

Empowering Schools: A Consultation on the Provisions of the Education (Scotland) Bill

Consultation Response from Includem

Background

Includem is a specialist Scottish charity which provides intensive, personalised support for vulnerable young people and their families. We believe that no young person is beyond help and that with a responsive, consistent service at the time of most need we can help rebuild relationships and deliver positive, sustainable outcomes.

Our work is focused on prevention – prevention of offending or reoffending, prevention of unnecessary accommodation away from home and prevention of exclusion from school. In all cases our framework of support consists of professional one to one relationships with focused work to deal with the underlying needs and challenges in order to develop hope, aspiration, resilience, and improved family relationships.

An increasing focus of our work is on earlier intervention through direct referrals from schools. We support young people who are at risk of exclusion and who have poor attendance and engagement with school.

Overview of consultation response

Includem's experience is working with young people to improve their engagement with school by supporting them outside of school hours at home and in the community.

Includem strongly welcomes the continued focus on the attainment gap and on improving educational outcomes for young people. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the provisions of the Education (Scotland) Bill.

We particularly welcome the vision around ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed, and noting the importance of addressing the unacceptable variability in attainment across the country.

We also welcome the recognition of the role that parents and families play in the education of children and the impact that improved parental engagement has on social skills, behaviour and relationships in school. However we are concerned that the actions outlined in this proposed Bill will do little to improve the participation of parents who are currently not engaged in their child's education. In particular there is very little emphasis on improving the underlying factors at home which may be preventing school engagement.

We are also concerned about how little reference is made to the principles of Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) in the Bill and the potential for increased decision making by schools leading to a fracturing of the holistic approach taken by many local authorities. This could be a regressive step making it more difficult to coordinate relevant services like housing or social work or health services which is so crucial for those young people who should be the focus of any work on closing the attainment gap.

We would encourage the government to look more broadly at the community based services and interventions which have a positive impact on engaging young people in school in an effective and sustainable way. Changes to governance, collaboration and improvement plans may all have a positive impact, but will not, in our view, be sufficient to reduce the attainment gap directly. The proposed content of this Bill represents a missed opportunity in providing the support young people and families need to tackle the underlying causes of the attainment gap.

Question One: The Headteachers' Charter will empower headteachers as the leaders of learning and teaching and as the lead decision maker in how the curriculum is designed and provided in their schools. What further improvements would you suggest to enable headteachers to fulfil this empowered role?

We welcome the intention that the Headteachers' Charter will require that head teachers will continue to involve their school community in the life of their schools and in key decisions which affect them.

Of particular interest is the proposal that the charter will create a new duty on head teachers to work collaboratively with other schools and partners on improving learning and teaching. Our experience is in supporting young people across a number of different schools in local authority areas who are disengaging from education. We would encourage the inclusion of a specific focus in this new collaborative framework on approaches to reach out to these young people and families, sharing good practice and experiences of what works.

This joint working in relation to those young people in need of out of school support should include the ability for head teachers to come together to co-ordinate the use of services such as Includem's which have a focus on bridging the gap between what happens in the home and what happens at school.

Question Two: The Headteachers' Charter will empower headteachers to develop their school improvement plans collaboratively with their school community. What improvements could be made to this approach?

We welcome the intention to involve the wider school community in school improvement plans as well as the expectation that headteachers will work collaboratively with other professionals to achieve excellence and equality of opportunity in their schools.

However, it will be important to ensure local approaches which work across a number of schools are not lost in the process of creating regional improvement plans. For example, in one local authority we work collaboratively across all secondary schools to support those young people most in need of out of school support. This approach works well across the whole authority and a crucial coordinating role is

played by the Education Department of the local authority. This effective joint working approach may be more difficult across a larger geographic area where there will be different local priorities.

There is a recognition in the proposal of the key role that schools play in “breaking the cycle of poverty and helping to close the poverty-related attainment gap” and that this requires the collaboration of a broad range of public services. We are concerned that by changing the education governance structures this collaborative approach may be more difficult as services which will continue to be delivered on a local authority basis (e.g. social work or social work commissioned third sector services) may not be as effectively co-ordinated alongside education services.

Regional collaboration may be effective in the design and development of the curriculum, but the equally important role schools play in dealing with the underlying causes of non-engagement in school must also be considered in this approach.

Question Three: The Charter will set out the primacy of the school improvement plan. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?

