

PE1789/F

Minister for Mental Health submission of 18 January 2021

Thank you for your request dated 21 December 2020 requesting a response to the concerns raised in the written submissions received by the Committee. I hope my response reassures the petitioner and the Committee that strategies are in place and work is underway that will do much to address these concerns.

The Promise

The Promise highlights the importance of providing support for all families caring for disabled children and those with additional support needs. If families require intensive support they must get it and not be required to fight for it. We know that some families caring for children with learning disabilities/difficulties will require long term support that goes beyond what is currently provided.

We know that children who have learning disabilities/difficulties may express themselves in a way that is perceived as trauma. It is therefore vitally important that trauma informed support therapies act as a cushion to all those that require it, regardless of diagnosis. A key theme throughout The Promise was the importance of listening to children and families and allowing them to be involved in shaping decisions that impact them, and the support that is provided.

Creating a structure that can facilitate the re design of whole system approaches to care and support is a substantial and significant piece of work. It is therefore important that the plan is developed and changes are made in collaboration with those that it impacts. This will include engagement with the workforce and delivery partners, and the voice of lived experience.

However the timeframe for The Plan has to reflect the urgency for change and The Plan published in February 2020 sets out a ten year phased approach for implementation which includes three stages.

The first stage between April 2021 and March 2024 will allow for early intervention and prevention will become standard helping to lead to an obsolescence of crisis services. The necessary legislative reform will be undertaken to make sure The Rules are enabling. A practice and culture change programme will be embedded and the next stages will focus on consolidation and then continuous improvement.

The workforce is key to delivering the work of The Plan and we acknowledge the concerns raised around providing vital support and training as a priority. Our dedication to developing and nurturing the workforce and working with children and families means this will happen in the first stage, as we have committed to ensure early intervention and prevention becomes standard.

During this time the work of the Scottish Government will not stand still and the 2020/21 Programme for Government illustrates our unwavering commitment to delivering The Promise, highlighting three early steps:

- Firstly, we are committed to creating a structure that can facilitate the re design of whole system approaches to care and support. This begins with embedding the commitments that have already been made to care experienced people into policy and delivery, with significant and intensive work across the entirety of government policy;
- Secondly, an Oversight Board is being established to hold us all to account, with Fiona Duncan – Chair of the Care Review – appointed to lead it. At least half of the members of the Oversight Board will be care experienced, because we cannot build a new approach without having those with lived experience at the heart of accountability;
- Finally, we are also supporting the establishment of a dedicated, independent Promise Team, including investing £4 million in the Promise Partnership Fund that will help embed and scale up holistic family support.

Additional support needs

The Scottish Government is determined to improve the educational experiences of children and young people with additional support needs, ensuring that they get the support that they need with their learning to reach their fullest potential.

As you will be aware, education authorities have duties under the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004 (as amended) to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of their pupils. They can also ask for help from appropriate agencies, including Health Boards and others to carry out their duties under the Act.

The review of implementation of additional support for learning which was led by Angela Morgan and published in June 2020, suggested several areas for improvement in how children and young people can be best supported to flourish in their learning and beyond.

The Scottish Government, COSLA and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) carefully considered the report and accepted the recommendations that it made. Our joint response was published on 21 October 2020. This response sets out the range of actions we will take, in collaboration with key partners, to address the recommendations from the review and enhance the experiences of children and young people with additional support needs. These actions will inform and help us to build on work that is already being taken forward to support children and young people with additional support needs, their families and those who support them at school to ensure that those children and young people are fully supported to reach their fullest potential.

Whilst we recognise the petitioner's concern that the approaches identified may take too long. Please be assured that we are committed to continue to work with relevant statutory bodies and third sector partners to ensure that the inequalities children with learning disabilities/difficulties face daily are addressed across all sectors including education, health and social care.

I hope the Committee find this response helpful.

Clare Haughey