

NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week of 4th October 2014

- **Tax-Free Childcare Scheme**
- **Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Inquiry**
- **Independent Counselling Services**
- **Statement of Special Educational Needs**
- **Statement of Special Educational Need**
- **Elective Home Education Guidance**
- **Middletown Centre for Autism**
- **Funded Education**
- **Autism Strategy**
- **Class Size**
- **Single Education Board**
- **Segregation in the Educational System**
- **Non-School Environment Education**

- **Fostering**
- **Welfare Reform**
- **Welfare Reform**
- **Child Maintenance Payment**
- **Supported Housing**
- **Women's Centre Childcare Fund**

Office of the First and Deputy First Minister

Tax-Free Childcare Scheme

Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps the Executive will take to ensure that the Coalition Government's Tax-Free Childcare Scheme will be promoted and accessible in Northern Ireland.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive has agreed to seek to extend the provisions of the Westminster Childcare Payments Bill to Northern Ireland by means of a Legislative Consent Motion. Subject to the Assembly agreeing such a Motion, parents who live here will be able to claim support under the proposed new Tax Free Childcare Scheme in the same way as those living in England, Scotland or Wales.

(1st October)

[Back to Top](#)

Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Inquiry

Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI - North Down) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given the proposed one year extension of the Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Inquiry and thus a similar period of additional wait for victims for potential redress, whether departmental officials will scope potential models of redress to learn lessons from other jurisdictions in order to inform thinking and expedite decision making ahead of the recommendations in the Inquiry report.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We do not underestimate the complexities of dealing with institutional abuse and every opportunity must be provided for those impacted by the allegations of institutional abuse to be heard in an open forum. The Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Inquiry Chairman has therefore reluctantly made a very persuasive and compelling case for a one year extension to the timeframe.

On consideration of all of the relevant evidence, the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Chairperson will submit a report to the NI Executive which will include recommendations on the requirement or desirability for redress to be provided by the institution and/or the Executive to meet the particular needs of victims.

The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Terms of Reference state “the nature or level of any potential redress - financial or the provision of services - is a matter that the Executive will discuss and agree following receipt of the Inquiry and Investigation report”.

We will not pre-empt the work of the Inquiry or any future decisions that the Executive may make by speculating now about redress or potential models of redress. **(1st October)**

[Back to Top](#)

Department of Education

Independent Counselling Services

Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Education what proportion of departmental funding has been allocated to independent counselling services for post-primary school pupils, in each of the last three years.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) is funded by the Department of Education and is available to all post primary schools and special schools with post primary age pupils. ICSS spend over the last three years is detailed below:

Year	Total DE Budget			ICSS Spend			% of Resource Budget
	Resource £000	Capital £000	Budget £000	ICSS Post Primary	ICSS Special Schools	Total ICSS	
2011-12	1,920,481	114,752	2,035,233	£1,893,873	£386,504	£2,280,377	0.12%
2012-13	1,900,503	108,221	2,008,724	£2,041,028	£402,556	£2,443,584	0.13%
2013-14	1,917,844	109,435	2,027,279	£2,041,028	£402,556	£2,443,584	0.13%

(30th September 2014)

[Back to Top](#)

Statement of Special Educational Needs

Mr Peter Weir (DUP - North Down) - To ask the Minister of Education to outline any changes in the process of issuing a statement of special educational need to children in each of the last three years; and what impact the changes have on the time it takes to issue a statement.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): There have been no changes in the statutory process of issuing a statement of special educational needs to children in the last three years. (30th September) [Back to Top](#)

Statement of Special Educational Need

Peter Weir (DUP - North Down) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils with a statement of special educational need, broken down by Education and Library Board, in each of the last five years.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The information requested is detailed in the table overleaf. The information provided relates to the 2013/14 school census, the 2014/15 school census takes place on the 10th October this year, provisional figures will be available in December, finalised figures in February.

Pupils with a statement of special educational needs by Education and Library Board, 2009/10 – 2013/14

Year	Education and Library Board					Total
	Belfast	Western	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern	
2009/10	2309	2144	2577	3210	3334	13574
2010/11	2479	2217	2634	3260	3308	13898
2011/12	2584	2261	2667	3254	3324	14090
2012/13	2739	2358	2840	3215	3402	14554
2013/14	2901	2545	2925	3400	3478	15249

Source: NI school census

Notes:

- Figures include funded children in voluntary and private preschools, nursery schools, primary (including nursery, reception and year 1-7 classes), post primary and special schools.
- Board refers to the board in which the school is situated, rather than where the pupil resides
- Figures include pupils at stage 5 on the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

(30th September)

[Back to Top](#)

Elective Home Education Guidance

Mr Mervyn Storey (DUP - North Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education whether his Department has issued guidance through a circular in relation to elective home education.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): My Department has not issued guidance through a circular in relation to Elective Home Education. However, the Education and Library Boards (the Boards) have recently each held a public consultation on their draft home education guidance/policy documents. The Boards are currently undertaking an analysis of the responses to the consultation exercise and a revised draft of each Board's document will be submitted to my Department in due course.

