

Cross Party Group Children and Young People
Thursday 24th May 12.30 - 14.00
Committee Room 4

Attendees:

Marco Biagi MSP
Roderick Campbell MSP
Malcolm Chisholm MSP
Kezia Dugdale MSP
Alison Johnstone MSP
Joan McAlpine MSP
Julie Abel, The Scottish Government
Kim Atkinson, Scottish Sports Association
Paul Bradshaw, ScotCen Social Research
Gwyneth Bruce, College of Occupational Therapists
Rozanne Chorlton
Sara Collier, Children in Scotland
Tony Conlon, Quarriers
Helen Davis, West Lothian Youth Action Project
Brandi Lee Dennell, LGBT Youth Scotland
Paul Dickson, The Scottish Government
Morag Driscoll, Scottish Child Law Centre
David Ferrier, Includem
Maurice Frank
Emma Grindulis, Together Scotland
Juliet Harris, Together
Kim Hartley, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
Elizabeth Hemsley, SCIS
Pete Higgins, University of Edinburgh
Martin Hunt, Tartan Silk
Keith Irving, Living Streets
Megan Johnson, Working on Wheels
Nico Juetten, SCCYP
Cath Logan, Big Lottery Fund
Vicky McGraw, West Dunbartonshire Council
Melanie Main, The DofE Scotland
Lea Mann, The Scottish Government
Carrie Manning, Prince's Trust
Louise Marryat, Glasgow University
Sue Milne, University of Edinburgh
Maggie Morrison, The University of Edinburgh
Andy Mount, West Lothian Youth Action Project
Paul Mullan, National Deaf Children's Society
Eileen Prior, Scottish Parent Teacher Council
Helen Reilly, BMA Scotland
Caryn Robertson, Prince's Trust
Juliet Robertson, Creative Star Learning

Kate Sanford, Quarriers
Alistair Seaman, Grounds for Learning
Barbara Schuler, Youthlink Scotland
Joanne Smith, NSPCC Scotland
Claire Telfer, Save the Children
Winfried van der Sluijs, The University of St Andrews
Linda Whitmore, Enable
Melaine Whittle, Common Thread
Anne Wilson, Action for Sick Children
Angus Wood, Barnardo's

Apologies:

Alison McInnes MSP
Fiona McLeod MSP
Drew Smith MSP
Humza Yousaf MSP
Stuart Aitken, Sense Scotland
Gillian Bell, Alcohol Focus Scotland
May Chamberlain, Relationships Scotland
Mo Colvin, RNIB Scotland
Bill Cook, Edinburgh Council
Martin Evans, Common Thread
Mark Joseph, Common Thread
Richard Knott, The Salvation Army
Euan Lloyd, Save the Children
Nancy Loucks, Families Outside
Sharon McCluskie, Play Scotland
Cathy McCulloch, Children's Parliament
Kirsteen McKay, The University of Edinburgh
Chris McNaught, Crossreach
Elizabeth May, Action for Sick Children
Susan Millar, Prince's Trust
Alison Reid, Cl@n Childlaw
Tracy Rodger, CLIC Sargent
Marsha Scott, West Lothian Council
Marina Shaw, Circle
Maggie Simpson, Scottish Childminding Association
Bob Stewart, Four Square
Paula Swanston, Home Link Family Support
Christopher Wiles, NHS Grampian
Caroline Wilson, Open Secret
Megan Wilson, Sense Scotland

12.55 Welcome

Alison Johnstone MSP welcomed the members to the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

13.00 Inputs on health, well-being and curriculum

Alastair Seaman, Grounds for Learning (GFL)

Illustrating his points with a number of photographs, Alastair explained that child-led play contributes to and impacts on behaviour and creativity. Outdoor play is reflected in key policies on buildings and on health equalities. With funding from Inspiring Scotland, GFL natural play programme has been used in 8 schools and is underpinned by the child-led philosophy and features tunnels and sand, hiding spaces, loose materials etc. It requires whole school involvement.

Outcomes: head teacher reported more maths being applied in the playground that previous demonstrated in the classroom, behaviour, social skills and creativity improved. Staff and school reported improved staff moral, increased physical activity. Parents were very supportive and when consulted reported that they had seen the benefits.

Cost £7-30K varied between schools, i.e. soft play and alternative surfaces costs on par with traditional tarmac.

