



PRESS RELEASE

Immediate release Wednesday, 2 November 2005

Children in Scotland issues a response in advance of the Scottish Parliament debate on children with special needs.

A motion that questions the statutory mainstreaming presumption in Scottish education law and calls for the closure of special schools in Scotland to be suspended, will be debated in Parliament tomorrow, (Thursday, 2 November).

The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 places a duty on every education authority to ensure that children are educated in mainstream schools, unless certain, specified, exceptions apply. In his motion, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton MSP, says there should be no presumption, statutory or otherwise, in favour of or against mainstreaming so that parents can make "a genuine informed choice between mainstream schools and special school provision".

He also calls on the Scottish Executive to "put in place a moratorium on the closure of special schools until the series of assumptions behind the mainstreaming policy is reviewed" and highlights concern that "33 special schools have been closed since 1997". (See 'notes for editors' for motion S2M-3490 in full)

Shelley Gray, policy officer at Children in Scotland, said: "Mainstreaming policy is based on the principle of inclusion and this must remain at the centre of Scotland's education system. It has come from many years of progress at an international level towards a society based on human rights and non-discrimination and to remove this principle from law would be a deeply regressive step.

"The motion expresses concern that 33 special schools have closed since 1997. However, this does not take account the fact that special schools have also opened in this time. Scottish Executive statistics indicate that there were 34 special schools in 2004 compared with 33 in 1997. The numbers of pupils in independent special schools has also increased by eight per cent in 2003 to 2004.

"It should also be noted that much of the recent high profile criticism of mainstreaming has referred to the English system of 'Statementing'. These are similar to the shortcomings of the Record of Needs system in Scotland, but in less than two weeks this system will be replaced by a new legal framework, introduced by the new Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.

“The reality of mainstreaming must be discussed and obstacles recognised and addressed. However if the rights and interests of all children are to be protected the principle of inclusion must not be undermined and the statutory presumption of mainstream, with the existing exceptions, must continue to be supported.”

Notes for editors:

- **Motion S2M-3490 in full:**
That the Parliament recognises that many children with additional support needs draw educational and social benefit from being educated in a mainstream setting; acknowledges, however, that in order for such children to flourish, appropriate resources and support must be available; further believes that the educational and social development of some children with multiple and complex needs can best be promoted through the concentrated support provided in special schools; notes with concern that 33 special schools have been closed since 1997; believes that there should be no presumption, statutory or otherwise, in favour of or against mainstreaming and that parents should be able to make a genuine informed choice between mainstream schools and special school provision, so that they can decide on the educational provision that is best suited to the needs of their child, and calls on the Scottish Executive to put in place a moratorium on the closure of special schools until the series of assumptions behind the mainstreaming policy is reviewed.
- **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.