



Providing Integrated Support for Pupil Attendance, Participation and Retention in Education

Summary of the Consultation for the National Educational Welfare Board



PROVIDING INTEGRATED SUPPORT FOR PUPIL ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION AND RETENTION IN EDUCATION

Summary conclusions of the National Educational Welfare Board consultation in 2011

Through the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Programme the Department of Education and Skills provides additional support for those children and young people most at risk of educational disadvantage. These include:

- The Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL), which works to strengthen links between families and schools
- The School Completion Programme (SCP) which provides a range of in-school and out-of-school supports to children at risk of leaving early
- The Education Welfare Service (EWS) which is responsible for ensuring school attendance.

In 2009, The Department of Education and Skills asked the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) to bring these services together to provide an integrated support service in DEIS schools. This integrated service aims to support children and young people, families and schools to achieve the best possible educational outcomes for each child and young person.

In 2011, the NEWB undertook a consultation process to ensure that the implementation of the integrated service is informed by the views of the people who deliver the service, and the children, young people and families who are supported by the service. The consultation involved DEIS schools and non-DEIS schools with SCP (School Completion Programme) The consultation work was carried out by researchers from SMCI Associates (SMCIA), an independent research organisation based in Scotland.

The consultation involved here was carried out in three parts:

- A questionnaire for staff in the three services and schools: there were 769 responses to the questionnaire, providing an overall response rate of 58.1%
- Consultation workshops for staff in the three services and schools: 513 people participated in the workshops.
- Small group discussions for children, young people and their parents/guardians: 84 people participated in the discussion groups.

Strong support and unified vision for the integrated service

There is a strong positive commitment to the development and implementation of the integrated service. This can be seen in the high level of engagement in the consultation and in the very positive response to the consultation, focusing on opportunities rather than challenges.

There is a strong shared vision for the integrated service, with stakeholders expecting the service to help children and young people to complete their education, attain well, have a high quality educational experience and be supported to do so, in particular those pupils and families who are

most marginalised and most in need of support. Strengthened participation was seen as being enhanced by ensuring that pupils has a high quality school experience, and that parents/guardians continue to be supported by the service.

Establishing a common vision and developing shared goals are crucial parts of any change process. This shared vision for the new integrated service provides an excellent basis for the implementation of the integrated service.

A strong base to build from

Stakeholders across the three services and schools have a shared positive view of the strengths of each service, with collaboration seen as a strength across all NEWB services

The approach to addressing attendance is seen as the strongest aspect of the Educational Welfare Service; in particular, its proactive and structured approach, with regular and consistent monitoring and follow-up of pupils attendance.

The work to engage parents/guardians is seen as the strongest aspect of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme; in particular the preventative work facilitated through home visits and engaging parents/guardians in education.

Work with pupils is seen as the strongest aspect of the School Completion Programme; in particular the provision of SCP support services, including tailored interventions, the early identification of pupils at risk, and the provision of one-to-one support.

This consensus on the key strengths of NEWB services provides an important base of mutual respect and trust on which to build the integrated service. This also provides a strong base from which to develop and strengthen what the services already do well and demonstrates a mutual recognition that the NEWB integrated service is not starting from scratch. Stakeholders want to build on what services currently do well, and to maintain the strengths of each service, as roles and responsibilities within the new integrated service are developed.

Opportunities to strengthen prevention and maximise attendance, participation and retention

The development of the integrated service was seen as providing a welcome opportunity to continue to develop collaboration, in particular to strengthen prevention (interventions that prevent the emergence of poor attendance and promote participation and retention in school. Stakeholders identified opportunities to develop a collaborative working structure across the integrated service and schools:

- With clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- To enhance communication, information sharing and joint planning with scheduled and regular meetings.
- Which builds local networks so that all sectors and services which provide support to children, young people and their families are part of the wider network of support in maximising school attendance, participation and retention.

Measuring progress

Stakeholders consider not only that the impacts of the integrated service should be measured, but that they should be measured at two levels: progress towards outcomes for pupils, and progress towards the organisational objective of integration. A range of approaches to measuring progress were identified, including:

- Collating statistical data.
- Monitoring parent, pupil and staff experience.
- Capturing learning about the progress in implementing the integrated service.

Recommendations

1. Given the very positive engagement by staff of the services, school personnel and principals, with the consultation process, NEWB should aim to move the integration forward quickly to capitalise on that interest;
2. NEWB should utilise the feedback from the consultation to propose a strong vision statement for the integrated service that will help to build a sense of common purpose. The vision statement should capture the commitment to placing children at the centre of the service, and recognising their parents and families as partners in the educational task.
3. NEWB's approach to integrated service delivery should consider and build on the views documented in the consultation, in particular the many practical and workable proposals around structured arrangements for team working. The Board should look at ways of continuing to research, refine and share existing good practice.
4. The integrated model of practice should be supported through clear role descriptions, responsibilities, provision of practice guidelines, joint CPD, joint planning and information sharing.
5. The importance of close working relationships with schools and school management should inform the model of integrated practice; NEWB should continue to build a partnership with schools that respects and makes use of the knowledge and expertise of school staff, and that recognises the profound impact of school and school culture on attendance, participation and retention. The development of NEWB Guidelines on School Attendance Strategies, as provided for in the Education Welfare Act 2000 should be of considerable assistance in this regard.
6. As part of a whole-child approach to service provision, NEWB should strengthen linkages and develop practical working arrangements with other agencies documented by respondents to be vital to the 'network of support'.
7. NEWB should continue to hear the views of parents / guardians and children who avail of NEWB services to ensure that the service is meeting their needs.
8. NEWB should develop a structured approach to measuring outcomes for children, taking account of the proposals made in this consultation for a multi-faceted approach to gathering data on outcomes.

9. A programme of professional development for integrated working, as well as opportunities for on-going peer support and shared learning will be an important support for an effective integrated service.
10. Consideration should be given by NEWB to the policy implications of the views about equitable access to the services of the Board, including those under 6 years old, those over 16 or who have left school, and children outside DEIS areas who experience marginalisation and disadvantage.
11. NEWB should work with relevant government departments, particularly DCYA and DES, to ensure the best outcomes for children through an integrated service approach. Part of this work is to ensure that resources are maintained to deliver best outcomes for children in relation to attendance, participation and retention.