

This bill is a welcome progression of Hungry for Success. Children in Scotland accordingly supports the many positive provisions of the bill including

- The duty on education authorities to ensure that the food and drink supplied in schools meets set nutritional requirements
- The duty on Scottish Ministers to endeavour to ensure that local authority schools are health-promoting.
- The power for local authorities to provide free drinks, cereals etc.,
- The provision to allow local authorities to provide children with snacks
- The requirement to promote uptake of school meals and the commitment to eradicating the stigma surrounding free school meals.

However, we are concerned about what the bill doesn't say and doesn't do. The bill does not

- Cover all early years provision
- Include a stronger provision for an extension of eligibility for free school meals
- Stipulate the involvement and participation of children and young people in the decision making and implementation surrounding nutrition and health promotion in schools.
- Include provisions for parental involvement and participation
- Lay out clear means for monitoring the progress of every school in Scotland

**The scope of the bill should be extended to include the early years sector and an expert panel similar to the Hungry for Success model established to advise on the implementation of the health promotion provision across the early years sector. This panel would also consider a wider range of recommendations to strengthen the role of early years services in contributing to the health agenda.**

Health throughout life is heavily influenced by early childhood experiences.<sup>1</sup> Children in Scotland believes that if policies to improve diet among children and young people are to be successful in the long term, there is a need to develop healthy eating habits among children of pre-school age.

Healthy eating habits in the early years entails more than ensuring food and drinks are nutritious. Involving children in food production and choice and connecting nutrition to health promotion in an early years setting is essential and is not currently being done. A whole child whole community approach is needed in the early years which encourages children to enjoy healthier lifestyles so that when they reach primary and secondary schools they are more likely make healthy food and lifestyle choices.

#### **Involving children and young people should be on the face of this bill**

Children in Scotland believes that it is essential that children and young people are meaningfully involved in the development of the nutritional standards for local authorities.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Improving Health in Scotland: the Challenge*, Scottish Executive, 2003

In the absence of good habits set at a young age, children and young people will too often given the choice, opt for unhealthy food. Therefore, food and drink provided by schools must not only be nutritious but appealing to children and young people. This must address such issues as the eating environment, compatibility with extra curricula activities, queues and food presentation. These issues are directly linked to uptake and their importance needs to be recognised.

### **Promoting school meals and extending eligibility to free school meals**

Promoting school meals to pupils, whether they are free or not, will benefit children and young people if those meals are healthy and nutritious. 23% of children in Scotland are living in poverty<sup>2</sup>, only 18% of all children in Scotland are entitled to free school meals. However, of those entitled to a free school meal, 31% do not take one.<sup>3</sup> ***The failure of this Bill to extend the eligibility to free school meals in Scotland does not reflect the Scottish Parliament and the UK Government pledges to eradicate child poverty.*** Uptake and entitlement to school meals are therefore both important issues that will have a direct impact upon the health of the poorest children in Scotland.

Children in Scotland believes that universal free school meals is the best option for providing free school meals. However, within the context of a restricted budget we recommend that the Scottish Executive should extend entitlement at least to:

- All 3 and 4 year olds
- All primary school children in Scotland
- Families receiving working tax credits (see Children in Scotland's Manifesto)

Children in Scotland believes that targeting younger children would be more beneficial in terms of forming long-term healthy eating habits and attitudes. We believe that the first priority is the provision of free school meals for pre-school children and all primary school children. Children will carry these healthy eating habits with them into their teenage years and adulthood, helping to reduce the risk of health problems later in life. We believe that the Scottish Executive should also target children and young people from poorer families through the benefits system so that those children are guaranteed at least one healthy meal a day

**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, 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 over 400 members, including 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 the European Union.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Executive, local authorities and practitioners. It also services a number of groups such as: the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People; the National Children's Voluntary Forum; the National Early Years Forum and the Additional Support Needs Network. Children in Scotland also hosts Enquire, the national advice service for additional support for learning.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Scottish Households Below Average Income 2004/05*, Scottish Executive

<sup>3</sup> *School Meals in Scotland 2006*, Scottish Executive

For further information contact Paula Evans Policy and Parliamentary Information Officer,  
on 0131 222 2435 or on [pevans@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:pevans@childreninscotland.org.uk)