NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week ending 6 March, 2020

Update on proportion of young people from a Catholic background in Woodlands

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| AQO 257/17-22 | Mr Pat Sheehan*(SF - West Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the proportion of young people from a Catholic background in custody in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, in comparison to young people from other backgrounds.**The Youth Justice Agency is working with children, families and communities to address vulnerability and risk-taking behaviour through targeted support and early intervention, to prevent children being drawn into the criminal justice system. This approach has led to a considerable reduction in the number of children entering custody in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre – over the past five years, the average daily population has fallen from 34 to only 18 children.There is, however, a recognition that there is a disparity in the religious breakdown of those entering Woodlands with, on average, 63% of the children coming from a Roman Catholic background over the past five years.As noted in the last inspection report by Criminal Justice Inspection NI, this matter is not directly within the control of the Youth Justice Agency. Woodlands is the recipient of children sent by police and courts; they must accept and work with every child referred, and have no right to exclude, nor options to assess suitability before accepting a child from Court. As corporate parents, Woodlands staff deliver all necessary supports and services to children in their care, including providing for their spiritual and religious needs. |

Update on review of Access NI system

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| AQW 2869/17-22 | Ms Joanne Bunting*(DUP - East Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Justice whether she will review the Access NI system in general, but with particular regard to the adequacy of inter-regional and cross-border information sharing to protect children and vulnerable people from those who have committed offences beyond our jurisdiction. *[Priority Written]***AccessNI work to ensure that both their administration process and IT system are up to date and reflect the current United Kingdom safeguarding regime.Criminal Record Information is shared through the Police National Computer (PNC) which holds information from all regions of the United Kingdom. In addition and unique to AccessNI it is also able to obtain criminal conviction and other information from the Republic of Ireland in relation to qualifying applications for enhanced checks for applicants seeking to work or volunteer with vulnerable groups. Given that both areas are already covered satisfactorily I have no plans for a formal review at this time |

Update on private educational psychology reports

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| AQW 2583/17-22 | Ms Paula Bradley*(DUP - North Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to clarify whether the Education Authority will accept a private educational psychology report in relation to special educational needs.**Regulation 9 of the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 provides that psychological advice shall be sought by the Education Authority (EA) from a person regularly employed or engaged by the EA as an educational psychologist.While the EA will take account of private educational psychology reports, these reports cannot be used instead of advice provided by the educational psychologist employed or engaged by the EA. |

Update on reporting requirements to Access NI on a statutory footing

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| AQW 2497/17-22 | Mr John Stewart*(UUP - East Antrim)* | **To ask the Minister of Justice for an update on placing reporting requirements to Access NI on a statutory footing.**There are no reporting requirements in relation to AccessNI.The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) of the Home Office provide, on a daily basis to AccessNI, lists of those persons deemed to be unsuitable to work or volunteer with children or adults across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. AccessNI subsequently checks these lists against individuals applying for work with vulnerable groups.The DBS has the statutory responsibility for determining whether any individual in Northern Ireland should be prevented from working with children and or adults and added to the lists. This is known as “barring”.In turn, organisations in Northern Ireland have a statutory duty to report to the DBS any person in their employment who is dismissed or would have been dismissed from working or volunteering with adults or children because they have;Been cautioned or convicted or a relevant offence;Engaged in conduct in relation to children and/or vulnerable adults i.e. an action or inaction (neglect) that has harmed a child or vulnerable adult or put them at risk of harm; orSatisfied the harm test in relation to children and/or vulnerable adults, i.e. there has been no relevant conduct but a risk of harm to a child or vulnerable adult still exists.This action allows the DBS to consider whether that person should be added to the lists of those barred from working with vulnerable groups. Policy responsibility for all issues relating to “barring” lies with the Department of Health. |

Update on numbers of children homeschooled

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| AQW 2407/17-22 | Mr Thomas Buchanan*(DUP - West Tyrone)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to detail the number of children who are homeschooled, broken down by constituency.**As of 17 February 2020 there were 428 children and young people who were known to the Education Authority (EA) as being electively home educated. It is important to note that this is not the total number of children electively home educated in Northern Ireland, rather it is only those that the EA has been informed about through the de-registration process or because EA has been asked for advice and support.The actual number may be higher as parents are only required to notify the EA if their child has previously attended school or has a statement of special educational needs.Parents may choose what they consider to be the most appropriate educational setting for their child and that can include being home schooled.The EA does not record the data by constituency and therefore can only provide a total figure. |

Update on escorts used to help children with SEN or disabilities to get to school

