

ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

4 June 1996

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Report No 474/96

A PARENTS' GUIDE TO SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

ABSTRACT

This report contains a draft response to the letter issued by the Scottish Office on a review of "A Parents' Guide to Special Educational Needs". The report seeks the approval of the Education Committee to submit this response on behalf of Angus Council to the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department.

1 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Education Committee approve this report as the Council's response to the consultative paper on amendments to the Parents' Guide to Special Educational Needs.

2 INTRODUCTION

Between 1989 and 1994, Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools produced a series of reports on effective schools, the third of which - published in 1994 - being Effective Provision for Special Educational Needs. This deals with effective provision for all young people with special educational needs and was drawn from evidence of inspections carried out in mainstream and special schools over the previous 5 years.

In March 1996, a related guidance circular, Children and Young Persons with Special Educational Needs : Assessment and Recording was launched by the Minister for Education, in the Scottish Office, Mr Raymond Robertson, MP.

Subsequently, on 24 April 1996, the Scottish Office wrote to education authorities and others seeking views on the content, layout and format of the Scottish Office publication "A Parents' Guide to Special Educational Needs", published first in 1993, and now about to be revised. A copy of this publication is available for inspection by members of the Committee.

3 CONTEXT

The document's present format lists a range of questions which parents may have and seeks to explain parents' rights and the help that is available if a child has learning difficulties.

4 CONSULTATION EXERCISE

The consultative letter seeks responses to the following questions and aspects:-

- the publication is aimed at parents - should its scope be widened to include more information for young persons and would this be practicable in a single document?
- is important information missing, or does the current version contain unnecessary material?
- should particular information be highlighted?
- appropriateness of layout?
- how might the format be improved?

Additional questions are aimed specifically at national and umbrella organisations who advise parents about special educational needs.

5 COMMENTS

Given the Minister's stated intention that, in the future, it would be desirable that Records of needs should no longer be required if a child or young person's needs are being met appropriately, the document in its present form would benefit from further revision.

- The guide is in places verbose and patronising in tone, and its title is misleading: the information presented focuses on the opening of a record of needs, rather than presenting an overview of the whole area of special education needs.
- The document fails to differentiate the fact that only for a very small number of young people, perhaps 1 or 2 in 100, will a record be required. This lack of information could encourage parents to seek the opening of a record for children who would not be seen as recordable.
- There is an over-emphasis on medical involvement without due regard for contributions from the psychological service.
- The section which describes Learning Difficulties could be confusing for parents. Because a child experiences difficulties in one area, this does not necessarily mean that a record is required. Also indications of possible concern will be different for very young children.
- The section dealing with assessment fails to differentiate between the process of assessment as part of teaching and learning and the formal assessment required within the statutory process to open a Record of Need.
- The section which seeks to translate legislation into everyday terms, is not particularly user-friendly and may be better placed in an appendix.
- There is no reference to the Case Conference, which, although not framed within the legislation, is the common means to review progress and to plan the way ahead.

- While the guide aims to popularise the legislation, the tone is at times confrontational and implies that a parent's rights will be acceded to, without regard for resources.
- There is a lack of clarity about the role of the named person.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Content

1. If the title is to remain the same, attention needs to be given to the broader area of special educational needs.
2. The document should be framed within the context of Effective Provision for Special Needs and the Guidelines on Assessment and Recording.
3. Identification of the appropriate services to be contacted by parents, in relation to the child's stage of development and specific need, should be included.
4. In terms of equal opportunities:
 - Photographs should show children from the different communities in a variety of settings e.g. in mainstream classes; young people with SEN in high status roles.
 - Availability of the guide in Community Languages and in a large text version should be highlighted.
 - There should be a reference to the availability of the Draft Record in the mother tongue and to the assessment of bilingual pupils in the mother tongue.

Layout

5. The format could be a series of leaflets on themes e.g. SEN in general; the Record of Need process; Young people's right and responsibilities; Services which can help you ; Assessment within Learning and Teaching; Assessment within the Recording Process.
6. A question format is helpful, but attention should be given to the nature of questions.
7. A visual presentation such as a flow chart would offer the reader ease of access to information.
8. Graphical representations such as a Venn diagram to represent the small percentage of the population for whom a record may be appropriate in relation to the total population. This would also ensure that the readability level was more user-friendly.
9. An appendix could include the reader's guide to the legislation.

10. While the list of useful addresses and Associations may be helpful to parents, the presentation of information is important. The first point of contact should be the services of the education authority.

CONSULTATION

This Report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive and the Director of Law and Administration.

JIM ANDERSON
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government(Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

JAA/RHB