taken forward by extending special schools we would see that as a very backward, step since it would be additionally hard to tackle the stigma and prejudice associated with the setting, as described above.

Similarly, if mainstream schools already considered to be developing good practice in inclusive education were to be extended with further additional 'special' services in isolation to others, they too could be unwittingly tripped up by the new developments and become regarded as segregating institutions with the same problems involved.

The possibility of mainstream and special schools amalgamating with social and health services in 'consortiums' or 'villages' may provide a more inclusive experience for the pupils during school hours but does not tackle the problem of segregation from their own local community and from other family members.

Inclusion in Society

It is CSIE's experience that in defining inclusion we need to ask 'inclusion in what?'

In our view the aim is inclusion in society and inclusion in society begins with inclusion in properly resourced and supported local mainstream schools which are capable of responding to the full diversity of children in their local areas. Schools are crucial to developing inclusion because they are the first main social experience outside the family for most children and because of their crucial role in transmitting values and attitudes in society.

The placing of social workers, youth justice workers, health workers, speech therapists and other teachers and supporters with specialist knowledge in all mainstream schools may seem beyond present organisational capacity and political will but we need to keep it in sight and be aware of the dangers of compromising too much, too early. The extent to which the 'one-stop shop'/'extended schools'/'full-service school' concept is applied across the country and the manner in which it is approached will be crucially important in efforts to

make sure that vulnerable children get the services they need without being seen as 'other' and not belonging.

It would also be helpful to consider to what extent mainstream schools may not need to have all types of specialist help on site on a permanent basis but could bring together appropriate combinations of support as required from sources within and without the school. This would especially benefit pupils experiencing complex and multiple difficulties for whom packages of support and programmes, based on their membership of their local mainstream school, could be individually tailored to suit their particular needs and circumstances.

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