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| AQW 2204/17-22 | Ms Paula Bradshaw*(APNI - South Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education (i) how many escorts are used to help children with special educational needs or disabilities get to school; and (ii) what guidelines are given to escorts to ensure children access and leave vehicles safely.**The Education Authority has advised that it currently employs 513 escorts to assist with home to school transport for pupils with special educational needs or medical needs.  All Education Authority employed escorts are issued with an Escorts Instruction Manual and receive additional instruction and training as deemed necessary to meet the specific needs of pupils under their supervision.All home to school bus drivers employed by the EA must hold a D Licence, Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) card, Digital Tachograph Card and Access NI Certificate before taking up their position.  Drivers of private operator buses and taxis contracted by the Education Authority to assist with home to school transport services are required to provide evidence of a D Licence (or D1 for minibus), hold a CPC card and have a current Access NI certificate. Such evidence is to be provided to the EA prior to commencement of the contract and with updated copies provided throughout the duration of their contract.When in employment drivers receive regular CPC training and Passenger Assisted Training Scheme Training.  Additional training on special educational needs or medical needs is provided as necessary to meet the needs of the pupils being transported. |

Update on provision of paediatric pathology services

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| AQW 2155/17-22 | Mr Colm Gildernew*(SF - Fermanagh and South Tyrone)* | **To ask the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1043/17-22, to detail the occasions on which his Department has been in contact with the Irish Department of Health to discuss the provision of paediatric pathology services, including (i) dates; (ii) type of contact; and (iii) content of the contact.**My Department has been in contact with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) on a number of occasions regarding this issue.Senior officials wrote to colleagues in ROI on 14 November 2018 to seek agreement to engage in discussions on this issue. An initial conversation followed on 15 November 2018 with Chief Medical Officers in both jurisdictions to consider how best to facilitate some joint work on identifying options for a potential all-island service model similar to the Paediatric Cardiology approach.On 27 February 2019, my senior officials wrote to formally initiate collaborative working and to seek agreement to establish a small internationally-led expert group to carry out a review of the services provided in both jurisdictions and to make recommendations for an all-island service model to maximise available resources North and South.A meeting was held with colleagues in RoI on 25 March 2019 to scope the terms of reference and to consider the structure and format of the proposed review. Following the meeting draft terms of reference were shared with colleagues in RoI. Colleagues there requested some time to gather information on the current service in RoI and to discuss in more detail with service providers and respective colleges in the South.My Department’s Chief Medical Officer wrote to his counterpart on 31 July 2019 seeking to include this issue on the agenda at an upcoming Cross Jurisdictional Oversight meeting. At that meeting held on 5 November 2019 colleagues in RoI indicated that they were supportive in principle with the approach and agreed to engage with the HSE in the South to consider the way forward.Between April 2019 and end January 2020 there has been email communication on a number of occasions with colleagues in RoI seeking updates to progress this work. |

Update on number of mental health teams in the Belfast Health Trust

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| AQW 2151/17-22 | Ms Carál Ní Chuilín*(SF - North Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Health how many mental health teams are based in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.**There are 47 teams currently working across Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and adult mental health services in the Belfast Trust.This figure includes 11 separate inpatient teams (based at the Acute Mental Health Inpatient Centre, Beechcroft and Knockbracken Healthcare Park) and 36 community mental health teams (ranging from large teams such as the Home Treatment Team and core mental health teams to small specialised community teams such as Clozapine Team and the Lithium Team). |

Update on deferring start of school

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| AQW 2131/17-22 | Mr Chris Lyttle*(APNI - East Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 686/17-22, when his Department will produce a formal response to the public consultation on deferring entry to compulsory education carried out in 2014/15; and for his assessment of the current systems providing for deferred entry to compulsory education currently operating in the English, Scottish and Welsh jurisdictions.**A summary of the responses to the consultation commissioned by the previous Minister has been published and is available on the Department’s website. You will be aware that, at that time, the decision was made not to proceed with legislation on deferring entry to compulsory education in exceptional circumstances. As the consultation is now over five years old, I am not persuaded that it forms the basis on which to move the debate forward.I am aware that practice varies in other jurisdictions where the ultimate decision still lies with the appropriate authorities rather than individual parents. I am also mindful that there is evidence on both sides of the argument for taking a different approach here and I am meeting the member to explore the issue further. However, given the number of urgent issues currently impacting on education such as school funding, special educational needs and education underachievement, I have not come to a view as to whether legislative change would be a priority for the Executive’s legislative programme during the remainder of the current Assembly mandate. |