

THE SCOTTISH ADVICE SERVICE FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

A newsletter for all parents - because any child, at any stage in their lives, for any reason, may require additional support to help them learn.

Welcome

Welcome to 2008's final edition of *Enquire Within*, with news and features to keep you informed and help you make choices that enable your child to get the most from their education.

In this edition, we provide insight into the day-to-day work of educational psychologists, who play an important and varied, but sometimes misunderstood role in supporting children's additional needs. You'll also find tips on finding out about assessment processes in your local area, used to determine what level of support your child requires. And we dispel another common ASL myth.

Enquire would like to take this opportunity to wish you all season's greetings and best wishes for 2009. The next edition of *Enquire Within* will be published in March.

If you have any comments on the newsletter or have ideas on issues you think we should be looking at, please send an email to info@enquire.org.uk or phone us on the helpline number below. We look forward to hearing from you.

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North Ayrshire leads the way in seeking the views of parents and pupils

The results of a ground-breaking survey of 1200 children, young people and parents in North Ayrshire will be used to help improve the area's additional support for learning services.

The survey of children's, young people's and parents' views of additional support for learning services in the area revealed that most have a positive opinion about the services and staff in North Ayrshire.

Overall, nearly three out of four children and young people said that the adults working with them at school listen to what they have to say and try to help.

A similar proportion of parents said that they were "happy" or "very happy" with the help that their child is getting – and a higher percentage (82%) expressed the view that the people involved in their child's education have been "helpful" or "very helpful".

A significant minority of pupils and parents expressed varying types and degrees of dissatisfaction about their experiences with additional support for learning. A significant minority also said that they want and need extra help at school above and beyond what they are already receiving.

The most frequently mentioned and most valued improvement recommended by those who took part was a desire for better communication and better relationships among parents, pupils and professionals.

Jonathan Sher, head of research and policy at Children in Scotland, which carried out the research, said: "North Ayrshire supported a consultation that went far beyond any token, tick-box exercise. We do not know of another local authority that has commissioned such a large, independent consultation with its pupils and parents about additional support for learning. We hope that North Ayrshire's good example will be emulated throughout Scotland."

Allan Cowieson, a key official with North Ayrshire Educational Services, said: "The authority was happy to have confirmation that the vast majority of children and young people and parents/carers were either happy or very happy with most aspects of the provision of additional support for learning. The authority was also pleased to note that some of the respondents were able to express to the research team any concerns that they had. The constructive criticisms will also be used to inform planning for the further improvement of services."

The summary report, *What North Ayrshire's pupils and parents told us*, is available to download free from Children in Scotland's website www.childreninscotland.org.uk.



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A day in the life of ... an educational psychologist

Does your mind boggle at all the different types of professionals who are involved in meeting the additional support needs of children and young people? This is an opportunity to peek inside their professional lives and find out what they do and how they got there.

What is the role of an educational psychologist?

The educational psychologist has a wide range of roles and works with three main groups – the child or family, the school/establishment the child attends, and the local authority. Psychologists have various duties which involve: providing consultations to parents, schools or agencies, and direct support to children and families; working with other colleagues to build up an assessment profile of the young person offering training for school staff/other agencies, and carrying out research to identify best practice in supporting young people.

What is involved in a typical day?

There are no typical days! Here is a recent day. In the morning, in my secondary school, I worked therapeutically with two children who had witnessed and were traumatised by violent incidents. In the same morning in that school, I worked together with the Support for Learning Department to develop school support strategies for the benefit of children who have additional support needs. In the afternoon, I was in one of the five primary schools in my workload and contributed to a review meeting where we all planned ways of supporting a young boy who was having significant difficulties with the curriculum. After this visit, I was at a Children's Panel meeting for a young person who attends an additional support unit. I used what little time I had left that day to respond to various emails and telephone calls.

What made you want to become an educational psychologist?

I have always had a passion for psychology and coming from a family of teachers, combining the two seemed to be particularly appropriate.

What is the most rewarding part of the job?

There is a real sense of achievement when you have worked alongside parents and colleagues from other agencies to support children who are experiencing very troubled times and you are able to see the impact of your work as their situation improves.

What is the least rewarding part of the job?

Wanting to spend more time with certain children and families but not having the time to do it. However, this is part of the challenge for all public servants working in children's services and it makes it all the more important for us to work at the school and local authority level to ensure that evidence-based practice influences policies and procedures which can prevent problems developing in the first place.

What is the most valuable lesson you've learned in your job?

Do not presume because you have worked with lots of adults and children that you will fully understand the needs of the next person. Each child and family is unique and deserves respect.

What constraints or barriers do you face in your job?

Responding to an infinite number of incoming requests in a finite amount of time! A vision may be having an educational psychologist for every school but this is unrealistic and maximising the impact of psychology in the time spent in each school and with each child and family is an important part of the job.

If you could correct one misconception about educational psychologists what would it be?

That educational psychologists go around schools testing children. It is often not appropriate for an assessment of a child's needs to involve psychometric testing. An educational psychologist will bring together information from various sources to inform and provide advice on a child, and direct testing of any kind from a psychologist may or may not be a part of it. There is so much more to the skilled educational psychologist than psychometric testing. Over and above my individual casework, I am involved in research on a number of topics which ultimately could help close the gap between the lowest achieving and attaining group of pupils and the rest of the school population. I also deliver training to schools and other colleagues on motivating young people, and have a specialism in supporting traumatised children.

What advice would you give parents to get the best out of their relationship with their educational psychologist?

It is not really parents who have the responsibility for making the relationship work. We need to say clearly how we work and what we offer – most misunderstandings come as a result of a lack of understanding of what psychologists actually do.

