

Enquire within

THE NEWSLETTER BULLETIN OF ENQUIRE, THE NATIONAL ADVICE SERVICE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN SCOTLAND

Enquire National Event

Enquire's first annual national conference was held on 11 September 2000, where 140 delegates gathered at Stirling Royal Infirmary to hear presentations, participate in workshops and discuss **Supporting inclusion: good practice in meeting the individual needs of children in mainstream settings**. The event explored how the development of good practice and encouraging partnerships can promote inclusion for over 34,000 children in Scotland with special educational needs. Delegates were asked what they considered to be the most relevant issues in their area. Responses were wide-ranging but a common thread could be detected – that the inclusion debate has a long way to go in order to establish how inclusion can work effectively and support all children with special educational needs and their families. Participants stressed the importance of collaborative working and developing proper systems of communication between sectors to ensure that best practice develops in schools.

SAM GALBRAITH

former Minister for Children and Education

Improving our schools: aspects of good practice in inclusive education in Scotland

Sam Galbraith, former Minister for Children and Education, outlined some of the initiatives developed by the Scottish Executive and relevant sections of the new Education Act – Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000.

Mr Galbraith stated the commitment of the Executive to ensure that parents and children retain the right to choice through the continued support of special schools in Scotland. This was particularly important given concerns raised by some delegates regarding the future of the special school sector. The Minister said:

"We underpinned our commitment to mainstream education through the recent Standards in Scotland's Schools Act. This establishes in law for the first time a duty on education authorities in Scotland to provide education in mainstream schools for all children. However, the Act allows room for debate on alternative options where these are better for individual children and families. In such cases the education authority should have, or should plan with other authorities, a range of provision to ensure that the needs of all children can be met.

"I am aware of the important contribution that special schools and units can play in ensuring that children receive a quality educational experience appropriate to their needs. Special schools and units enable a range of provision which allows parents (and children) an element of choice."



The Minister made reference to the following initiatives:

- the £12 million Inclusion Programme to support local authorities to include children with special educational needs in mainstream education;
- last year over 13,000 staff took advantage of in-service special educational needs training;
- a new introductory course has been developed to help teaching staff to develop their awareness of the needs of pupils with special educational needs and some of the issues they are likely to face in a classroom situation.

In his concluding remarks the Minister stated:

"It is important that the views of children with special educational needs themselves are also heard if education is to be truly inclusive."

Children
IN SCOTLAND
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working for children and their families

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SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

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JANYS M SCOTT, Advocate

The law is on the move: supporting the legal rights of families in the education system

Janys M Scott, Advocate, addressed the audience in the afternoon in a presentation titled: *The law is on the move* which looked at supporting the legal rights of families in the education system. This presentation was clear, informative and very well received. Janys outlined relevant recent developments in the law relating to the education of children and young people. This is an extract from her talk:

“This is a conference which focuses on partnership between parents, education authorities, teachers, educational psychologists and others, all engaged in meeting the needs of children. Each person has his or her own perspective and responsibility towards a child. That child is best served when each plays his or her part in harmony with the others. Parents in particular bear the responsibility of safeguarding and promoting their child’s health, development and welfare in terms of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, and have a duty to provide efficient education for their child, suitable to his or her age, ability and aptitude (Education (Scotland) Act 1980, section 30). It is important that parents are empowered to play their full role in the partnership, in the interests of children. If the child fails to progress and suffers harm, then the system has failed.

Delegates’ comments

“The exchange of good practice is always useful and it is interesting to hear what is happening in other authorities.”

Professional in the local authority education department

“It is vital that all children feel included, therefore it needs to be established what inclusion really means. We need to ensure that there are equal opportunities within classes, the curriculum is tailored to what young people are able to do and that appropriate training is in place for staff. We need staff to be flexible, adaptable and creative enough to include all children.”

Parent in Kites, Parent Support Group, East Dunbartonshire.

