Education (Scotland) Bill – Call for evidence.

From - Grandparents Apart UK.

Our response comes from a layman’s perspective and from our experience dealing with family problems and how adult behaviour affects children who don’t have a voice.

Attainment
1. The Bill will only reduce inequalities in outcome if every child is considered important to every teacher. No legislation can cover this completely as it depends on the individual relationship between each teacher and each pupil.

Not all inequalities are caused by economic or social circumstances. Problems can arise in circumstances throughout a child’s life, leading to inequality if not noticed. Attainment suffers when a child is stressed by their situation at home, if there is violence or mental abuse, when parents separate and their life is turned upside down and they don’t know where to turn to for support. This stress can lead to inequality if the teacher does not realise the child is struggling and act to help. Training is of huge importance so that teachers are able to pick up on changes in a child’s behaviour.

Parental education would help more children as too many parents don’t realise the harm their behaviour or lack of support does to their child.

2. The ‘desirability of reducing inequalities of outcome’ should not require a Bill. If teachers and Education Authorities cared for every pupil, attainment would be their goal without a Bill. Early recognition of difficulties, the freedom to address the issues promptly, better teacher training and freedom to support children whether they are suited to further academic learning or practical trades should be automatic and simple common sense.

3. ‘Inequalities of outcome’ should be interpreted as each child not reaching their full potential when adults in their life have contributed to this by their behaviour or lack of support.

4. The specific actions education authorities can take will be limited to budget constraints and priorities. Training, awareness, looking and seeing will reduce inequalities.

5. There are too many targets which have lead to focusing on specific issues instead of a rounded education. Informal weekly testing is required to highlight where individual children require extra support; it is not a tool to highlight failure.

6. If the terms are in the policy memorandum they should be in the Bill to prevent confusion or misunderstanding. The Bill assumes wealth, or lack of it is the cause of inequality of outcome, but this is not always the case. A teacher’s personal attitude to a specific pupil can cause inequality of outcome whatever the family’s social or financial situation.
7. The Bill should not contain sanctions as this usually has financial consequences which will potentially make the situation worse. Monitoring of outcomes is necessary as is early enforced action to improve standards within the school. Showing the responsible people how other schools have succeeded would have more benefit.

8. No comment

9. An inequality is an inequality and all should be addressed. All children should be given the opportunity to be the best they can be; to be confident, to learn respect for their fellow human being and not to feel a failure if they are not ‘first past the post’. Equality of outcome should be a lesson learned for life and treatment of others.

Gaelic
10 – 15 – No comment

Additional Support for Learning
16 – 20 – No comment

Registering teaching staff
21. All teachers should be registered with the General Teaching Council

22. Government should help temporarily subsidise changes and support special schools where required.

Complaints
23. 8 week deadline for a decision for a case to answer is acceptable. 6 months is too long for any decision relating to children as this is a long time in any child’s life and delays can have far reaching effects.

24. The complaints system should be as simple and clear as possible. The more complicated a system is or the more avenues there are to try, the longer the process takes and the more expensive it is for all concerned.

25. Whatever the system, parents should be aware that they can complain, aware of the system and whistleblowers should be confident that they will not be victimised by complaining or highlighting problems.

Learning and childcare
26. There should be no difference in provision of early learning and childcare. Whether guardian or kinship carer should not be the issue; each child should be the priority and treated equally in whatever situation.

Other issues
The Bill will only deliver the policy’s objectives if it is backed up by training, awareness and the education of the adults entrusted to carry out its objectives.

Legislation is not the answer to everything. Commonsense, training and better financial planning could have the same outcome.