With thanks to Chris Boyle, educational psychologist, South Lanarkshire Council Psychological Service.

Useful resources for finding out about assessment and intervention:

Supporting children's learning – the code of practice chapter 3 www.ltscotland.org.uk/inclusiveeducation/additionalsupportforlearning/index.asp

The parents' guide to additional support for learning, page 19 'The assessment process' and page 29 'Providing additional support'. Enquire 2008

Planning children's and young people's learning, Enquire factsheet 2. Co-ordinated Support Plans (CSPs), Enquire factsheet 15. These and other publications can be found at: www.enquire.org.uk/pcp/publications.php

The Enquire conference 2009 The Additional Support for Learning Act

Three years on – How are we doing?

Three years on from the implementation of the ASL Act, what impact has it had on professionals, families and most importantly on children and young people with additional support needs?

For further information visit www.enquire.org.uk/conference or email: conference@enquire.org.uk

Enquire guides for young people - *Going to Secondary School and Getting Ready to Leave School* - available in the next school term

These guides will help children and young people prepare for transition and will give them information about people who may be able to support them through the process. To order copies, contact Enquire: Tel: 0131 222 2425. **Email: info@enquire.org.uk**

Demystifying ASL myths

Enquire reveals the truth behind some of the most common myths about additional support for learning.

Myth: A child needs a diagnosis before additional support can be provided.

Some callers to Enquire's helpline have been under the impression that a school cannot provide their child with additional support until a diagnosis is made. This is not the case. Children require additional support at school for a huge variety of different reasons. External factors such as a death in the family for example, or any type of trauma, may impede a child's ability to learn and they may require additional support for a while. If it is suspected that your child may have a condition such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or autistic spectrum disorder but a diagnosis has not yet been made, your child is still entitled to support if they need it while they are being assessed.

If a diagnosis is made, this does not automatically lead to a set level of support for your child. Again, it all depends on the individual child. Children who have been diagnosed with the same condition may have varying levels of difficulty at school. Other factors such as the school environment may also affect the type or level of support a child needs.

Tips on finding out about assessment and intervention

Assessment helps to identify whether a child has additional support needs and determines what kind of support they require. Although "assessment" sounds formal, most children's needs are assessed as part of the day-to-day work in school. If a child's needs prove to be more complex, a specialist may carry out more formal assessments. Schools will use this information to help plan for those children who may need more attention and extra help with their work. Most schools use a system called "staged intervention" where they will try to deal with a child's difficulties as early as they can and with the least possible disruption for the child.

The following may help you find out more about these processes in your local area:

- Your education authority must publish information about their services and the arrangements for identifying and providing for additional support needs. Ask your child's school for any available leaflets or guides on assessment, learning plans and staged intervention. Your education authority will have a named person who is responsible for answering queries and providing information about services and arrangements relating to additional support needs.
- Check your council's website for information on the Additional Support for Learning Act. There is a wide range of information for parents on many council websites although this is not always easy to find.
- Under the Additional Support for Learning Act, you, or your child if they are aged 16 or above, can ask for a particular assessment or examination to be carried out. This request can only be made at certain times. These are when the education authority is assessing
 - whether your child has additional support needs
 - whether your child requires a co-ordinated support plan
 - or when their co-ordinated support plan is being reviewed

You would need to explain what kind of assessment you would like your child to have, and outline why you believe it is necessary.

Reviewing children's additional support needs

Case study



Seven-year-old Tom already receives additional support at school but his mum is concerned about his progress. She calls Enquire to find out what she can do to get his needs reviewed.

Mrs Cooke rings Enquire about her son, Tom, who is in P4 and already gets some one-to-one support in class.

She is concerned that Tom is falling behind, especially in reading and believes he needs more support than he is getting. She asks Enquire's helpline adviser if she should ask for more support and if so, who makes the decision about what level of support Tom gets.

Enquire asks Mrs Cooke some questions to get further information about her son's situation. The helpline adviser asks if she has spoken to the class teacher about her concerns and if Tom has a learning plan of any kind.

Enquire learns that Mrs Cooke has spoken to the class teacher but that she still feels concerned about Tom's progress. Tom does have a learning plan, but it has not been reviewed for some time.

Enquire suggests that Mrs Cooke contacts the head teacher of Tom's school to discuss her worries and sends her a copy of *The parents' guide to additional support for learning* and an Enquire factsheet on planning children's learning (see page 3).

Mrs Cooke speaks to the head teacher of Tom's school, who listens to her concerns and suggests that it would be a good idea to review Tom's learning plan. She says his targets and the methods being used to support him could be looked at to see if any changes were required. Mrs Cooke will be invited along to the review meeting so that she can make her views known and make any comments on behalf of Tom.

This case study is based on real situations but details and names have been changed so that individual cases cannot be identified.

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Proposals to change ASL legislation

Proposals to change existing additional support needs legislation have been introduced to the Scottish Parliament and are currently being considered.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 has been in force for three years now. The changes proposed will affect placing requests, mediation and dispute resolution, co-ordinated support plans and the Additional Support Needs Tribunals for Scotland.

The changes put forward have been informed by the results of a public consultation held earlier this year on the effectiveness of existing additional support needs legislation. You can read a report which summarises the issues raised during the consultation and the proposed changes on the Scottish Government's website at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/09/10125334/0>

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill is available at: www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/bills/billsInProgress/index.htm

Highland work together to get it right for every child

Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) is the national programme that aims to improve outcomes for all children and young people by promoting a shared approach that builds solutions with and around children and families. It is designed to ensure children get the help they need when they need it.

All services to children and families in Highland will be operating under the GIRFEC approach by March 2009.

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