



MEDIA RELEASE
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**CIS welcomes ASL review
and highlights need to involve parents**

Children in Scotland welcomes today's publication of HMIE's review of the implementation of the Additional Support for Learning legislation and its highlighting of the need to do more to reach and support parents.

The report, *How good are we at Implementing the Additional Support for Learning Act? How good can we be?* is particularly welcome in the context of the Scottish Government's new focus on the early years.

Bronwen Cohen, chief executive of Children in Scotland, said: "The review underscores the need for better information and support to involve parents, particularly in the early years. In the context of additional support needs, we need to do more to address the quality of relationships in the pre-school period and work to ensure there are fewer disagreements. Building a better understanding between parents and staff in the early years must be the priority."

Anne Lennon, senior manager at Enquire, the Scottish advice and information service for additional support for learning, emphasised the review's findings about local authorities' consultation of children.

She said: "The report finds that authorities have not involved or consulted children and young people sufficiently. In particular, approaches to consulting and involving children and young people lacking capacity to make their views known were not well developed and more needs to be done in this area."

Lennon also highlighted the review's recognition of positive developments in the area of transitions.

"It is very positive that some aspects of transition are working well, for example nursery to primary and primary to secondary – specialist support teams have significantly improved planning to meet needs of pre-five children," she said.

“However, it is a concern that secondary to post-school transition is less effective due to difficulties in coordinating agencies and accessing adult services.”

The review addresses the implementation of the landmark act that has put Scotland at the forefront of additional support needs legislation.

Dr Jonathan Sher, Children in Scotland’s director of policy and research, said: “The review recognises a unique, progressive and important piece of legislation that contributes towards the development of an inclusive society. It is encouraging that it shows local authorities have, overall, absorbed and understood the act.”

Dr Sher noted that a pilot programme run by Children in Scotland in 2005-2006 highlighted the role advocacy could play in better involving parents.

He said: “Successfully implementing the ASL Act cannot be accomplished solely by professionals. Children in Scotland’s pilot advocacy projects in Grampian and Forth Valley demonstrated the great value of informed and supported parental involvement. They also revealed the pressing need families have for help in negotiating complex systems on behalf on their children.”

“Family support should become a government duty (as mediation already is) and a routine feature of how the ASL Act’s promise is fulfilled across Scotland. Getting it right as early as possible is what’s best for children, families, schools and the government. Tribunals and other lengthy, costly legal processes should be a last resort for families, not the first or only option.”

For more information please contact Chris Small, tel 0131 222 2419 / email csmall@childreninscotland.org.uk

Notes for editors

- **The ‘What I Think Matters’: Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Project**

Children in Scotland has been asked by North Ayrshire Council to carry out an independent consultation project with children and young people who require additional support with learning, as well as their mothers, fathers and carers.

The ‘What I Think Matters’: Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Project will provide an opportunity for children, young people, parents and carers to share their thoughts and experiences of support and services they access or have tried to access. Findings from the work will be compiled into a report

informing North Ayrshire Council where service users think things are done well and where things could be improved.

Next month the project is running the first in a series of consultation events for children, young people, parents and carers where they can share their views. The first two events will be held at Greenwood Teachers Centre, Irvine, on Wednesday 5 December and Saturday 8 December. Sessions on the 5 December will run at 10am, 1.30pm and 6.30pm, and on 8 December at 10am.

If you would like to sign up for one of these free sessions, contact Catriona Thomson, tel 0131 222 2445 / email cthomson@childreninscotland.org.uk

If parents are not able to attend the dates at the Greenwood Teachers Centre but would like a chance to get involved, please contact Catriona Thomson – other consultation events will be running throughout December and January.

More information on this project will be available in a forthcoming press release.

- In 2004, the Scottish Parliament passed the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act. The Act changed the framework for supporting children who require extra help to learn, replacing the concept of 'special needs' with one of 'additional support for learning'.
- Children in Scotland is Scotland's national children's agency, bringing together voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals to improve the lives of Scotland's children and their families.