On 18 September, the Department published guidance (the Guidance) on Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS). The Guidance provides clarification on the legal basis for EOTAS provision, the process by which pupils must be referred for possible EOTAS placement and the ongoing role which schools are expected to provide for their registered pupils receiving EOTAS support.

However, I would note that the Guidance does not address home tuition services, which operate under fundamentally different referral and support processes, nor does it apply to elective home education, where a child's parents have chosen to withdraw the child from mainstream provision. **(30th September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Ross Hussey (UUP - West Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Education, in relation to the Middletown Centre for Autism, to detail

(i) how many children with autism spectrum disorder have been referred the centre, broken down by Education and Library Board; and

(ii) how many children from the Republic of Ireland have benefited from the centre, in each of the last five years?

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Chief Executive of the Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) has advised that the number of children who have been referred to MCA in the north of Ireland, broken down by Education and Library Board, is as follows:

	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB
1 September 2009 – 31 August 2010	1	0	0	1	0
1 September 2010 – 31 August 2011	1	1	1	1	1
1 September 2011 – 31 August 2012	1	1	1	1	1
1 September 2012 – 31 August 2013	2	1	1	1	1
1 September 2013 – 31 August 2014	7	6	6	6	6

The Middletown Centre for Autism also provides a range of support and intervention to professionals, parents and children with autism. Parents can avail of a range of training courses provided free of charge by the Centre and can access a broad range of online learning resources, including training video materials.

The Centre is also currently expanding its programme of direct support and intervention to children with complex autism who are referred to it by the ELBs.

In the south of Ireland referrals to the Learning Support and Assessment Service in MCA only commenced this year and the number of children who were referred was six. Prior to this the Department of Education and Skills had prioritised the provision of training and support for the parents of children and young people with autism. **(30th September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Funded Education

Mr Ross Hussey (UUP - West Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Education how many children diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder have received funded education outside of Northern Ireland, in each of the last five years.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Education and Library Boards have advised that the number of children diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder who have received funded education outside of the north of Ireland, in each of the last five academic years, is as follows:

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
BELB	0	0	0	0	0
NEELB	0	0	0	0	0
SEELB	1	1	1	0	0
SELB	0	0	0	0	0
WELB	0	0	0	0	0

(30th September)

[Back to Top](#)

Autism Strategy

Mr Barry McElduff (SF - West Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Education, given the increase in school age children who are diagnosed with Autism spectrum disorder, to detail the key elements of his Department's Autism strategy, particularly, how his Department is addressing equalities in service provision in the Western Education and Library Board area.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Executive's Autism Strategy (2013-2020) and Action Plan (2013-2016) sets out its commitment to improving services and support for people with autism, their families and carers, throughout their lives. The Strategy and Action Plan have been prepared as a result of the Autism Act 2011 which required the DHSSPS to lead on the development and implementation of a cross-Departmental Autism Strategy.

Both the Strategy and Action Plan have been developed through a process of collaborative and consultative working between people with autism, their families and carers, representatives from all government departments in the north, including the Department of Education (DE), and some key community and voluntary sector organisations.

A number of actions focus on education, which outline the specific input required from DE, the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA):

- Provide joined-up timely support services to meet the needs of children and young people with autism;
- Continue to build the capacity of schools and youth service to meet effectively the needs of children and young people with autism;
- Provide parents/carers of children and young people with autism with effective support and advice which will ensure that they are informed, involved and supported effectively by the school, the ELB and other agencies;
- Implement a common model of professional support and provision for children and young people with autism to meet their needs;
- Formalise protocols for collaboration between education and health autism services;
- Expand educational-led trans-disciplinary assessments, support and intervention mainly for children and young people with autism presenting with more complex needs;
- Provide life skills training for young people with autism whilst in post-primary education to help prepare for their transition to adulthood.

DE will work closely with the ELBs and MCA, as appropriate, to monitor progress on the implementation of each action.

DE and ELB Service Provision

Following publication of the 'Report of the Task Group on Autism' (2002), DE funded the ELBs to establish an inter-board Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Group to provide support to children on the autistic spectrum within each ELB. To ensure consistency across all ELB's an ASD advisory team was established in each ELB to enhance existing ASD services. The ASD advisory service continues to provide valued and worthwhile practical support to schools and is a resource of knowledge and skill, with the capacity to raise the standards of education and the social inclusion for children on the autistic spectrum and can provide tailored support to match a child's individual needs to ensure

that they reach their full potential. ELBs also provide autism-specific training in schools and all ELBs deliver a range of autism-specific training for school staff. In addition MCA provides a range of support and intervention to professionals, parents and children with autism. Parents can avail of a range of training courses provided free of charge by the Centre and can access a broad range of online learning resources, including training video materials.

