

NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions Friday 16th May 2014

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Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Gapping and Mapping Exercise on Internet Safety

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the report on the Gapping and Mapping Exercise on Internet Safety was given to the Safeguarding Board NI for amendment; and when they expect to publish its findings.

(AQW 31637/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM wrote to the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) on 10 December 2013 to establish whether, in its capacity as the statutory body charged with safeguarding children, it would be willing to carry out an assessment on the risks identified in the Gapping and Mapping Exercise. At that stage, the Department only provided the SBNI with a copy of the template which was used to carry out the exercise rather than the full report until we had obtained their agreement to carry out the assessment. This issue was raised during the recent Assembly debate on 10 February 2014 to mark Safer Internet Day and Junior Ministers have now written to the Speaker to provide clarification around this issue.

Officials met with the SBNI on 10 March 2014 and a letter has now been issued to DHSSPS to ask it to commission the SBNI to carry out the assessment. The safety of children is our paramount concern and we want to make sure that any action we take will not expose children to additional risk. As a result, we are also asking DHSSPS to request advice from the SBNI on whether it is appropriate to publish the gap analysis report at any stage.

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Childcare: Costs/Policy

Mrs Cochrane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the recent 2014 UK Budget announcement on help with childcare costs will affect their childcare policy.
(AQO 5998/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The first phase of the Bright Start School Age Childcare Strategy will promote current government assistance with the costs of childcare (childcare vouchers and the childcare element of tax credits) with a view to increasing local levels of uptake. A particular focus will be on encouraging parents who use childcare services supported under Bright Start to avail of the type of financial assistance most suited to their needs. We are aware of the Coalition Government's plans to introduce a tax-free childcare scheme and we are currently considering this in the local context.

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Bright Start

Mr F McCann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Bright Start childcare scheme.
(AQO 6004/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme was launched on 27 March 2014 and is currently open to applicants. The Scheme aims to create or sustain up to 7,000 school age childcare places by assisting current and prospective childcare providers. These envisaged childcare places will begin to address the need for additional school age childcare services. The Grant Scheme will assist childcare settings serving disadvantaged and rural communities, and settings based on the schools estate. The first letters of offer are expected to be issued in the autumn.

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Bright Start

Mr Newton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the proposed 8,000 childcare places under Bright Start will be created and sustained.

(AQO 6005/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme aims to create or sustain up to 7,000 school age childcare places by assisting current and prospective childcare providers. These childcare places will begin to address current unmet need for school age childcare services.

The Grant Scheme was launched on 27 March 2014 and is open to applicants. A second grant scheme – to create up to 1,000 new childminder places in rural areas – is currently in development with a view to launching later in the year.

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Department of Education

Early Years Programme

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Education to detail the benefits of the pilot Early Years programme to date.

(AQW 33046/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) have been involved in ongoing evaluation of the Early Years pilot and to date the feedback has been positive. After the first full year of operation of the pilot, ETI indicated that considerable progress had been made and that there was evidence of very good practice developing across the range of pilot settings. ETI also indicated that some evidence showed that, as a result of the work of the pilot teams with parents, there had been a dramatic impact on the home lives of children involved. Some settings reported to ETI that the training is the best that has been provided and that the opportunities for clustering and whole setting training have been invaluable. A number of stakeholders, including various early years' specialists and an attached Health Visitor, have reported their views on the benefits of the pilot to date and again feedback has been positive. Some of their comments have indicated that staff are better informed, can recognise needs early and can put in place appropriate strategies to help.

The pilot is funded to continue over the summer months and is due to finish in the settings at the end of September 2014 when it will move into its evaluation phase. As well as evaluative work conducted within the pilot, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) will complete an independent report following the end of December 2014.

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Early Years Capacity Building Pilots

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether the multi-disciplinary teams put in place to deliver Special Educational Needs Early Years Capacity Building pilot projects will be kept together to continue their work during the evaluation phase once the pilots have been completed.

(AQW 33098/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Early Years pilot is due to end in the pre-school settings at the end of September 2014 and will be followed by an evaluation phase ending in December 2014. Following on from this, a full evaluation of the pilot will be completed by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

In preparation for the Early Years pilot ending in September, DE in conjunction with the Education and Library Boards will consider the possibility of any interim arrangements that might be made, subject to the availability of funding. Decisions on what might be the future shape of SEN early years provision beyond the pilot stage will not be made until the final ETI evaluation has been considered.

Whilst I recognise the importance of collaborative working, there is no provision for the continuation, beyond September 2014, of the pilot multi-disciplinary teams as they currently stand.

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Department for Social Development

Phase 2 of the Child Maintenance Reform Programme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development whether he expects Phase 2 of the Child Maintenance Reform Programme to begin as scheduled in June 2014.

(AQW 32953/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Child Maintenance Reform programme in Northern Ireland will be aligned with changes being made in the rest of the United Kingdom by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). My officials are continuing to work towards the timetable as scheduled. I expect to be able to confirm the actual commencement date in the near future.

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