

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 the Spring issue of Enquire Within, the first edition of 2009, with news, features and advice to keep you informed about about your child's rights and education.

In this edition, we focus on our annual conference, which took place in March, in Inverness, and examined the impact of the ASL Act, 'Three Years On'. And we welcome a new face to Scottish mediation, who aims to raise the profile of this valuable resource.

As always, we hope you find the newsletter interesting and informative. If you have any comments, or ideas on issues you think we should be looking at, please send us an email to info@enquire.org.uk. We look forward to hearing from you.

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The Additional Support for Learning Act: Three years on – How are we doing?

Scotland's provision for additional support for learning has come a long way, but it needs to be more consistently applied, delegates at Enquire's annual conference in Inverness heard.

As Holyrood expressed strong cross-party support for the first Bill amending the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004, Mike Gibson, Head of the Support for Learning Division of the Scottish Government, outlined the need for improvements in the interpretation of the legislation, particularly in relation to co-ordinated support plans (CSPs).

Despite a 43 per cent increase in the number of plans agreed in the last year there is still a significant variation among councils, with 0.15 per cent of pupils in both Midlothian and South Lanarkshire having a CSP compared to 1.19 per cent in Dumfries and Galloway.

Dr Gibson highlighted the need for parents, carers and pupils to be better informed of their rights under the Act, particularly in relation to mediation and dispute resolution; for improved partnerships between schools and agencies; and improved provision for looked after children.

Picking up on the theme Elisabeth Ritchie, Assistant Chief Inspector with HMIE, welcomed the significant progress that has taken place since the implementation of legislation, especially in the widespread commitment to inclusion and a more effective staged intervention process to identify when a child needs support and from whom. However she also drew attention to the need for more consistent application across authorities, and particularly highlighted the need for improvement in managing transition pathways and in the support available to looked after children.

Read more about the conference and its findings overleaf ...



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Lessons learned and next steps

In his keynote address to the conference, Mike Gibson, Head of the Support for Learning Division of the Scottish Government, reviewed the aspects of the ASL Act that are working well, including an increased commitment to joined-up processes and the encouragement of a broader view on how young people can be supported.

Among the messages that need to be taken on board three years on from the original Act, he highlighted:

- Ensuring parents, children and young people know their rights and are involved and consulted: there is a clear need for more information and awareness-raising
- Improving partnerships between schools and agencies, sometimes within local authorities: in some areas education and social work departments have not always worked well together
- Improving transitions to post-school options
- Improving provision for looked after children and those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
- Ensuring consistency in addressing individual needs, e.g. for those with mental health issues and young carers
- Developing agreements with providers about CSPs for young people in residential schools and secure accommodation, and
- Improving the consistency with which legislation relating to CSPs is interpreted.

Dr Gibson went on to look in detail at how these affect each level of education from pre-school upwards, including special schools, with evidence from sources including HMIE reports and statistics gathered from Government, Additional Support Needs Tribunals, dispute resolution agencies and court cases.

The conference heard three changes had already received Government and cross-party support:

- Giving parents of children with additional support needs the right to make placing requests to local authorities outwith their own area
- Giving parents access to mediation and dispute resolution from the host authority following a successful out of area placing request, and
- Increasing parents' rights in respect of access to the Tribunals regarding failures by the education authority.

Other amendments are being considered to enable:

- All appeals in respect of placing requests for special schools to be heard by Tribunals
- Parents to have the right to request an assessment of their child's needs at any time
- Tribunals to have the ability to specify when a placement resulting from a successful request should start.



Workshops

A range of breakout sessions provided a context by looking at further aspects of the Act's impact and examples of good practice from all over Scotland

Parental involvement – making the legislation work for parents of children with additional support needs

With two pieces of legislation now in force aiming to engage and support parents in their partnership with teaching staff, the Learning and Teaching Scotland/Scottish Government Parental Involvement Team focused on practical ways to build successful partnerships between schools and parents.

Perseverance, clarity, communication and creativity were seen as key elements in any initiative to involve parents in the school and a range of practical suggestions were discussed including timing of events, using electronic and other means of communication, and supporting staff through training.

Experiences of resolving disagreements

Sandra Mitchell of Resolve:ASL, Morag Steven of Common Ground and Jessica Burns of the Additional Support Needs Tribunals for Scotland, considered how effectively the current range of resolution options for disputes or disagreements are operating.

Routes to resolution can be complex and, while many disagreements are satisfactorily resolved at an early stage, others can progress through mediation, Tribunals and Independent Adjudication to the Court of Session. Key challenges presented by the process were identified as lack of awareness (many parents and young people are not aware of their rights in this respect and some local authorities do not provide appropriate information) and lack of compliance (some organisations and agencies struggle to meet timescales and to communicate effectively with all parties concerned).

How well do you know your school?