“There have been two significant criticisms of the law relating to education in recent years. The first is that the law developed as a means of establishing a ‘machinery’ of education. Education was recognised as a social necessity for a stable and well-ordered community. It required public organisation, and the law was used to establish a structure for the provision of education. The law did not focus on individual rights. That perspective has been increasingly unacceptable with the

development of notions of the rights of children over the latter part of the twentieth century. The growing perspective that children have rights in education gave rise to a second concern. The law did little to give them remedies in the event that rights were not recognised. Where the rhetoric did not match the reality, children and their families found themselves powerless. In these circumstances it can be difficult to operate an effective partnership. Now “The law is on the move...” While much does remain uncertain, the best outcome would be for families to find that the law empowered them so that their partnership with professionals was truly effective, in the interests of children.

“I think that the issue of SEN education is a national one – particularly the issue of inclusion – parents feel isolated in individual authorities and events such as this one serve an extremely useful purpose in bringing people together so that best practice and new ideas can be shared and parents feel supported.”

Parent/Parent Supporter

“On 16 December 1991 the United Kingdom ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Government bound itself to recognise and to give effect to certain rights. These included the child’s right to education (found in article 28 of the Convention) and an acknowledgement that the education of a child should be directed towards “the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” (article 29). The Scottish Executive inherited that commitment. They also inherited legislation which failed to state in express terms that children had a right to education, nor did it state the aim of the education provided to children. It is to the credit of the Scottish Parliament that one of its first pieces of legislation addressed this deficit. The Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act 2000 starts by enshrining “the right of every child of school age to be provided with school education” (section 1). The Act goes on to impose a duty on education authorities to “secure that the education is directed to the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” (section 2), precisely in terms of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

“One of the features of the 2000 Act is the introduction of a statutory presumption (22 years after Warnock) that education should be in mainstream schooling (section 15). This does not directly affect the law relating to placing requests, but there must be some concern that the numbers of small independent special schools will fall, reducing the scope for parental choice, and the possibilities for collaboration between mainstream and special schools.”

MORAG STEVEN & CAROLE MOORE,
Enquire
Supporting transitional stages in mainstream education

Morag Steven and Carole Moore of Enquire highlighted some of the challenges parents, children and professionals face during transitional stages in education. Morag is the Mediation Project Officer at Enquire and a parent of three boys, one of whom has severe and complex special educational needs. Morag illustrated her family's experience of mainstream inclusion. Her son Duncan (pictured

below, centre) has recently moved from a mainstream primary to mainstream secondary. Delegates were shown the video that was produced by the education department to assist this move. The video featured Duncan, Morag, Duncan's auxiliary and class teacher in his primary school environment. This was viewed by teachers in the high school to aid the transition process.



Delegates' comments

"I found the parent presentation and video of an inclusive education the most useful. This is a vision turned into reality and more people need to know about it. Inclusion can be positive and possible – even for the most complex needs."
Parent/Parent Supporter

"This was a good idea and one I haven't heard used before. This was very positive about 'how' to include."
Parent

LORNA MACLEOD
Headteacher of Haddington Infant School
Inclusion of children with complex needs in the early years

Lorna MacLeod, Headteacher of Haddington Infant School, addressed delegates on the pre-school provision for SEN at her school. In her presentation Lorna outlined what she considers to be the key elements of good practice in meeting the needs of SEN pre-school children within a large and busy mainstream nursery class:

"Inclusion means that the SEN children are part of the school – the whole school. That, in turn, means that the whole school is committed to the policy. Even staff who would not normally be directly involved with SEN children must be committed to it. The ethos of inclusion must pervade – soak through – the whole school in everything it does. The long-term aim is of course, not even to mention that we are an inclusive school! Inclusion must become something natural, instinctive and unremarkable.

"Another crucial area: we must win the trust and confidence of parents and keep them totally informed. Having a child with special needs seems to be a constant battle for parents – and we aim to make the whole educational process as dignified, stress free, as natural and as 'easy' an educational process as it is for mainstream infants. Home visits are arranged for new pupils in June, before they even start school, and again in August. From when SEN children start, their parents become part of the nursery and join in with all parents' nights, curriculum nights, social nights – and they can become parent helpers.

