

Stage 1 Evidence to the Education and Culture Committee on the Education (Scotland) Bill

- 1.1 Save the Children welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Committee's call for evidence on the Education (Scotland) Bill. This evidence draws on Save the Children's experience of working with families affected by poverty and disadvantage to support their children's learning. It also draws on recent policy and research work in this area. Our comments therefore are in response to the Committee's questions on the sections in part one of the Bill - focussed on reducing inequalities in outcome.

What improvements in attainment, in achievement and in reducing inequalities of outcome do you consider the Bill in itself could deliver? What would be a desirable level of improvement?

- 1.2 Save the Children support the principles and provisions in part one of the Bill aimed at reducing inequalities of outcome experienced by pupils impacted by socio-economic disadvantage in schools and early learning settings. The scale and persistence of the gap suggests that the challenge is significant and that greater attention and priority is required. The goal in the long-term should be to break the association between poverty and disadvantage and children's development and learning outcomes. To achieve the aim of reducing inequalities of outcome will require progress each year to improve outcomes for children experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
- 1.3 It is our view that the legislative framework would provide a positive step towards ensuring that services are designed to support and improve outcomes for this group of children and young people consistently across Scotland. It would provide the impetus to build on the will and promising work that is already underway by Scottish Government and by a range of partners at local level in Scotland. The provisions would support this by strengthening leadership amongst stakeholders at political, policy and service design levels. They would also support increased priority and drive further progress, encourage a wide range of stakeholders to influence actions, including families, as well as strengthening accountability for decisions taken and delivering improved outcomes this group of children and young people.
- 1.4 It is our view that to meet the policy objectives of the Bill a number of steps would need to be taken to ensure effective implementation of strategic approaches:
- **Robust and consistent processes for identifying children at risk of or in socio-economic disadvantage.** This requires improved and timely collection and use of data in schools and early years settings, and at local and national level. The majority of the gap in outcomes between children experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and their peers is found *within* rather than between schools.
 - **An enhanced and shared understanding of how socio-economic disadvantage can impact on learning experiences and outcomes** from the early years through to secondary school.
 - **Increased knowledge and understanding of what works in supporting pupils experiencing socio-economic disadvantage** through more robust monitoring and evaluation of interventions. In

addition the Scottish Government should find ways to better identify and share approaches that work with education authorities, particularly given the context of reduced education budgets.

- **A recognition that effective approaches to tackling inequality of learning outcomes need to be holistic.** This includes action to support families to engage in their children's learning, learning at home as well as in early years settings and schools. Strategies should recognise the role of education authorities as part of wider approaches to reduce poverty.
- **A shared and consistent understanding of the outcomes and milestones we would expect children and young people to achieve at different stages.** This should be based on the principles of Getting it Right for Every Child and an understanding of wellbeing, as set out in the SHANARRI indicators. We would welcome a particular focus on ensuring all children reach expected milestones (as set out in Curriculum for Excellence) in relation to core areas – literacy, particularly reading, numeracy, and health and wellbeing from early years to end of primary school and beyond. These are critical outcomes on which broader education outcomes will depend.

The duty in the Bill is to 'have regard to the desirability' of 'reducing inequalities of outcome'. Is this meaningful to have the desired policy effect?

- 1.5 Save the Children is concerned that the duty as currently drafted - to 'have regard to the desirability' of reducing inequalities of outcome - may not have the desired policy effect. We support the desired policy intention. To achieve it we believe the duty needs to be strengthened. To ensure clarity we recommend that the duty is drafted in a way that ensures Scottish Minister and Education Authorities *must*, when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to carry out its functions, take account of ways to reduce inequalities of outcome.

How should 'inequalities of outcome' be interpreted and should this phrase be defined in the Bill?

- 1.6 We believe that 'inequalities of outcome' need to be interpreted on an individual child basis. As set out above, processes need to be in place to identify how socio-economic disadvantage impacts on a child's ability to reach their potential. This can be achieved through wellbeing assessments using the SHANNARI indicators and building on existing approaches, for example in the early years the 27-30 month health review. These approaches should be developed to ensure consistency in assessing and understanding the impact of socio-economic disadvantage.
- 1.7 There is a significant body of evidence that illustrates the correlation between socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities in outcome at collective level. This includes 27-30 month review data, the survey of literacy and numeracy at P4, P7 and S2 and formal exam results in S4, S5 and S6. These data sets are disaggregated by socio-economic indicators and demonstrate significant gaps in achievement between children who are socio-economically deprived and their peers. These national data sets should be used to provide guidance in interpreting inequalities of outcome and areas where improvements need to be made. We recommend that outcomes in core areas that impact on wider learning and outcomes such as literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing should be central to the interpretation of these duties.

- 1.8 In order for the policy intention to be achieved, there may be merit in considering how this could be defined on the face of the Bill. At the very least clear and robust guidance will be needed. We seek clarification from Scottish Government on their interpretation of this phrase. We recommend that consultation is undertaken with key stakeholders including children and young people, parents, headteachers and school staff, early years workforce and third sector organisations to develop a shared understanding and best practice in this regard.

