

MEDIA RELEASE

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**North Ayrshire leads the way in seeking
the views of parents and pupils**

A new report by Children in Scotland on additional support for learning in North Ayrshire reflects the views and experiences of more than 1,200 children, young people and their parents/carers across this local authority area.

North Ayrshire Council's Educational Services commissioned Children in Scotland to independently and meaningfully consult with the intended beneficiaries of Scotland's landmark *Additional Support for Learning Act*, now starting its fourth year of implementation.

Over a six-month period during the last school year, Children in Scotland's four-person research team used a variety of methods to find out what the consumers of additional support for learning services think and recommend.

The key messages of *What North Ayrshire's pupils and parents told us* are:

1. Most pupils and parents expressed a positive opinion about ASL services and staff members throughout North Ayrshire. Overall, nearly three out of four children and young people said that the adults working with them at school listen to what they have to say and try to help. A similar proportion of parents said that they were 'happy' or 'very happy' with the help that their child is getting – and an even higher percentage (82%) expressed the view that the people involved in their child's education have been "helpful" or "very helpful".

2. A significant minority of pupils and parents across North Ayrshire expressed varying types and degrees of dissatisfaction with their experiences with additional support for learning.

3. A significant minority of the children and young people said that they wanted and needed extra help at school (above and beyond what they already are receiving).

4. The most frequently mentioned, and most valued, improvement recommended by the participants involves better communications and better relationships among parents, pupils and professionals.

Jonathan Sher, head of research and policy at Children in Scotland, said: “North Ayrshire’s desire to seek and to learn from this independent, in-depth consultation process should be applauded. We also are grateful to the pupils and parents who made time to respond and trusted us with their thoughts.”

“Agencies always say that they care about what children, young people and parents actually think. North Ayrshire backed up their interest by supporting a consultation that went far beyond any token, tick-box exercise. We do not know of another local authority that has commissioned such a large, independent consultation with its pupils and parents about additional support for learning.”

“However, we hope that North Ayrshire’s good example will be emulated throughout Scotland.”

This Children in Scotland report also found that there are three criteria by which parents and students judge additional support for learning. The first is ‘how much has it helped me (or my child)?’, the second is ‘how easy was it for me (or my child) to get the extra help needed?’, and the third is ‘how friendly, respectful and fair have professionals been with me (or my child)?’

Allan Cowieson, a key official with North Ayrshire Educational Services, said: “As part of its commitment to the delivery of high quality services for children and young people with additional support needs, North Ayrshire Council is delighted to have commissioned Children in Scotland to conduct this large-scale survey research.”

“The authority was happy to have confirmation that the vast majority of children and young people and parents/carers were either happy or very happy with most aspects of the provision of additional support for learning. The authority was also pleased to note that some of the respondents were able to express to the research team any concerns that they had. The constructive criticisms will also be used to inform planning for the further improvement of services.”

The summary report, *What North Ayrshire’s pupils and parents told us*, will be available to download free from Children in Scotland’s website www.childreninscotland.org.uk from 10 October 2008.

An article about the report and consultation process is published in the new issue of Children in Scotland magazine, also available from 10 October. For more information and to order a copy visit www.childreninscotland.org.uk/cis

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Notes for editors:

- 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 succeed in school, 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.