The Playback Trust introduced their new resource to promote

school inclusion, *How well do you know your school?*, that provides a self-evaluation framework for reflection by all school staff. It poses eight challenges that create an opportunity to identify necessary improvements.

There was also a film summarising the “What about us – Voices for Change” project, bringing together young people, youth workers and leisure centre managers to explore issues around accessible and mixed ability leisure facilities in two local authorities.

A new school – building in the ASL act from the start

Linda Schubert, Headteacher at the brand new Drummond School in Inverness, described how the largest special school in the Highlands places additional support needs of pupils at the centre – from the design and décor to their highly-praised transition and leavers’ programmes.

Educational psychological services

Shirley Paterson and Jane Thomson of South Lanarkshire Psychological Service spoke of the responsibilities local authorities have under the ASL Act to 3–5-year-olds, which are the same as those for school-age children, and for disabled children under 3 years where Education departments have been notified of their needs. In South Lanarkshire a new Early Years multi-agency team has been set up to manage this effectively.

Young carers

School support worker Jackie Haynes highlighted the role of school staff in identifying and supporting young carers, and outlined the training Moray Young Carers has provided for local schools. It was generally felt that it would be helpful for a national definition to be agreed for ‘a young carer’, and that agencies working together would help support children and young people in this situation more effectively.

Lights, camera, action

A series of autism-friendly cinema screenings has been introduced at Glasgow Film Theatre. With the volume reduced and the house lights set low, the monthly film is shown in an environment suitable for children with autism spectrum disorders and/or sensory hypersensitivity, as well as those with other disabilities. Children are free to make noise and move around during the screening, allowing for an experience that is personalised.

Screenings will take place on the first Saturday of each month, with ‘Madagascar – Escape 2 Africa’ listed for Saturday 2 May.

For more information about Access Take 2, contact Penny on 0141 352 8604, or info@ght.org.uk

Two new guides for young people in transition

The transition from primary school to secondary, and from school to further education, training or work can be nerve-racking and stressful. But two new advice guides from Enquire, written specifically for young people, offer straightforward advice about how to successfully manage these major events.

Getting Ready to Leave School and *Going to Secondary School* give young people questions to think about and suggestions for people they can talk to. The guides also explain what help and support is available from schools to guide young people through each of these transitions.

Print versions are available from the Enquire office, info@enquire.org.uk, or download from www.enquire.org.uk/yp. Audio versions and British Sign Language (BSL) translations will be available from the website www.enquire.org.uk/yp in May.

Conference –

Young people’s contribution

Amid the complexities of legislation and the intricacies of practice it’s sometimes easy to lose sight of what it’s all about – giving children and young people who need it, a helping hand to get the most from their education and fulfil their potential.

Enquire’s Information and Development Officer Amy Westendarp worked with young people from the Princess Royal Trust Highland Young Carers project and with Shakti Women’s Aid from Edinburgh to bring two presentations to the conference, putting children where they belong: right back in the centre.

Lily’s Story

The young carers’ drama – written and performed by the group themselves – powerfully highlighted some of the key issues faced by ‘Lily Fraser’ in caring for her Mum on the one hand and being a normal teenager on the other. We see Lily arriving late for school and unable to complete homework on time, as the responsibilities of caring take priority over her own life. A number of things mark Lily as ‘different’ among her classmates: she has special permission to take mobile phone calls in class, perceived as “unfair”; she is unable to join a school trip to London with the rest of her friends, who sympathise, but still tell her she’s “a slave”.

The contrasting attitudes of teachers in the play – one sympathetic and supportive, the other critical and unhelpful – are seen as being pivotal in making the difference for Lily. One teacher complains when Lily is unable to do the detention she’s given for her late arrival: the other offers lunchtime help in completing homework tasks. It’s the second teacher who applies to Young Carers for the grant that finally allows Lily to make the London trip, and provides care for her Mum while she’s away so she can join in without worrying.

Ben and Sara’s Story

Lively, colourful and challenging, this presentation was written, drawn and produced by a group of eight children and young people aged between 10 and 16, with the help of animator Jo Hodges and the support of Enquire and Shakti Women’s Aid.

Ben and Sara both find school “pants”. They list the things they dislike – “smelly food”, “too much work” – on clothes on a washing line. Both are being bullied, and they give examples of what people have said. Together, they think of people who can help, and finally call Childline. A few days later, the bullies apologise for their thoughtlessness and the animation ends with cut-out ‘helping hands’ showing the things that can make a difference – “more care”, “be open to everyone”, “tell the teacher now”.

Especially sobering were the bullies’ comments, many of them racist and abusive, which children in the project had heard or experienced first-hand.

When agreement can't be reached

Andrew is in Primary 5 at a mainstream school, and has Asperger's syndrome. His dad has some concerns. He wants Andrew to stay at the school, but feels that the headteacher has not put forward a workable solution.