"I am not saying that it [mainstream inclusion] is a panacea for all children. Education authorities have a duty, subject to certain limits, to educate children according to their parents' wishes. Many parents are hugely in favour of inclusion and enormously grateful for it but, equally, other parents think that it is not the answer for their children and that has to be respected."

JENNY PRESTWELL & CHRISTINE BOATWRIGHT
 Gavinburn Primary
Assisting children with specific learning difficulties in the classroom

Jenny Prestwell and Christine Boatwright from Gavinburn Primary, West Dunbartonshire presented on *Specific learning difficulties – an inclusive approach*. As teachers, they outlined an intervention programme developed at Gavinburn which aimed to address both general and specific difficulties in the acquisition of literacy skills (particularly spelling) which would result in raising attainment overall.

Jenny and Christine highlighted the importance of partnership with all parties. They stated the need to involve parents in children's learning and increase their knowledge of possible learning styles. A parents' workshop was held at Gavinburn to give an in-depth description of the programme and offered an opportunity to give hands-on experience of the types of learning their children would experience. They stressed the need to include the children they were working with and stated that children played a major part in decisions about the kinds of activities preferred, ways of working and choice of material.

"Excellent presentation, very informative. Surely this is the way forward to make inclusion a success."
 Parent

PLAYBACK

Playback have published a video resource pack that encourages users to focus on issues of disability, social inclusion, participation for all and children's rights. It is a unique and powerful resource promoting social inclusion for young people with disabilities, and linking into the 5-14 Curriculum.

The pack:

- provides teachers and trainers with an effective specialist resource to promote good practice and challenge perceptions;
- supports and enables teachers and trainers to include young people with special needs in the school and local community;
- positively influences young people's perceptions of disability and encourages active citizenship;
- illustrates a model of consultation with young people.

The Playback video is the product of a consultation with physically disabled children over four separate events. It features the young people talking freely amongst themselves. The accompanying training resource pack is suitable for use with every age group including professionals. It offers stage by stage activity based training which encourages consideration of the issues highlighted by the children and links directly to the 5-14 curriculum guidelines on Environmental Studies and Personal and Social Development. The pack can also be used across all sectors including healthcare, social work, recreation and leisure and voluntary organisations.

For more information contact Playback on 0131 334 2126 or e-mail: playback235@netscapeonline.co.uk

ENQUIRE UPDATE

Publications

A guide and video for young people have just been published. The guide *Life at school and choices at 16+* and video *Having your say at school* are available from Enquire free of charge. Factsheet No.5, *Educational appeals* is also now available.

Mediation projects

Enquire is working in partnership with representatives from a number of local authorities to develop a pilot mediation project in special educational needs.

By the end of March 2001 a pool of highly trained mediators will be available for these local authorities and families/carers in these areas to contact for help in the resolution of difficulties and disputes.

The pilot will run to March 2002, after which time there will be a major dissemination of information and evaluation of the work undertaken.

Enquire is also working in partnership with South Ayrshire Council on another pilot project called *Link-up: support for families who have children with special needs*. The main aim of this project is to develop and train a local group of volunteer

parent supporters who will offer a range of practical support for families in the South Ayrshire area.

For further details about either of the pilot projects contact Morag Steven, Mediation Project Officer at Enquire. Tel: 0131 222 2422, e-mail: msteven@childreninscotland.org.uk

Local events

Meaningful meetings - promoting joint decision-making in special educational needs. One-day seminars for anyone who wants to assist families to take part in meetings concerning their child's SEN. Seminars began in January 2001. Contact Julia Wilson, Training and Development Officer, Enquire on 0131 222 2424 or e-mail jwilson@childreninscotland.org.uk for more details.

National event

Enquire's next national conference is planned for May 2001. Also, as a result of requests by delegates at the first national event, a conference specifically for parents will be held in September 2001. If you would like to receive details about either event when they are available, please contact Moira Cameron on 0131 222 2425 or e-mail mcameron@childreninscotland.org.uk