

19 August 2019

Dear sir/madam

Consultation – Draft Northern Ireland Children and Young People’s Plan 2019-2021.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above consultation.

The Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC) was set up in September 2016 to represent and support the interests of the controlled sector in Northern Ireland. To date 94% of controlled schools have opted-in to register with CSSC.

The controlled sector is:

- Large – it accounts for 49% of all schools and caters for over 143,600 children, making it the largest education sector in Northern Ireland.
- Diverse – providing education across all school types, i.e. nursery, primary, secondary, grammar and special schools. Within this, controlled integrated and controlled Irish Medium schools are included.
- Inclusive – providing education for children of all faiths and none (63% of pupils define as Protestant, 10% Catholic and 27% ‘other’) and over a third of newcomer pupils in Northern Ireland.

CSSC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Draft Northern Ireland Children and Young People’s Plan 2019-2021. Effective coordination and collaboration between agencies and organisations is critical in meeting the needs of children, CSSC therefore welcomes this strategic plan.

CSSC endorses the focus in promoting early intervention and is in agreement with the definition which acknowledges that early intervention can take place at any age in a child/young person’s life. CSSC also welcomes the recognition in the definition of the importance of family. In addition to this the definition also acknowledges the potential for a population to be at risk and CSSC understands this to also include vulnerable groups within the population.

In respect of the definition for family support, CSSC acknowledges the support for families in the home, however the term “style of work” requires clarity.

CSSC would welcome further clarification in respect of the definition for parenting support. As it is currently presented, the definition assumes a deficit model. CSSC strongly believes that early intervention is critical for children and young people and that access to timely

support would assist parents in supporting their children and help parents make well informed decisions.

CSSC agrees with the approach outlining the purpose of the Children and Young People's Plan and with the core principles. CSSC supports the use of data in planning and communicating key messages to support outcome based planning.

It is crucial that strategic partnerships work together consistently across Northern Ireland. It is noted from the summary of outcomes in each area in Northern Ireland that there are different priorities across the 5 Outcome Groups. CSSC would welcome reassurances that the inconsistencies in outcomes are based on assessed need rather than inequalities of access to support.

Within the key actions to support the purpose of the Children's Services Planning Process CSSC welcomes the inclusion of the Department of Education in clarifying strategic objectives in relation to services. Such commitment to collaboration will insure effective planning to meet the needs of children and young people. CSSC recognises the importance of the interface between education and health professionals and is concerned that this may not be appropriately represented in the multi-agency planning processes. CSSC recognises that this is a high level plan. Since the establishment of CSSC in 2016, member schools have clearly articulated the challenges they face in meeting the needs of individual pupils. Principals have raised concerns regarding limited accessibility to training for key medical conditions, excessive waiting times for support for pupils in respect of mental health issues and a lack of effective communication between health and education. The role of a school is primarily to provide education to its pupils; school staff are not medically trained, therefore the importance of an integrated approach amongst all agencies in meeting the needs of children and young people cannot be underestimated.

Governors and principals report that often appropriate support packages for medical needs are not in place when children start school. If early intervention is to be operational, effective partnerships need to be in place between health and education. As soon as there is a diagnosis which is likely to result in the need for additional support to enable a child to access the curriculum, education must be involved, even before a child is admitted to school. If medical evidence is not presented in a timely manner to assist the statutory assessment process then children may not receive early intervention and schools are left vulnerable, supporting children's needs without any additional financial help or human resource until assessment is completed.

Effective health/education partnerships have the potential to assist parents making informed decisions about the appropriate placement of their children within the education system.

Member schools have raised concerns regarding the increasing financial pressures in providing support for children with additional needs. Due to the current status of school budgets many schools find themselves having to reduce that support as they no longer have sufficient funding to sustain the provision.

Controlled Schools' Support Council
2nd floor, Main Building
Stranmillis University College
Belfast, BT9 5DY
T: 028 9531 3030
E info@csscni.org.uk

CSSC would welcome regular communication on the work of the partnership and would like further information that is relevant to our member schools.

CSSC officers welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation and to be given the opportunity to influence the final Draft Northern Ireland Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2021. The closing date has not enabled consideration by Council, however, the response will be reported to the Education and Research Committee in October 2019 and any further comments forwarded to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Mulholland'.

Barry Mulholland
Chief Executive