

NICCY Child Sexual Abuse Event – Speaking Notes

Slide 1 - Intro

- Good afternoon, my name is Caroline Gillan and I am the Director of Access, Inclusion and Wellbeing in the Department of Education.
- I have a broad remit within the Department, which includes responsibility for child protection & safeguarding; the independent school counselling service; additional education needs; looked after children; bullying; attendance and special educational needs.

Slide 2 – Role of Education – Child Protection

- I want to start by giving you a brief overview of the role of education in child protection.
- The education sector is a uniquely placed as it interacts with children and young people on a daily basis. This provides schools with the opportunity to be a positive influence; to support parents in teaching valuable lessons to children & young people; to be alert to the challenges pupils might be experiencing and to respond appropriately when issues of concern arise.
- To that end, a comprehensive suite of policies and procedures on safeguarding and child protection have been in place for a number of

years and are now well embedded across the education sector. A point noted by the Education and Training Inspectorate in their evaluation which informed the Marshall Report.

- Our ultimate aim is to create a safe learning environment, whereby those pupils who are suffering, or at risk of harm can seek help, or are identified, and appropriate action is taken.
- In doing so, the Department's document, 'Pastoral Care in Schools – Child Protection' is the first port of call and provides clear advice to schools and others on their responsibilities in relation to child protection.
- As you may be aware, the Boards of Governors of each school has a legal responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of its pupils and the significant front-line role undertaken by schools here cannot be underestimated.
- On a practical level, each school is required to have:
 - A child protection policy that sets out the procedures to be followed whenever there are concerns about a child; and
 - A Designated and Deputy Designated Teacher for Child Protection who act as the first point of contact for child protection concerns.
- Whilst the education sector itself does not have an investigative responsibility in this area; schools and the Education Authority assist relevant authorities by referring concerns and providing information when required.

Slide 3 – CSE and the Marshall Report

- Turning now specifically to Child Sexual Exploitation and the education-related recommendations in the Marshall Report.
- In responding to the challenges laid before us in the report, the Department took stock of its work programme; identified any gaps and the measures by which these gaps could be addressed. This was to ensure that our responses would not only be comprehensive but also that they would become an integral part of the Department's work in protecting our children.
- I would emphasise that our work in this area, as set out in our action plan, is not set in stone. Going forward we will continue to monitor and review our approach, in consultation with our stakeholders, responding appropriately and promptly to matters of concern.
- So turning to the recommendations themselves.

Slide 4 – DE Key Recommendation - Youth Services Review

- The one key recommendation for Education related to a review of youth services which takes into account the views of young people and aims to ensure that provision is attractive and appropriate.

- This has been accepted, as the Department clearly recognises the importance of engaging with young people and this is already a key feature of the planning and delivery across much of the youth sector.
- The **Priorities for Youth policy** seeks to further strengthen this engagement and there are also a number of actions in the Regional Youth Development Plan through which young people will be able to influence decisions.
- These will include the development of a Network for Youth Model and the establishment of Local Advisory Groups both of which will increase the voice of young people in the design and delivery of youth work.
- A Regional advisory Group was established to ensure that the views of young people shape the future provision of youth services. Membership includes two young people nominated by peers from the Youth Congress to represent the views of children and young people. They are also supported at the Regional Advisory Group meetings by the NI Youth Forum.
- There will also be greater flexibility in the opening times for centres and the deployment of youth workers operating in areas of disadvantage to ensure delivery meets the needs of the young people in the area.
- The Department will ensure the continued and active participation of young people in youth service planning and delivery through the implementation of the Regional Youth Development Plan and *Priorities for Youth*. And it will look to reach out to those young people in vulnerable groups who may not currently feel that the youth service has anything to offer them.

Slide 5 – DE Supporting Recommendations

- There were a further 16 supporting recommendations for the education sector covering a broad range of issues.
- The Department's response to these has two elements – firstly, **prevention**, by equipping children and young people with the skills they need to enable them to withstand the pressures they face and secondly, our **response** when issues do arise.
- While we don't have time today to go through each of the supporting recommendations in turn; I do want to highlight a couple of actions under the two themes of **Prevention** and **Response**, which I hope will be of interest.