Mr Casey rings Enquire about his son, Andrew, who is in P5 at a mainstream school. Andrew has Asperger's syndrome, and Mr Casey does not think that the school staff have enough experience to work appropriately with Andrew. He is also worried about Andrew's relationships with his classmates.

Mr Casey has already spoken to the headteacher, who feels that the school are doing a good job. He has also spoken to an education officer, who agrees with the headteacher.

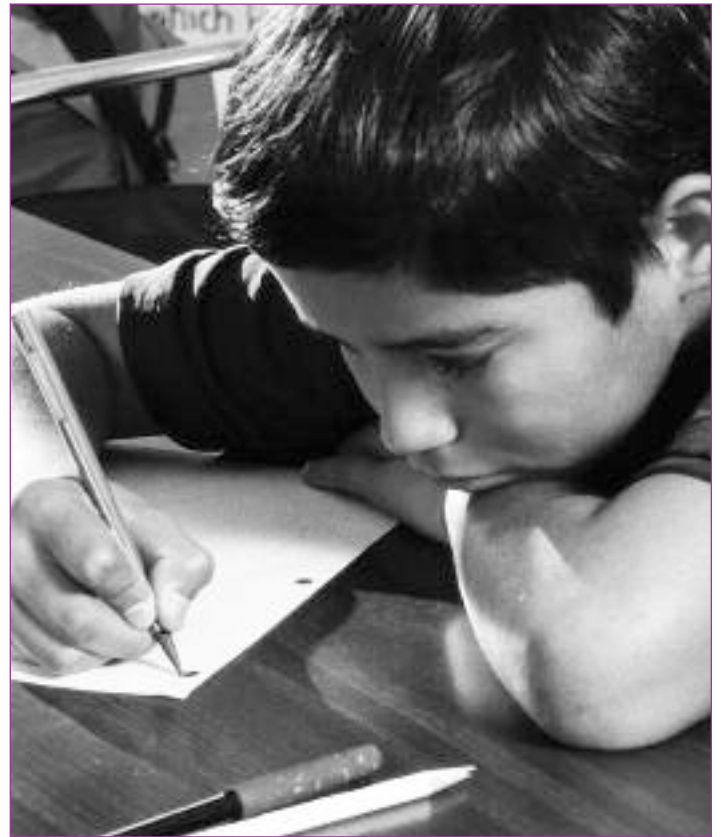
Mr Casey would like Andrew to stay at the school, if some changes were made, but is not sure what his next step would be.

Enquire suggests that Mr Casey considers mediation; a voluntary process, where a neutral third party (a mediator) sits down with everybody involved, to talk through their disagreement and work towards finding a solution that is acceptable to all.

Enquire explains to Mr Casey that the service is free to parents, and can be used if a disagreement cannot be resolved within the school or education authority. But, both Mr Casey and the education authority would have to agree to mediation.

Enquire gives Mr Casey a contact in the authority, with whom he can discuss mediation, and offers to send him the Enquire factsheet on 'Mediation'.

The education authority agrees to enter into mediation with Mr Casey and, after everybody has had the chance to express their concerns and listen to each other's views, the school suggests that they could put a buddying system into place for Andrew, and also



provide further information and training for staff about working with children with Asperger's syndrome.

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

Communication is the key

Three years on from its implementation, the benefits of the Additional Support for Learning Act are still being assessed. One area of achievement, however, is the Act's provision for independent advocacy and mediation, to support both schools and families.

The profile of mediation received a further boost with the appointment of broadcaster Muriel Gray as Scotland's first patron of ASN Mediation, in conjunction with the Scottish Mediation Network, of which the Resolve:ASL service at Children in Scotland is a part.

At a recent launch at the Scottish Parliament, attended by local authority representatives, professionals, and MSPs – including Minister for Children and Early Years,

Adam Ingram – Gray explained that, as the mother of a severely disabled child and aunt to an autistic niece, "I can see both sides of the story – the parent's view and that of local authorities."

Highlighting the usefulness of mediation, Gray added: "Mediation can resolve issues early. It should be used not as a last resort, but as a first base. We need to make parents aware of the resources, and come to the best outcome for the child."

Adam Ingram spoke of the need for local authorities to engage with parents in a partnership, and endorsed the strength of mediation as a means of early intervention in disputes.

For more information, visit www.childreninScotland.org.uk resolve or www.scottishmediation.org.uk

Conference publication –

Live it, breathe it, read it all again... If you missed the conference but you'd like a detailed overview of what was covered, it's worth placing an order for the forthcoming Annual Conference Report.

With full accounts of the keynote addresses, reports on all the breakout sessions, and useful links for further information, this publication will be both a record of the event, and a useful reference for the future.

To download a free PDF copy of the report, visit www.enquire.org.uk. If you wish to purchase a printed copy, at a cost of £5, please see the website for details of how to order.

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