

<i>item:</i>	7
<i>report:</i>	CYP20/06

HIGHLAND CHILDREN'S FORUM INCLUSION REPORT - OFFICER RESPONSE by Stephen Iliffe

Summary

This report provides members with an initial officer response to the report prepared by Highland Children's Forum on Inclusion Issues "What Difference Would There Be If Children's Experience Framed Policy?" which was presented to the Joint Committee on 21st April 2006.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Highland Council and NHS Highland, through the Highland Joint Committee for Children and Young People, provide support for the Highland Children's Forum (HCF). The core roll of HCF is to represent the views of Children and Young People in the Highlands who have Additional Support Needs.
- 1.2 During the period June 2004 - September 2005 the HCF Children's Consultation worker undertook a number of visits to discuss experiences of educational inclusion with children and young people and their families, and with professionals.
- 1.3 Following these visits The Highland Children's Forum prepared a Report "What Difference Would There Be If Children's Experience Framed Policy?" This report, although admittedly anecdotal, provides a vivid account of the experiences of some children and young people with additional support needs who attend both mainstream and specialist schools. The report highlights both existing good practice and issues for future development.

- 1.4 Historically the Highland Council and its predecessor The Highland Regional Council have educated in mainstream schools a higher proportion of pupils who have special educational needs than have most Scottish Councils. This has resulted partly from Council Policies, partly from the expressed preferences of parents, children and young people, and partly from the geography of the Highlands - within which a significant number of pupils live outwith possible day travel to specialist facilities within the council area, and outwith possible day travel to national centres of excellence in central Scotland.
- 1.5 The expectation that all children should be educated in their local school wherever possible was first made explicit in Highland Regional Council policies in the early 1990's, including in the Policy Documents produced in response to the report of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education "Effective Provision for Special Educational Needs", and the prospectus and policy statement for The Highland Regional Council Psychological Service. These policies were continued by the Highland Council.
- 1.6 The Standards in Scotland's schools etc Act 2000 introduced into Scottish Education law a "Presumption of Inclusion", by requiring that other than in exceptional circumstances pupils with additional support needs should be educated in a mainstream school. This requirement is fundamental to the overarching Highland Council Education and Sport Service Policy Document: The Support for Learners Policy Framework.

2. The HCF Report

- 2.1 Although the HCF report states that "it is written from information gained anecdotally", the range of views and experiences described within the report is consistent with the experience of officials. The report is particularly useful, therefore, because it provides further evidence about practice in the Highlands, and because it contains rich and vivid descriptions of the actual experiences of children and young people, together with many useful ideas and suggestions.
- 2.2 Following the presentation of the Report to JCCYP, this Committee agreed further funding to HCF to resource further work in this area.

3. Developments in The Highlands: Past and Future

- 3.1 It has been the experience of officials in Highland that though a few parents have sought segregated special education for their children, the majority have wanted an appropriate package of support in mainstream school. A key goal of policy and practice development has therefore been to support mainstream schools in developing the facilities and expertise to meet a widening range of additional support needs.

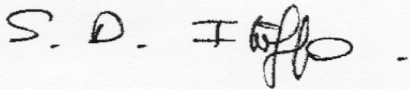
- 3.2 In Inverness and East Ross-shire parents and carers of pupils with severe, profound or complex learning difficulties have been offered a choice of provision with the possibility of attending a mainstream school or one of the three special schools. In other centres of population provision is made in resourced mainstream schools. In the most rural localities the numbers of pupils are so low that it is not viable to maintain a continuing specialist facility and so packages of support are put together at need for individual pupils.
- 3.3 Major strands of development to support educational inclusion in the Highland's have included:
- a) Training for school managers in developing a positive, inclusive school ethos.
 - b) Increasing emphasis on the responsibility of all teachers to differentiate the curriculum and educational experience appropriately for all children who live within the area serviced by any school, together with training in differentiation.
 - c) The development of specialist secondary school-based and primary Area-based learning support teams.
 - d) The development of core specialist services which can provide advice, support, specialist equipment and materials, and training to schools in relation to pupils with particular additional needs.
 - e) The identification of a core-held budget to support the purchase of expensive items of equipment required by individual pupils (further funding is held at Area level.)
 - f) The delegation of budgets to schools wherever possible in order to enable head teachers to manage their school's overall resources inclusively.
 - g) A continuing programme of training for teachers and classroom assistants covering both the principles of inclusion and the practicalities of meeting various types of support need.
 - h) Collaboration with Aberdeen University to develop the additional support needs content within initial teacher training.
- 3.4 The Highland Council Education, Culture & Sport Service has sought to respond to the Council's geography and location by developing expert education services to provide advice, training and some direct teaching for pupils with hearing impairment, visual impairment or autistic spectrum disorders, or who would benefit from the use of augmentative technology. These specialist education services have made available locally a level of expertise which was previously only available from national services based in Central Scotland.
- 3.5 A finding of particular importance in the report is the view from children and young people that academic inclusion is less important than social inclusion.

This has significant implications for practice in those Highland mainstream schools which have a specialised resourced base or facility.

- 3.6 Much of the work to be carried out in the Highlands to further develop inclusive provision and inclusive practices is set out in the new plan: For Highland's Children 2. In addition to the content of For Highlands Children 2 there have also been discussions about some further supporting developments including:
- a) The development of an Inclusion Indicator for schools, which would be compiled using data on those pupils who would be expected to attend a school but do not as a result of a placing request, exclusion, or placement in Special Education etc
 - b) Further development of joint training for both professionals and parents and carers.
 - c) Further development of the partnership between The Highland Council and NHS Highland.
- 3.7 Schools are subjected to many competing pressures and demands. Supporting Highland's schools in their continuing development of an inclusive ethos and of high standards of inclusive practice is a long-term and continuing task. The HCF report provides a vivid snapshot of the experiences of some children and young people, and will be a valuable resource for use during future training in relation to inclusion.

Recommendation

The Joint Committee is asked to commend the HCF Report, and to endorse the policy of educational inclusion and the practice developments set out in this Report.



S. D. Iliffe

Stephen Iliffe

Senior Manager - Additional Support Needs