

NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions Friday 13th June 2014

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Department of Education

Admission Criteria for Enrolment into Primary Schools

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to standardise admission criteria for enrolment into primary schools.

(AQW 33852/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Statutory responsibility for setting admissions criteria rests with the Board of Governors of the primary school concerned and reflects the particular priorities they wish to use when considering applications for admission to their school. My Department does not have a role in this other than to offer guidance.

Working in close collaboration with the five Education and Library Boards, my Department conducted a series of workshops during September 2013 for representatives of primary schools and their Boards of Governors, to provide advice on best practice when formulating their admissions criteria for the 2014/15 school year. This training was scheduled to assist schools in reviewing the criteria they wished to be included in booklets for parents, which are published by the ELBs in November each year. All primary schools were invited to attend. School feedback on the events was positive and attendance of oversubscribed primary schools was good. The guidance given to primary schools at the workshops, and the training materials, was published on the Department's website and a link sent to all primary schools by the end of September 2013.

Any move to standardise admissions criteria would require consultation, legislative amendment and the agreement of the Assembly. There are no current plans to introduce such legislation.

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Department of Finance and Personnel

Shared Education: Funding

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has been asked by the Minister of Education to provide additional funding for the facilitation of shared education projects since May 2011.

(AQO 6290/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Shared education funding and projects can take different forms. For example, as well as capital funding for shared education campuses, there can be resource funding aimed at enabling individual, separately located schools to engage in sharing services and facilities. My Department received several bids from the Department of Education relating to shared education funding. Of course, the provision of any additional funding to a department would be a decision for the Executive to make, subject to a recommendation from me.

A number of shared education bids are currently being considered with the UK Government under the Economic Pact announced in June 2013. These include funding for Lisanelly Shared Education Campus and a number of Integrated Primary Schools. The Shared Education Campuses Programme is a key commitment under the Together: Building a United Community Strategy which aims to identify up to ten potential shared campus type projects. In January this year the Minister for Education called for expressions of interest in this Programme, and I understand he will make an announcement shortly regarding those selected to proceed in planning. No bids have been made in this regard.

I understand the Department of Education is also planning a programme of enhanced shared education amongst schools to be part-funded under Delivering Social Change. This will need to be considered by the Executive against competing priorities.

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Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mental Health Capacity Bill

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what protections are in place for people under 16 who are currently excluded from the draft Mental Health Capacity Bill.

(AQO 6313/11-15)

Mr Poots: The key protections that will continue to apply to all children when the draft Mental Capacity Bill is enacted are contained in the Children (NI) Order 1995. That Order requires the child's welfare to be given paramount consideration. Importantly, it also recognises that children should be given a voice in relation to what happens to them and provides opportunities for working in partnership with children as far as their age and development allows.

A number of protections are also contained in the Mental Health (NI) Order 1986. Pending the outcomes of a proposed children related project in the next mandate, the Department is seeking views on how the protections in that Order could be made more child-focused and enhanced where appropriate. Any proposal brought forward during the current consultation that better protects children will be given careful consideration.

Both the Children (NI) Order 1995 and the Mental Health (NI) Order 1986 are part of a wider legal framework that already exists to protect children and govern decision making in relation to them. This is the main reason why the draft Mental Capacity Bill (and capacity legislation elsewhere in the UK) does not apply to those aged under 16. The Republic of Ireland has gone further in deciding that its proposed capacity legislation will not apply to those aged under 18.

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Health Checks: Primary Schoolchildren

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will consider instigating health checks for all children when they start primary school. (AQO 6315/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has a framework in place known as 'Healthy Child, Healthy Future' which delivers the universal child health promotion programme for all children and young people from birth and throughout the school years. The programme includes a specific set of contacts delivered by school nurses for children throughout their school life including when they start primary school as a Year 1 pupil.

General health appraisal takes place in years 1 and 8 and includes individual child health assessment to identify any mental or emotional health issues, review of speech and language development, oral health review, TB risk assessment, measurement of Body Mass Index (BMI) and review of the child's immunisation status. Parents are always invited to attend.

Targeted reviews are also carried out across all school years for example for children with long term conditions. This is in addition to the school based immunisation programme. These are all delivered within the school setting by Trust employed school nurses. If problems are identified, children are signposted to other services when new or existing physical, emotional or developmental problems are not being addressed. For example weight management programmes may be offered to children, they may be reminded about overdue immunisations, or offered support with long term conditions.

Schools are essential to the delivery of a comprehensive range of health promotion and health protection activities.

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