

## **New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools Comment by Mencap in Northern Ireland**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Mencap is a voluntary organisation which works alongside children, young people, men and women with a learning disability and their families and carers.
- 1.2 We believe that children and adults with a learning disability should have equality of choice, opportunity and respect, with the support they need. We also believe that support for carers is essential to achieving these rights.
- 1.3 We welcome the opportunity to comment on this consultation document. We were extremely surprised and disappointed that an equality impact assessment had not been carried out.
- 1.4 We were also disappointed that the draft document did not reflect some of the choices and decisions facing parents of children with severe learning difficulties when their child is at this stage in their school life. While parents of children who have statements can, of course, express a preference for the school that their child goes to, the final decision is not theirs. Many children with severe learning disability attend a special school and, thus, are not involved in the transfer process. An increasing number, however, will be attending mainstream school or, perhaps wish to transfer to a mainstream school at this time.
- 1.5 We would welcome confirmation that the **Principles** and **Objectives** outlined in the draft document apply equally to children with statements and to their parents. We believe that “promotion of equality of opportunity for all children” should included in the list of principles.

### **2.0 Pupil profile**

- 2.1 Mencap believes that it is important to recognise and value the knowledge and expertise of parents regarding their child’s skills, achievement and potential. We believe that parents should be supported to become active contributors to their child’s pupil profile.
- 2.2 We believe that the content and use of pupil profiles should be monitored to ensure consistency of approach and fairness in their application. We also suggest that, if pupil profiles are to be used as the basis of selecting a child for a school, there should be an appeal process, allowing unfair or inaccurate content to be challenged and corrected.

### **3.0 Access to information and advice**

3.1 Mencap welcomes the commitment made in the document to informing parents about the choices available to their children. We believe, however, that schools should be required to make sure that information is accessible and that parents who do not have access to web-based information are not disadvantaged. Clearly alternatives should be in place to ensure that all parents have access to information regardless of their circumstances.

3.2 We also believe that the Department should ensure that the advice service is accessible to all, including parents with a learning disability.

### **4.0 Children with a statement**

4.1 Mencap requests more information about the supernumerary issue outlined in Chapter 4. We believe that it would have been helpful if the document had provided more information about the impact on the children and parents involved as well as the impact on schools. We also believe that it would have been helpful if the document had outlined the possible impact of options available.

4.2 Mencap believes that the Department should demonstrate that the option finally selected promotes equality of opportunity and does not further disadvantage or exclude children with statements or their parents taking part in the transfer process.

### **5.0 Feeder schools**

5.1 Mencap believes that all schools, including relevant special schools, should be identified as “feeder schools”.

### **6.0 Central Panel**

6.1 Mencap believes that parents should also be members of any Central Panel established. It may also be helpful to have adults, who have been through the process when they were at school, also on the Central Panel.

### **7.0 Monitoring**

7.1 We believe that the Department should monitor the admissions criteria set by schools to ensure that they are consistent and fairly applied, that they promote equality of opportunity for all children and that children with special educational needs are not disadvantaged by the admissions policies of all schools, including over-subscribed schools.

### **7.0 Conclusion**

7.1 Mencap welcomed the opportunity to comment on this document. We look forward to further consultation on the equality impact assessment.