What specific actions will education authorities be able to take to reduce inequalities of outcome that they are currently unable to take?

- 1.9 The advantage of the measures in this section of the Bill are to develop a national framework that would require Scottish Ministers and Education Authorities to take account of ways to reduce inequalities of outcomes when making strategic decisions about how services are delivered. Whilst this will already be at the forefront of minds in many areas of Scotland, the legislative framework would ensure that this happens across the country. Children are living in poverty in every part of Scotland. A significant number of children experiencing poverty live outwith areas of concentrated deprivation. This may mean different approaches are needed in concentrated areas of deprivation and settings where a small number of children are affected. The duties will help ensure that all children who need support to overcome this type of disadvantage are identified and supported. In addition, the measures could also support action by allowing for greater priority to be given to this group of children and providing increased accountability against progress.

Do you consider the terms are clearly defined and widely understood? Could the different terms used in the PM and in the Bill create any problems in delivering the policy objectives?

- 1.10 There is a need to consider the language used and ensure a clear and shared understanding between stakeholders of the policy intention. We favour an approach that is centred on development, learning and education 'achievement' in its broadest sense. We believe clear guidance should be used to clarify these terms. That said, the key is enabling an approach that identifies children and young people at risk of or experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and allows for the planning and delivery of services to meet those children's needs. We have set out earlier in this response key elements of how this could be achieved.
- 1.11 Various indicators are used to identify socio-economic disadvantage, including the SIMD, household below average income data sets and free school meal entitlement. There is a need to consider what indicators are best used at local level to define 'socio-economic disadvantage'. Analysis of both the impact of area deprivation and household income/ characteristics should be used to form a comprehensive understanding of the impact of socio-economic disadvantage.

Should the Bill contain sanctions in the event that the Scottish Government or local authorities fail to achieve the policy intention of reducing inequalities of outcome? If so, what sanctions would you suggest are appropriate?

- 1.12 It is difficult to identify appropriate sanctions in this regard. We favour an approach that is based on a robust reporting framework in the first instance. Scottish Minister and Education Authorities should be required to report publicly on steps taken. Reporting should include an update and analysis of progress in

improving outcomes for children experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (based on robust analysis of data) during the reporting period, an outline of the steps taken, including budgetary decisions, as well as what further steps and progress will be made in the next reporting period. We consider that clause 4(1)(c) and 4 (2)(c) could be strengthened to require Education Authorities and Scottish Ministers to report on specific aspects of progress, for example against reducing gaps in relation to literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. There is a need to develop a more consistent approach gathering and analysing data in this regard.

- 1.13 In addition, we believe there is merit in developing inter-authority 'hubs' to support local authorities to develop their improvement strategies. This would bring together authorities who are recognised as performing well with those who are making less progress to share successful approaches, challenges and how they have been overcome, and resources with other authorities. This approach was used successfully as part of the Literacy Action Plan. Similar approaches were also used as part of the 'London Challenge'.

Do you have any views on the consultation and reporting requirements set out in this part of the Bill?

- 1.14 Save the Children supports the provisions that will allow key stakeholders and communities to influence decisions and actions taken by Scottish Ministers and Education Authorities. We believe that the groups included in the list to be consulted are appropriate. We would welcome further clarification on the interpretation of the phrase in 2(3)(a) – (e) of 'as the authority thinks appropriate'. We believe a comprehensive approach will be required and guidance should set key criteria for consultation.
- 1.15 We question why pupils have not been included as a category for consultation in relation to guidance in section 3 (2). We ask the Committee to seek clarification from Scottish Government on this point. Children and young people can provide valuable insight into their experience of education and learning. Our report, *Learning Lessons – children and young people's experiences of poverty and education* (2014), published in partnership with Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, demonstrates the value of engaging, understanding and reflecting on pupils' direct experience of poverty, how it impacts on their learning and their views on the improvements that are needed. We recommend pupils are included in the list of stakeholders to be consulted in producing guidance.

The Bill focusses on reducing inequalities of outcome resulting from socio-economic disadvantage. Should all examples of inequality be addressed?

- 1.16 Any child who is experiencing any form(s) of inequality should have their needs met and be supported to reach their potential. We welcome the focus and priority in the Bill on pupils affected by socio-economic disadvantage. There is strong and compelling evidence on the persistence of the link between this kind of disadvantage and less positive outcomes for children and young people. There is a large and growing group of children who are socio-economically disadvantaged. At present, 1 in 4 children in Scotland experiences poverty. We are concerned that the number of children affected by poverty is expected to rise to 1 in 3 by 2020. This suggests the challenge we face to reduce inequality of outcomes will become even greater in coming years. Therefore, a sustained and explicit focus on pupils' experiencing socio-economic disadvantage is required.