

PE1820/G

Scottish Government submission of 20 January 2021

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the petition on Compulsory Bereavement Education in Schools where you sought the Scottish Government's views on the submissions made by Young Scot and CHAS.

With regard to the Young Scot submission, the Committee may be interested to know the key priorities for the National Bereavement Coordinator I mentioned in my previous letter are:

- Work with partners to develop an action plan, developing a vision for support for those children who have experienced bereavement;
- Develop a framework of support;
- Promote an understanding of bereavement across Scotland; and,
- Work with schools to develop the curriculum around bereavement.

In a recent report, the National Coordinator noted the work with schools to develop a curriculum around bereavement, their Key Deliverable 8, was 40% complete as the Project has engaged with Seasons for Growth trainers and coordinators across Scotland; Education Psychologists in several local authorities; teachers in primary and secondary schools; and, with the individuals involved in the petition. They will be building on this initial engagement through their roundtable discussions to formulate recommendations on how to develop a proposal for a curriculum around bereavement. The roundtables are planned to commence in January 2021.

With regard to the CHAS submission on the petition itself, the Scottish curriculum is designed to allow schools flexibility to decide what to study against the experiences and outcomes. Schools are encouraged to do their own thing, using people and places in their local area, or the individual interests of classes and pupils to choose topics to focus on. The idea is this will make lessons more relevant and therefore more rewarding for children. It is reassuring to hear schools are using their flexibility to bring in organisations like CHAS.

The Scottish Government notes the comments in the CHAS submission about teacher confidence around dealing with bereavement as well as inclusion of education and training around death, dying and bereavement. This may be taken forward as part of the work delivering and implementing the recommendations of the PSE review mentioned in the previous submission.

On the subject of counsellors in schools, education authorities and other agencies have duties under the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004 (as amended) to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of their pupils. An additional support need would include children and young people who have experienced a bereavement. Education authorities and all those working in our schools have a responsibility to support and develop the mental wellbeing of pupils, with decisions on how to provide that support taken on the basis of local circumstances and needs.

During the planning and implementation of the commitment to provide access to a counsellor in schools, BACP and COSCA advised that the training required to work with children under the age of 10 is very different and more complex to that for children aged 11-18, which is why our commitment is only for children and young people aged 10 and over. Schools and education authorities have the capacity to identify specific measures to support children in primary schools under the age of 10 and draw on a number of resources provided by Education Scotland.

Some local authorities may have staff trained to deliver 'Seasons for Growth', a programme widely used in primary, secondary and special sectors across Scotland to support children and young people suffering from loss and grief. The core element of the programme is the promotion of social and emotional wellbeing and the development of resilience for young people who have experienced significant loss due to death or family breakdown.

Education Scotland also have a number of resources which raise awareness of early adversity and trauma and develop approaches to prevent and mitigate the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These include: professional learning materials on nurturing approaches and Adverse Childhood Experiences; the Applying Nurture as a whole school approach self-evaluation framework and 'The Compassionate and Connected Community' professional learning resource delivered by local authority staff. Education, health and the Scottish Government are working closely together to ensure that these key resources form part of the delivery of the Trauma Training Plan. Almost all authorities have now received the two day 'Compassionate and Connected Community' coaching session.

Finally, the Committee will wish to be aware some councils have support policies in place for bereavement. For example, the City of Edinburgh Council's policy¹ is based in wider family policy areas whereas Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's policy² sits within their Education and Children's Services Department. Both policy documents are designed to help adults support children and young people who have experienced bereavement.

I hope the Committee finds the additional information contained in this letter helpful.

¹ <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/support-families/supporting-children-young-people-loss-change-bereavement/1>

² <https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/media/4802/support-for-bereavement-policy.pdf>