Slide 6 – Prevention

- Turning first to the issue of prevention. In order to avoid issues of CSE arising we need to take preventative action on a number of fronts. We need to educate our children on the risks, we need to assist parents and of course the key to this is equipping our teachers to teach those sensitive subjects and ensure that the right conversations take place in the classroom in the right way.
- The following examples give you an idea of the approach being taken.

- Firstly, the **Northern Ireland Curriculum** itself requires schools to give specific attention to pupils' emotional wellbeing; health & safety; relationships and the development of a moral thinking and value system.
- Within this framework, the curriculum offers a medium to explore sensitive issues with children and young people, such as CSE, in an age-appropriate way which helps them to develop appropriate protective behaviours.
- To complement this, the Department has commissioned NSPCC to undertake a '**Preventative Education**' project which is aimed at building the capacity of teachers to deliver an effective preventative curriculum in primary schools. You may have heard about it in the press last week.
- This will not only equip teachers to embed preventative education into classroom life but will also provide support to other school staff and parents and involve external agencies to provide enhanced learning opportunities for pupils. The programme is currently at the development stage and will be piloted in primary and special schools throughout NI, before further roll out.
- The inclusion of special schools in this pilot is extremely important, as it is the vulnerability of these children and young people to these types of issues that can often be overlooked. Indeed this is confirmed by the recently published Barnardos NI briefing on the subject which noted that young people with learning disabilities are vulnerable to CSE due to a range of factors including overprotection and social isolation and can even be overlooked by professionals due to a lack of awareness of their sexual exploitation.

- Revised guidance for schools on **Relationship and Sexuality Education** (RSE) was published in August this year. It was updated by CCEA to reflect new legislation, technological advances and societal changes which affect how schools deal with these sensitive issues. RSE must be delivered in a sensitive manner which is appropriate to the age and understanding of the pupils which is why separate guidance for primary and post-primary schools has been published.
- We are all aware that the internet is now unfortunately a common tool for sexual exploitation. In the area of **e-safety**, the Department works alongside SBNI and PSNI and has recently issued guidance to schools, providing advice to pupils and parents on staying safe online. There are also now a wide range of resources on e safety available to teachers on the C2K system and these will continue to be developed over the coming year. Finally, the SBNI is developing Safeguarding Apps for children and parents/carers which will provide information and resources on CSE and e-Safety and will be rolled out in the autumn. We intend to work in partnership with SBNI to ensure that schools and pupils make the best use of, what we hope will be an invaluable resource.

Slide 6 – Response

- Moving on, whilst it's obviously important to have a focus on prevention, it is imperative that we have mechanisms in place to identify pupils who are vulnerable to abuse and to respond to the needs of children and young people who are victims of CSE, or indeed any other form of abuse.

- The starting point must be the overall **pastoral care system** that has become a vital part of education today. This comprises a wealth of policies and programmes, but at its heart is a nurturing and supportive setting in school, which as confirmed by the Chief Inspector's most recent report is a strength across our schools.
- An integral part of the pastoral care system is the school's child protection policy. This not only sets out the procedures to be followed whenever there are concerns about a child but on a wider level should also address how children will be made aware of risks; how they will be helped to recognise them and be given the skills to cope through the use of the preventative curriculum.
- A necessary step in complementing the pastoral care system was the **integration of CSE into child protection training**, whether that be in initial teacher training or the programmes provided by the Education Authority's Child Protection Support Service for Schools. And I can confirm that CSE is now a feature of that training.
- The Department has also a number of programmes which provide support to young people, these include:
- In schools, the '**iMatter**' Programme, which is the overarching vehicle for promoting pupils' emotional health and wellbeing. It looks to address how the entire school community should be engaged in promoting resilient emotional health for all pupils, what support systems are available for vulnerable pupils and what support is available to schools in the event of a crisis.