The Centre is currently expanding its programme of direct support and intervention to children with complex autism who are referred to it by the ELBs. **(1st October)**

[Back to Top](#)

Class Size

Mr Danny Kinahan (UUP - South Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education for his assessment of the effect class size has on children attending primary schools in areas identified as suffering from social deprivation and educational underachievement.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): My Department has carefully considered local data and international research on the issue of class sizes.

As regards local data we looked at the relationship between pupil-teacher ratios and assessment results at the end of key stages 2 and 3 and at GCSE. Our analysis showed there is no evidence of a correlation between class size and pupil outcomes. International research evidence also suggests that, except during the very early years, there is little correlation between class size and pupil outcomes.

While evidence suggests that smaller class sizes in early years can have a positive impact on outcomes, it has also consistently highlighted that the quality of teaching and allowing teachers the flexibility to adapt their teaching in different situations, are the most important factors in determining educational outcomes. These key factors are reflected in core Departmental policies, namely DE's literacy and numeracy strategy and the revised curriculum. In view of the evidence surrounding the early years, it is DE's policy to keep classes for our youngest pupils, (Years 1-4), to a maximum of 30 pupils.

I recognise that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds have greater obstacles to overcome and their schools need additional resources to help them do this.

In response to this I made changes to the way schools are funded in order to target additional resources at schools serving high proportions of disadvantaged pupils.
(1st October)

[Back to Top](#)

Single Education Board

Mr Peter Weir (DUP - North Down) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the estimated timescale for the establishment of the proposed single education board.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The timescale for the establishment of the proposed Education Authority will depend upon the Assembly's consideration of the Education Bill. I am seeking agreement to the use of the accelerated passage procedure so that the Bill may complete its passage in time to allow for the establishment of the Authority by 1 April, 2015, or as soon as possible thereafter. **(1st October)**

[Back to Top](#)

Segregation in the Educational System

Mr Trevor Lunn (APNI - Lagan Valley) - To ask the Minister of Education, given that he recently noted that selection should be seen not only as an educational issue but also a social action issue, for his assessment of whether the segregation of children and young people in the education system is as a social action issue as well as an educational issue.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Our education system is founded on the principle of parental choice, and has a rich diversity of school types within it. My school improvement policy, 'Every School A Good School', and my Department's commitments in the Executive's Programme for Government, take into account the impact of wider social issues in helping or hindering progress. **(1st October)**

[Back to Top](#)

Non-School Environment Education

Mr Mervyn Storey (DUP - North Antrim) -

To ask the Minister of Education for his assessment of the number of children educated outside of a school environment.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The best place for children and young people to be educated is in school. It is recognised, however, that for some young people a school placement cannot be sustained and education outside the school environment may be necessary to meet their educational and other needs.

This is known as 'Education Otherwise Than At School' (EOTAS) and legal responsibility for this rests with the Education and Library Board (ELB) in which the young person resides. EOTAS encompasses a broad range of ELB funded interventions, allowing for a flexible response based on the assessed needs of the individual young person. While normally delivered in a group setting within specialist centres, EOTAS can include ELB provided tuition services delivering one-to-one teaching, in a home or other setting.

Each year, my Department collects statistics on the number of pupils in EOTAS provision. Data is currently held to 2013. The figures, broken down by board area are in the table below:

Date	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	Total
October 2009	225	155	179	161	146	866
October 2010	236	129	190	128	143	826
October 2011	172	87	192	125	111	687
October 2012	141	103	159	65	116	584
October 2013	164	90	64	134	106	558

*Figures are collated for the first week of October each year and include pupils in any form of ELB delivered EOTAS provision. They do not include children receiving Elective Home Education (EHE).

Under existing legislation a parent may choose to educate his/her child at home (EHE). ELBs are aware of 258 children being home educated, however, this figure does not include those children who have never been registered at a school and who have never been brought to the Boards' attention by another agency or individual. **(3rd October 2014)**

[Back to Top](#)

Department of Health

Fostering

Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department is taking to

- (i) increase the number of families choosing to foster children; and
- (ii) to make the process from application to attainment as efficient as possible.

Mr J Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Recruitment of foster carers is a continual activity and is based on the ability of prospective foster carers to match and build a relationship with the children and young people who require foster care. At the end of June 2014 there were 2146 foster carers in Northern Ireland.

