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**CSSC response to the Programme for Government Outcomes Consultation February 2021**

Online web form response:

1. **Our children and young people have the best start in life**

* Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

Yes.

CSSC agrees that this outcome is crucial and in particular emphasises the role of education in giving children and young people the best start in life.

The controlled sector is diverse and inclusive. It is the only sector which includes all school types, nursery, primary, post-primary (grammar and non-selective) and special schools, as well as a number of controlled integrated and Irish Medium schools. There is a wealth of good practice in the controlled sector which can be shared and replicated to lead improvement. As the advocacy body for the controlled sector, the largest education sector in Northern Ireland, a number of CSSC’s work streams are aligned to this outcome in the current Programme for Government. CSSC provides a representational and advocacy role to controlled schools, which includes supporting principals and governors, sharing evidence based good practice across the sector and facilitating programmes to build capacity within the sector and raise educational standards in conjunction with the Education Authority.

Access to high quality education must be available to children from all backgrounds and circumstances, with a particular focus upon those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Schools leaders and staff must be well equipped to support children and young people to reach their potential. This must begin in teacher training and be reinforced through continuous professional development. Investing in the teaching workforce therefore is crucial to fully realise this aim.

The ongoing financial pressures that schools face must be addressed and we hope that the upcoming review of education will build upon the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee’s inquiry into education funding.

CSSC welcomes the focus on mental health and wellbeing, particularly due to the ongoing impact of Covid19 on children and young people. In this context it is critical that schools are given the resources to provide necessary support and pastoral care for those pupils in need.

* Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas that have been included under this Outcome?

Yes

CSSC notes that under the ‘Access to education’ priority area, the consultation document highlights addressing resourcing pressures and a strategic approach to area planning. CSSC agrees that these are key areas of focus to secure appropriate provision for quality education and access for all in schools which are fit for purpose.

Regarding ‘skills and attainment’ CSSC notes that under the existing outcomes the following two indicators are linked:

* Gap between % non-FSME school leavers and % FSME school leavers achieving at Level 2 or above including English and Maths
* % school leavers achieving at Level 2 or above including English and Maths

We understand that the indicators which will be linked to each new outcome have yet to be agreed, however, going forward consideration must be given to the definition and measurement of underachievement. Basic measures such as GCSE results do not reflect the added value that schools provide to enable pupils to achieve their potential.

* Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

No

* Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

No

1. **We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment**

N/A

1. **We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect**

•Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

Yes

•Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas that have been included under this Outcome?

Yes

The role of education under this outcome must be considered.

Shared education

The Shared Education Act in 2016 placed a statutory duty on the Department of Education and the Education Authority to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education. Through the Act other arm’s length bodies, including sectoral bodies, have a power to encourage and facilitate shared education. CSSC reports on its work in this area to the Department of Education every six months.

By its nature shared education fosters respect and understanding between cultures. Pupils from different schools and backgrounds come together to learn, interact and engage. Many of the early projects took place outside schools and contact was often brief. Today’s shared education projects are mostly based on regular contact, such as programmes of shared lessons, taught in schools by pupils’ teachers. There is greater opportunity for friendships to form between pupils, but also school staff who work together to plan and deliver the projects in many cases. While some projects tackle the topics of identity and culture, often the contact pupils have with one another is a learning experience in itself.

The number of schools involved in shared education partnerships has grown significantly over recent years and the availability of funding through the Shared Education Signature Project and Peace IV funds has enabled many more projects to develop.

Many school leaders acknowledge that without funding they would have been unable to begin a shared education project and if funding were to cease they would find it difficult to continue the work which has begun. The continuation of funding is essential so that existing projects may endure and new partnerships are encouraged to develop.

In addition CSSC agrees that shared education must be mainstreamed and has responded to the consultation on this issue.

Inclusive education

The controlled sector is the largest, most diverse and inclusive education sector in Northern Ireland. The ethos of the sector is reflected in the Council’s vision statement:

‘The Controlled Schools’ Support Council supports controlled schools, which are open to all faiths and none, in providing high quality education for children and young people to enable them to learn, develop and grow together, within the ethos of non-denominational Christian values and principles’.

School ethos is an important factor in tackling inequality and discrimination, increasing trust and respect, and promoting understanding. CSSC’s self-evaluation ethos toolkit for controlled schools supports schools in identifying and fostering their ethos. The toolkit and additional support is available to all controlled schools.

•Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

No

•Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

No

1. **We all enjoy long, healthy, active lives**

* Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

Yes

It is imperative to consider the role of schools in supporting pupils from all backgrounds to tackle disadvantage and promote physical and mental health and wellbeing.

In terms of disadvantage, the indicators focusing on pupils entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) in the current Programme for Government consistently shows underachievement in this cohort of pupils. Particularly in comparison to pupils who are not entitled to FSM. The ongoing work to explore underachievement by DE’s expert panel will bring forward recommendations on how to address this issue. These recommendations should be included in the updated Programme for Government.

As mentioned previously, the focus on mental health and wellbeing is welcomed, especially due to the ongoing impact of Covid19. It is critical that schools are given the resources to provide necessary pastoral care for pupils.

* Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas that have been included under this Outcome?

Yes

* Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

No

* Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

No

1. **Everyone can reach their potential**

* Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

Yes

Education has a key role to play in supporting children and young people to reach their potential. Schools are centres of learning and education is focused on each individual child and providing support mechanisms needed to enable every child to reach their potential. A commitment to supporting and developing strong school leadership, pastoral care, an emphasis on teaching and learning and the curriculum are all essential aspects of a school’s role in achieving this outcome. Consideration must be also be given to the added value that schools provide (over and above basic measures of success e.g. GCSE results) to enable pupils to achieve their potential.

CSSC is committed to advocating on behalf of controlled schools to inform the initiation of innovative, evidence-based projects which enhance provision and enrich the controlled sector.

* Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas that have been included under this Outcome?

Yes

As outlined previously, addressing the underachievement of particular groups (FSME and SEN pupils) in schools is necessary.

* Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

No

* Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

No

1. **Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral**

* Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

Yes

A world class education system must link to future markets and workforce needs. In general, there needs to be a fresh long-term strategic plan for education, with the necessary investment and clearly articulated outcomes. In order to do this underachievement in the system must be addressed.

* Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas that have been included under this Outcome?

Yes

* Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

No

* Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

No

1. **Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other**

No response.

1. **We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives**

* Do you feel this Outcome is worth including in the Programme for Government framework?

Yes

As mentioned previously, schools have an important and unique role to play in supporting pupils and ensuring that all services are focused on the individual needs of children and young people. Education settings must be considered in conjunction with this outcome, particularly in respect of vulnerable pupils, those entitled to FSME and pupils with SEN. Education services are one of several frontline services funded by government to safeguard and protect the interests of all children. Education services work in conjunction with the Safeguarding Board NI to prioritise the protection and wellbeing of children.

* Do you agree with the Key Priority Areas that have been included under this Outcome?

Yes

* Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas missing under this Outcome?

No

* Do you feel there are Key Priority Areas included under this Outcome that are not relevant?

No

1. **People want to live, work and visit here**

No response.

**Other comments**

CSSC is the advocacy body for the largest education sector in Northern Ireland. Our programme of work is aligned to the current Programme for Government outcomes. We would welcome inclusion in the next stage of the Programme for Government consultation as a key stakeholder.