Scottish Government have committed to supporting 30 more schools over the next 3 years. A network of schools committed to outdoor learning to share experience and practice.

Alastair posed 4 questions to the group:

- Q1. Why Education Scotland not interested in play beyond early years?
- Q2. Why does our £13m p/a active schools programme focus on sport and fail to support active outdoor play?
- Q3. We're spending £1.25 billion on new schools – how do we avoid the rubbish playgrounds of the past?
- Q4. Why is this usually led by individual parents or teachers and not by Local Authorities?

30 August 2012 - bus tour of 3 schools to see spaces and meet teachers.

He finished by asking - What's our vision for Scotland?

Juliet Robertson, Creative Star Learning

Juliet explained her role as an education consultant who is passionate about getting children outside. She strongly believes in the link between health and wellbeing and achievement and attainment. She still teaches 1 day per week.

Juliet received a Churchill Fellowship that enabled her to go to Sweden – she visited the 1st outdoor nursery and others where they are outside 80% of the time. They are funded in line with other state schools. Ur Och Skur schools use the local area for learning, not just the forest but using the totality of outdoor area. The trip made substantial impact on her views of Scottish education. The children she had seen were physically more able, not overweight, and happy, with the ability to concentrate.

This brings the question of how does this affect the cognitive development of children. The Cross Party Group participated in a leaf exercise to demonstrate that natural materials can be used more effectively than expensive educational puzzles, and force you to think harder. The use of natural materials can develop skills such as problem solving, team working and creativity. Everything can be taught using these materials except for a few lab-based skills.

Paul Bradshaw, ScotCen

Growing Up in Scotland is a large scale longitudinal study which started in 2005 and tracks three cohorts of children from families from across Scotland. The information collected is used to find out if the circumstances and experiences of children in Scotland are changing and whether current policies and services for young children and their families are improving lives. Data is collected on an annual basis.

Age 6 findings from the 1st birth cohort were recently published in three reports: early experiences of primary school, obesity and activity, and the involvement of grandparents.

Key Findings:

Travel to School: 52% walk, 38% by car. More travel by car in advantaged areas though this is largely because more people have cars. Amongst car owners, there is no difference in travel by car according to area deprivation.

For lunch at school, 45% of children have school meals whilst 53% have packed lunches. No data is collected on nutritional content. As fewer take school meals, any attempts to improve health in this way will only impact on a minority. According to other UK research, most packed lunches do not fit nutritional standards set for school meals. 62% of lowest income group took school meals.

Obesity: 22% were overweight/obese, 9% obese; 15% not meeting minimum requirement of 60 minutes activity; 31% had 3 or more hours of screen time per week day.

Key factors associated with overweight/obesity at age 6: mother overweight/obese, frequent snacking on foods such as crisps at earlier ages, not eating main meal in dining area, skipping breakfast, low parental supervision.

Low levels of activity and high screen time were all associated with parental roles – for example mother’s level of activity and screen time.

At age 6 there was no relationship between low physical activity nor high sedentary behaviour and overweight/obesity. Many of the risk factors for young children’s overweight and low activity identified here are potentially modifiable – that is, they can be changed - or they allow risk groups to be identified and thus potentially allow interventions to be targeted.

Full reports and summary findings can be found on the Growing Up in Scotland website.

Chair then opened up the meeting for discussion and questions.

Malcolm Chisholm, MSP said these topics came up in debate in Parliament the previous week. There were contrasting messages between second and third speaker in relation to activity and diet. Need to clarify to determine where focus should be.

Paul Bradshaw: Being more active does not appear to reduce the risk of obesity at this age, so there is a need to look at wider issues around diet and look beyond obesity as the key measurement or outcome and at health more generally.

Juliet Robertson: In Sweden parents have chosen the outdoor schools so other factors come into the equation.

Kim Atkinson, Scottish Sports Association. Key indication of longer term life expectancy is linked to physical activity, with thousands of people per annum dying as a result of lack of physical activity. The Chief Medical Officer has said physical fitness is the key indicator to how long you live. It is estimated that a 1% increase in physical activity would save lives and millions of pounds – preventative spending. Premature mortality could be reduced by an increase in physical activity and sport could make a contribution as part of a continuum.