We refer to our previous answer with regard to our concerns about local collaboration potentially being more difficult to achieve if regional improvement plans result in less detailed local priorities being taken forward.

Question Four: The Headteachers’ Charter will set out the freedoms which headteachers should have in relation to staffing decisions.

a. What are the advantages and disadvantages of headteachers being able to have greater input into recruitment exercises and processes adopted by their local authority?

b. What are the advantages and disadvantages of headteachers’ ability to choose their teams and decide on the promoted post structure within their schools?

Question 5: Should head teachers be able to decide how the funding allocated to their schools for the delivery of school education is spent? If so, what is the best way of doing this?

Question 6: How could local authorities increase transparency and best involve Headteachers and school communities in education spending decisions?

Question 7: What types of support and professional learning would be valuable to Headteachers in preparing to take up the new powers and duties to be set out in the Head teachers’ Charter?

Question 8: Are the broad areas for reform to the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 correct?

As stated earlier we welcome the recognition of the important role parents and families play in the education of children and young people.

We do not have a comment on the specific reforms to the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) 2006 Act, however we have a more general comment on the importance of parental involvement in education.

We know from work across different local authorities in Scotland of how crucial dealing with challenges young people face at home is to their attendance and engagement at school. This is often an area of young people's lives which schools find difficult to engage with and which is generational – parents have often had a poor experience of education themselves which reflects in their engagement with their child's education. We would suggest the Education Bill could consider other ways to improve parental engagement in education in addition to the formal structures of Parent Councils.

The section of the consultation under 'wider activity' (p19) suggests there may be an additional package of activity around this but it is not clear how this will be implemented and what form it will take. For example, in principle the introduction of a home to school link worker in every school to support parents who find it challenging to engage in their child's learning is welcome, but we would encourage this to be implemented in a way that reaches out to those least engaged parents beyond normal school times and is a community based rather than school based role.

We would be happy to contribute further evidence to this discussion when this 'additional package of activity' is further developed.

Question 9: How should the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 be enhanced to ensure meaningful consultation by headteachers with parents on substantive matters of school policy, improvement planning and curricula design?

Question 10: Should the duties and powers in relation to parental involvement apply to publicly funded early learning and childcare settings?

Question 11: Should the Bill include a requirement that all schools in Scotland pursue the Principles of pupil participation set out in Chapter 3? Should this be included in the Headteachers' Charter?

Yes, we would agree that the Bill should include a requirement that all schools in Scotland pursue the principles of pupil participation, and also that this requirement should be included in the Headteachers' Charter. Such a development would complement the GIRFEC framework and further embed a children's rights approach to Scottish education.

Question 12: What are your thoughts on the proposal to create a general duty to support pupil participation, rather than specific duties to create Pupil Councils, committees etc....?

We welcome the proposal to create a general duty to support pupil participation, as opposed to a specific duty to create pupil councils or committees. A general duty has the potential to incorporate a far wider range of views and enable young people to become engaged in different ways, recognising that some young people do not put themselves forward for formal roles like Pupil Councils, but still have a view on their education which should be heard.

Question 13: Should the Bill include provisions requiring each local authority to collaborate with partner councils and with Education Scotland in a Regional Improvement Collaborative?

Question 14: Should the Bill require each Regional Improvement Collaborative to maintain and to publish annually its Regional Improvement Plan?

Question 15: If we require Regional Improvement Collaboratives to report on their achievements (replacing individual local authority reports), should they be required to report annually? Would less frequent reporting (e.g. every two years) be a more practical and effective approach?

Question 16: In making changes to the existing planning and reporting cycle, should we consider reducing the frequency of national improvement planning and the requirement on Ministers to review the National Improvement Framework?

Question 17: Are the proposed purpose and aims of the Education Workforce Council for Scotland appropriate?

Question 18: What other purpose and aims might you suggest for the proposed Education Workforce Council for Scotland?

Question 19: Are the proposed functions of the Education Workforce Council for Scotland appropriate?

Question 20: What other functions might you suggest for the proposed Education Workforce Council for Scotland?

Question 21: Which education professionals should be subject to mandatory registration with the proposed Education Workforce Council for Scotland?

Question 22: Should the Education Workforce Council for Scotland be required to consult on the fees it charges for registration?

Question 23: Which principles should be used in the design of the governance arrangements for the proposed Education Workforce Council for Scotland?

Question 24: By what name should the proposed Education Workforce Council for Scotland be known