The Regional Adoption and Fostering Service (RAFS) supports local Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, in the recruitment, assessment and training of foster carers, maintains an overview of the overall fostering position and undertakes recruitment drives as required. In addition, Fostering Network (NI), on behalf of the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), provides a dedicated helpline for foster carers and runs annual recruitment campaigns.

The British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) also receives funding from the HSCB to provide advice, consultancy services and training for prospective foster carers and professionals in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, under Transforming Your Care, additional funding has been made available to put in place professional foster care schemes for the most difficult to place children.

Currently the HSCB and HSC Trusts are reviewing fostering services which will identify areas of need and enable better targeting of recruitment. This has the potential to reduce the time spent on processing applications in respect of potential foster carers.

Independent fostering agencies to assess their own foster parents, without requiring a further assessment by a Health and Social Care Trust, as is currently the case. This will shorten the process for those who apply to become foster carers through independent fostering agencies. The new Regulations will also bring fostering agencies within the scope of inspection and regulation by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority.

Currently, the expected timeframe for the completion of assessments is between 4 and 6 months. Also, my Department is currently finalising new Fostering Regulations which, among other things, will enable. **(29th September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Department of Finance and Personnel

Welfare Reform

Mr Basil McCrea (NI21 - Lagan Valley) - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the schedule of financial penalties that will result from the failure to implement Welfare Reform, over the next five years.

Mr Hamilton (Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Chief Secretary has confirmed that the cost of not implementing welfare reform will be £87 million this year and £114 million next year. This will increase significantly over time. DSD estimates from January suggest that the cost could rise to £343 million per annum by 2018-19. **(1st October)**

[Back to Top](#)

Department for Social Development

Welfare Reform

Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI - North Down) - To ask the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of

- (i) the First Minister's view that non-implementation of Welfare Reform will cost £1bn per annum; and
- (ii) of the estimated additional annual cost of each social security programme which would emerge in the event that the Welfare Reform Bill was not enacted by the Assembly.

Mr Storey (Minister of Social Development): The costs to Northern Ireland of not implementing Welfare Reform will continue to escalate the longer decisions are delayed, impacting the monies available for public services in Northern Ireland now and in the future.

The First Minister is right to set out the potential scale of the financial risks which Northern Ireland is facing and, as Minister for Social Development, I cannot disagree with his statement on the potential costs. The scale of the financial costs for each social security programme should the Welfare Reform Bill not proceed will largely be determined by decisions of the Executive on how it wishes in the future to deliver social security and tax credits for Northern Ireland claimants and by the level of the adjustments made by UK Ministers to the NI Block DEL as a result of not implementing welfare reform.

It would be remiss of me not to highlight the significant financial advantages that Northern Ireland has under the current social security arrangements. Over £6 billion of social security and tax credit spending is provided directly by HM Treasury to Northern Ireland each year. The level of support is approximately £3.5 billion over and above the amounts derived from the National Insurance Fund for Northern Ireland. Breaking parity puts this support potentially at risk. **(30th September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Child Maintenance Payment

Mr Ian McCrea (DUP - Mid Ulster)- To ask the Minister for Social Development to outline the current levels of child maintenance payment arrears.

Mr Storey (Minister of Social Development): The Child Maintenance Service has made significant progress in recent years, getting more money for more children and as a consequence reducing the arrears outstanding.

During 2013/14, over £27m was either collected or arranged, supporting 22,123 children across NI. This represents an extra £2.9 million for 731 more children than the previous year. As a result, the arrears balance at 31 March 14 was £78.818m, some £2.691m less than reported for the previous year. The number of cases with a current liability, which were not paying fell from 2,616 to 1,629 during this same period, further underlining my commitment to better support separated families. **(30th September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Supported Housing

Mr Phil Flanagan (SF - Fermanagh and South Tyrone) - To ask the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has engaged with any relevant stakeholders to identify the demand for supported housing for young people with special needs.

Mr Storey (Minister of Social Development): Yes. My Department and the Housing Executive engage with a range of stakeholders to identify the demand for new supported housing services. This is done primarily through a joint commissioning structure in place with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Health and Social Care Trusts, to identify the need and plan for the delivery of housing support services for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.

Within this partnership the relevant Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the identification of demand for supported housing for young people with special needs. **(30th September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Women's Centre Childcare Fund

Mr Ian McCrea (DUP - Mid Ulster) - To ask the Minister for Social Development to outline the current status of the Women's Centre Childcare Fund.

Mr Storey (Minister of Social Development): Contracts for the Women's Centres Childcare Fund programme have been issued for 2014/15 and it is not yet known whether these will be impacted by anticipated budget restrictions across DSD programmes.

(3rd October)

[Back to Top](#)