The discussion moved to the role of planning for new and existing schools.

Alastair Seaman told the group that this was being taken forward by the Scotland Futures Trust. It was noted that in the post concordat era that this presented a number of challenges with Local Authorities making the final decisions. The sharing of good practice also creates some tensions. How to balance the investment in resources eg football pitch vs space for general play.

Morag Driscoll, Scottish Child Law Centre, reminded the group of the link back to UNCRC and in particular the right to play. Focus should be on healthy children in mind and body.

Pete Higgins, Professor of Outdoor Education, Edinburgh University

shared with the group that some of his students' work on this area shows that it is not just about improving physical activity but also about access to a variety of places. Adolescents in particular do not have places to 'be'. Good example from Scandinavia regarding the need for green and private space where young people have 100 metres private space away from adults. There are also cultural issues of risk management.

Juliet Robertson: gave an example of a new PPP school where cuts were made to outside space to bring the budget back into line. Outdoor space is the fall guy in budgets. Guidance need at national levels to show value of green space. Other planning issues to be considered e.g. can children and young people walk safely to local shops and back ('popsicle test').

Paul Bradshaw: These considerations should be taken account of alongside skill sets of staff to support wide range of activity.

Kate Sanford, Quarriers: Scottish weather is also a factor which demands indoor and outdoor activities and areas.

Alastair Seaman: Gave an example where a school was under pressure from 70% of pupils electing to go out in the rain whilst from an adult practitioner perspective concerns that at times it is 'too sunny' to go out. Is it more about adults comfort levels?

Marion MacLeod, Children in Scotland: The proposed legislation for Children and Young People should be meaningful in including UNCRC in Ministerial decision making - this could make a real difference in the areas of planning, roads etc.

Eileen Prior, SPTC: There is an over emphasis on safety rather than health. Children and young people learn through taking assessed risks. Parents are often used as the reason why children don't go outdoors but this isn't true – although often playgrounds are not fit places to play. Outdoor activities are an important part of learning and wet clothes are just practical issues that can be overcome.

Juliet Robertson: Clothing boxes in schools could alleviate this practical issue. The mindset of adults can be a more difficult issue to tackle. It's not about teachers vs parents.

Mike Small, Fife Diet: Fife Diet Manifesto was an example of practical support to change the way we do things in relation to food in schools working with the Nick Nairn Group. Aimed to connect to climate change targets as the way we do food creates 30% of our carbon outputs. We need to look at the values that underpin food policy. Currently we only judge this by home much we export abroad.

Potential indicators to measure:

1. Soup Test – no child should leave school without learning how to make soup.
2. Right to Grow – in terms of physical activity.
3. Soda Tax – in France and Hungary levy on carbonised drinks to fund other resources and activities.
4. Social Responsibility and sustainable procurement – locally sourced food
5. School Farms – Eco schools projects, produce links to playground developments.

Andy Mount, West Lothian Youth Action Project: talked about sports in schools and some of the messages young people are learning, should be about participation and learning rather than winning/losing.

Juliet Harris, Together: need to engage with forthcoming Children and Young People Bill, linking to UNCRC, and decision making and planning. Everyone in group needs to be aware of ongoing issues.

Marco Biagi, MSP: Most of these issues relate to local authority decisions. Need to be aware of these when making consultation responses.

Maurice Frank: Stress is an important issue in relation to health. School environment can affect mood.

Pete Higgins: Children and Young People should be engaged in own risk assessment, thinking of them as active citizens involved in decision making.

Group felt that Fife Diet model of schools produce was something that could be encouraged as part of the Eco Schools Programme.

Action Points

1. Alison Johnstone, MSP: take forward the wet breaks point and investigate further with relevant minister. If it is down to individual schools or teachers, what are the implications in terms of rights? Also issue of wet weather gear, supply, storage etc.
2. School Buildings: When we have a blank canvas, one size fits all is not appropriate. How can we do good things?
3. Possible opportunities in the forthcoming children and young people bill. Consultation will begin over the summer.

AGM

Convenors were re-elected and Children in Scotland and YouthLink Scotland confirmed as joint secretariat.

Sara Collier noted that this cross party group was one of the largest in the Scottish Parliament and encouraged members to continue to support the group by suggesting topics and themes.

Annual return will be submitted to the Scottish Parliament shortly.