

Consultation response

Evidence to Scottish Parliament's Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill.

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Shelter

Introduction

Shelter Scotland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Scottish Parliament's inquiry on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill.

Shelter is working hard to make lasting changes to policy and practice which will protect children from homelessness, as well as mitigate the impact of homelessness and bad housing on children. Housing is fundamental to the quality of children's lives and the fulfilment of their statutory rights. Children need a home to feel safe, keep warm, stay healthy, and to play and learn. Too often bad housing and homelessness have a profound impact on children's abilities to learn and fully participate in school life. The additional support needs of children experiencing housing difficulties must be addressed if the Bill is to help all children receive the support they require.

Impact of homelessness on children's education

Children can spend anything from a few weeks to several years living in temporary accommodation waiting for a permanent home. It can mean children have longer journeys to school involving several buses, which may also be unaffordable for parents who are already struggling financially. Cramped conditions may mean children do not have a quiet space in which to do their homework or the necessary equipment. Some families will move a number of times before they are re-housed permanently, sometimes forcing children to change schools and to cope with the resulting loss of friends, familiar teachers and their own support networks.

Furthermore children living in temporary, overcrowded, poorly repaired or inadequately heated housing are more likely to suffer health problems and be bullied.¹ They are a third more likely to suffer respiratory problems such as chest problems and asthma than other children, and may also have difficulties sleeping and have feelings of depression and anxiety.² It is harder for them to have friends over making them more vulnerable to bullying and affecting their self-esteem and social skills. These factors all hinder children's chances of enjoying and succeeding at school. Research confirms this, finding that homeless children have lower levels of achievement and higher levels of absence than other children.³

¹ Shelter (2006) *Against the Odds: An investigation comparing the lives of children on either side of Britain's housing divide*.

² Shelter (2004) *Living in Limbo*.

³ Shelter (2006) *Chance of a lifetime: The impact of bad housing on children's lives*.

Frequently children experiencing housing problems are also coping with other challenges such as living in poverty, family breakdown, parental alcohol or drug misuse, parental mental or physical health problems or have fled domestic or racial abuse.

Shelter's educational support services

In light of the negative impact homelessness can have on children's learning Shelter recently developed an education support service to minimise the adverse affects of homelessness on children's education. We have four education liaison workers who provide tailored support to children aged 5 - 16 years who are experiencing homelessness to help them learn and achieve. Types of support may include working with the child to help them develop a positive attitude towards learning and build their self-esteem; organising one-to-one educational support at home or at school; helping parents to engage with schools and advocating for children to receive appropriate support to help them achieve. It is a pilot service currently running in Edinburgh, Glasgow, South Lanarkshire and Dumfries, funded for three years by the Big Lottery Fund and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

In our experience of offering education support to homeless children we have found that educational professionals are often unaware of the housing circumstances of some of their pupils, how this can affect their learning and how to support these children to achieve their potential. This means that homeless children tend to miss out on additional support they are eligible for under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act, 2004.

Conclusion

It is of paramount importance that when making amendments to the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act, 2004 the Committee takes into consideration the learning barriers faced by children experiencing homelessness and the additional support they require.