

DRAFT GUIDANCE ON PARTNERSHIP WORKING BETWEEN ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND EDUCATION

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

GENERAL

Children in Scotland is pleased to contribute to the consultation on the draft guidance. We welcome the introduction of guidance, as the interface between health professionals and schools can be, and indeed has been, complex and challenging. In the past, most children who required additional support attended special schools. Generally, allied health professionals who worked in those schools were viewed by school staff as familiar and trusted colleagues, integral to the provision of personalised and effective support. This continues to be the case in many special school settings; many, particularly those more recently constructed, include appropriate specialised facilities for allied health professionals to undertake therapeutic interventions.

Over the years, however, increasing numbers of children who need additional support for learning entered mainstream schools. Managers and staff in mainstream education were less familiar with the needs of, and of best practice with, children with additional support needs. Indeed, many had had no relevant training or experience. Arrangements for children were made on a case by case basis, resulting in inconsistency and, for some children, less than optimal provision. The introduction of guidance underlines the expectation that additional support for learning needs, including the provision of therapies, are routinely catered for in mainstream education. Greater consistency should also be achieved, if the guidance is adhered to. This, in turn, should result in better outcomes generally for children who need additional support.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. Is the structure and content of the guidance clear and can you identify any way that the structure and content could be improved?

The structure and content are clear and cover the key areas. The issues and signposts sections provide useful checklists. Having those collated at the end is helpful. What is possibly less clear is the status of the guidance. Perhaps the underpinning legislation might be more prominently asserted. It is important that schools do not see this as an 'optional extra', but as an integral part of their day to day business.

2. The guidance is structured to support joint reflection and service improvement. How effective do you think the guidance will be as a way to reflect on and improve partnership working?

If it is widely known about, understood and acted upon, it will be a useful and productive mechanism. As is rightly stated in the guidance, leadership "at all levels" is vital to effective collaborative practice. While it is of course important that those directly involved with the child and family take personal responsibility for forming and sustaining meaningful partnerships, it is essential that the culture and climate within which they do this is supportive and encouraging. The section on joint strategic planning could possibly be more explicit as to how 'high-level' partnership working and the community planning process can actively support and improve practice on the ground.

3. When you consider the range of practice identified in the guidance, to what extent does this reflect your experience and expectations?

It would possibly be helpful to include some specific examples such as the level of skill and commitment required from a school to optimise a child's motor coordination. The reference to AHPs building capacity in schools by providing training to school staff rather than always supporting children by direct intervention is welcome.

4. The guidance offers guidance on the universal, targeted and specialist roles of AHPs. Is this model of practice consistent with current ways of working by AHPs?

We believe it reflects the current approach by most AHPs and is in general supported by NHS management.

5. Any other comments about any aspect of the guidance or consultation process

We would like to emphasise the centrality of children and parents to the collaborative process, and to highlight the importance of a child rights focus.

Children in Scotland is Scotland's national agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents more than 400 members, including 90% of Scottish Local Authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and Europe.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It also services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland). In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve: ASL, Scotland's largest independent education mediation service.