

Barnardo's Northern Ireland
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Post Primary Support Team
Dept of Education
Rathgael House
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

6th March 2006

Dear Sir/Madam

Barnardo's NI Response to Education Draft Order

Barnardo's NI is the largest children's voluntary sector organisation in NI.

Our vision is to ensure that all children can live free from discrimination, poverty and abuse. We provide 47 services across all levels of intervention and work with 8,500 children, young people and families across Northern Ireland. Our work includes family support and child protection, work with disadvantaged young people in education and in the juvenile justice system, work with disabled children and young people as well as work with those young people who have experience of the care system.

We undertake a range of work within the education sector and it is primarily this which has informed our response. We provide an after-schools service which works within deprived areas in Belfast to support children's school based learning. We also provide parenting support and other services across a number of school sites and provide school restorative conferencing aimed at reducing the number of children and young people who are

suspended or expelled from school. Barnardo's are also delivering an emotional well being development programme in over 20 schools.

Barnardo's NI has previously expressed its concern at the differential impact that academic selection at 11 has had on children from deprived areas. As the following statistics highlight it is children from deprived areas who do not fare well under the current system.

- One in five children leaves school without a single GCSE at grade C or above.
- Northern Ireland has the lowest qualified workforce in the UK.
- Northern Ireland has the highest level of economic inactivity in the UK.
- Selection works against the interests of people in disadvantaged areas. Grammar schools have always been dominated by middle class students, both Catholic and Protestant. Statistics for free school meals underline this segregation by class – eg 64.9% of students at Mount Gilbert are entitled to free school meals compared to 1.6 per cent at Methodist College.
- International research shows that students in non-selective systems perform better, on average, than those in selective systems.

Barnardo's welcomes the intention within the Draft Order to end academic selection and would encourage government to publish as soon as practicable the new criteria for transfer at 11. We believe that it is important that this criteria works to prevent a postcode lottery developing and that children in the most deprived neighbourhoods can do equally as well in education.

Barnardo's welcomes the move to develop a common scheme to deal with suspension and expulsion at Departmental level. We also welcome the development of an appeals tribunal for expulsion cases. These decisions can have devastating effects on

an individual child or young person's educational career and it is crucial that children and young people are given the opportunity to present their point of view and the appropriate representation and support to enable them to do so. We believe that it is crucial to consult widely on the guidance and regulation for these tribunals and to learn from the experience in England and Wales where a similar policy has been in-effect.

We recognise the intention of the Department to establish arrangements for appeals against decisions to suspend a pupil. We believe that it is crucially important that such arrangements are put in place and that there is full consultation on how an appeal system will operate and when an appeal may be made. We look forward to receiving such a consultation.

We would draw your attention to a Barnardo's service that operates in the Southern Education and Library Board area and uses a school restorative conferencing model to work with pupils who are at risk of suspension and expulsion. This has been successful in reducing the number of suspensions and expulsions in those schools where it operates and we have attached a Briefing Paper which outlines the model and its success.

In conclusion Barnardo's welcomes much of the content of the current Draft Order and in particular its stance on academic selection. We look forward to receiving further consultations on suspension and expulsions.

If you require further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

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