- Under the banner of iMatter a range of resources have been designed for young people that cover various issues including, self esteem, sexual identity and relationships and sex. Schools can use these resources in a number of ways and the topics are available in homework diary insert, poster and leaflet format; and in a variety of languages.
- The **Independent Counselling Service for Schools** currently provides valuable support to young people in every post-primary school and to the post-primary cohort in special schools. We are also currently considering the potential to develop a counselling service for primary schools. Of course a number of primary schools do already buying-in counselling services for their pupils where they have identified a need.
- In terms of some wider work of the Department:
- Children missing from school can be more vulnerable to CSE. It is important therefore that when any child's **attendance** gives rise to concern the school should put in place appropriate early interventions and if attendance continues to fall, should make a referral to the Education Authority, who will put in place support mechanisms to help a child get back to school.
- The Department has placed a particular focus on school attendance over the past 18 months with have been engaging with pupils and parents and have issued renewed advice and guidance to schools and will soon be consulting on a **Pupil Attendance Strategy**.
- We also hope to introduce an "Anti-bullying" Bill into the Assembly during the current mandate – subject to Executive agreement.

- Finally, the Department fully recognises that there are specific groups of children and young people who require additional support. One such group are LAC and we are currently developing a **Strategy to improve the educational outcomes for LAC**.
- While these areas of work are not CSE focussed per se – we would expect that they will lead to positive outcomes for children who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Slide 8 - Monitoring and Review

- I mentioned earlier that going forward we will continue to monitor and review our approach, so how exactly are we going to do that?
- We work in partnership with other Departments and agencies including DHSSPS and the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland in order to provide an appropriate response to identified need on a co-ordinated basis.
- Eilis has already elaborated on the cross-departmental role in relation to CSE, and in particular the role of the senior officials group. What will monitoring look like in DE then?
- The primary mechanism for this is a departmental safeguarding group. I chair this group and its membership is derived from the teams that are responsible for implementing the Marshall recommendations, including representations from ETI, Curriculum, Early Year and Youth. My role as chair involves critical oversight of implementation and challenge where progress is lacking. I report directly to the DE representative on the Senior Officials Group and the Minister, with regular updates on progress.

- It is our intention, subject to Ministerial agreement, to publish on our website six monthly progress reports on the action plan beginning in the autumn.
- The Education Committee has also taken particular interest in CSE and regularly requests updates on this work, as is appropriate given their statutory oversight role in relation to the work of the Department.
- I do understand that there is often cynicism when a Department develops an action plan and all the focus and rhetoric tends to be about the action plan itself, rather than what will change on the ground. But I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that our Minister and we, as officials, are committed to addressing the education related issues highlighted in the Report and to work with other departments and bodies in this regard.

Slide 9 - Challenges

- We will of course face challenges: funding is an ever present concern for all of us and the uncertain future financial position may impact on what we can deliver. We will of course continue to prioritise our activities and continue to robustly make the case for funding to support our work. The needs of children and young people will continue to be our primary consideration.
- Cross-departmental and sectoral working is an obvious challenge; but this work on tackling CSE has brought the Departments closer together, reflecting the already close working relationships between schools/EA staff/Social Workers and PSNI which has long been the case when child protection concerns are identified. DE has also a very good working

relationship with colleagues in SBNI which has been strengthened as a result of the CSE related work.

- The current political uncertainty will be at the forefront of everyone's minds at the minute. If the current difficulties are resolved, we should have assembly elections next year. This may result in a change of Ministerial leadership across Departments. New Ministers can often have different priorities from their predecessors. But it is reassuring to note that politicians across the political spectrum here have been united in their desire to tackle CSE and to ensure that children and young people are protected.
- But there are always challenges of one sort or another, we will do our utmost to overcome them.

Slide 10 - Conclusion

- Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today and I hope I have given you an insight into some of the key steps the Department is taking to tackle CSE.