

The Children Bill



Case study: Devon children's trust

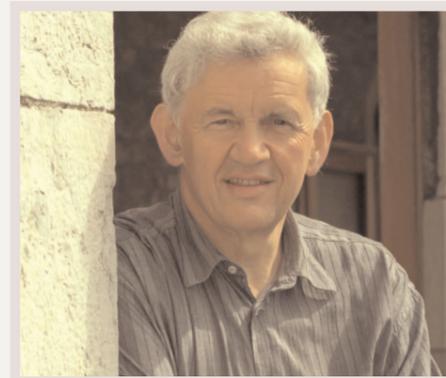
Every Child Matters, the title of last year's green paper, sums up neatly what motivates people to work in education. When Devon successfully bid to become one of 35 pilot children's trusts, bringing education, social services and health together, I was delighted to be asked to chair it, especially when I discovered its membership. Seated around our table are the chief executive of the county council, the director of social services, the clinical director of a local healthcare trust, the chief executive of the teenagers' welfare body Connexions, representatives from Sure Start, the Children's Fund, and parents' and governors' organisations, as well as the lead councillors for education and social services, one of whom is now lead member for children's services. It is a rich mixture.

Our starting point is the five children's rights described in the green paper: the right to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve the most out of life, make a positive contribution and have economic wellbeing. When you see children who miss out on some, or all of these, it can rip you to pieces. Some are homeless. Others are physically or emotionally abused, unhealthy, absent from school, or ravaged early in their lives by environmental factors that will shape them forever, if no one intervenes.

We have to be interested in the whole family, not just a particular child, for sometimes it is parents or carers who need support, so that they can, in turn, do their best for their charges. Intervention must come in the early years, hence the presence of Sure Start on the trust board. Parents of children born with a disability, for example, need help from the beginning. A few years ago a colleague of mine at Exeter University, Professor Bob Burden, carried out a study of the mothers of physically disabled children. Some felt guilty at having given birth to a child with medical problems, though, of course, they had done nothing wrong. Most eventually developed back problems from lifting and moving their growing children.

Better communication and co-operation among professionals from many backgrounds is essential. There is a long record of community policing in Devon, yet police officers report very different experiences when they go into schools. In some it is clear who their contact is, while in others nobody seems to know, so they wander round trying to find someone.

Our emphasis is on changing ways of working and co-operating, not on setting up elaborate structures, or smothering people in yet more bureaucracy. Everyone wants to do the best for



Photograph: Chris Jones

Ted Wragg: 'good can emerge from catastrophe'

children, but circumstances do not always help them. An innovative series of child and adolescent mental health workshops is just beginning in Devon, allowing professionals from schools, health, social care, youth and voluntary services to work together.

A few years ago one of our researchers at Exeter University visited a couple of truants at home. The two lads sat on a sofa watching television, fit as fleas. Why were they off school? "I've told them," their mother said, "one day they'll come home from school and find me dead, if I've had one of my turns." No wonder the poor boys missed out on their education, terrified their attendance might kill their mother. But schools on their own cannot cope with what is really a family mental health problem. You can't fine someone for being mentally ill.

Among the early projects of the Devon trust is a centre for vulnerable adolescents in Exeter. Youth support workers, teachers and other professionals will be able to give advice and support on pregnancy, substance abuse and other sensitive matters. Another multi-agency initiative is aimed at broadening the skills of those who work in early years services, centres and school-based nurseries.

The original driving force for Every Child Matters was the report into the death of Victoria Climbié. Sometimes good can emerge from catastrophe, and the introduction of children's trusts is one such example. Yet it would be easy to overreact and swamp professionals with so much form-filling and accountability that they are prevented from doing their job.

The Devon children's trust will have been a success if we can bring together professionals from different disciplines and get them working together for the benefit of all children, not just the ultra vulnerable.

TED WRAGG

How will the integrated inspection system work?

A discussion paper sets out early proposals for a children's services inspection framework. An agreed set of principles is to underpin inspection of all children's services, including education. They are to focus on five outcomes for children set out in Every Child Matters: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and social and economic well-being — plus a sixth: support for parents. The inspectorates, including social services, health, police and probation service, are together developing criteria for judging performance on these themes. The framework will inform all inspections of children's services, but not govern them.

Joint area reviews, undertaken by any two or more inspectorates, will evaluate how well services together improve the wellbeing of children and young people in the locality. They will have to square the circle of having less burdensome inspections while gathering additional information. Inspections and reviews are to use, as far as possible, existing documentation, but there will also be some fieldwork. There is no intention to introduce another layer of inspection.

How is all this being funded?

In 2004-5 there will be a £20 million "change fund" to help local authorities and primary care trusts adapt to the new system. Further guidance will be published in the autumn, outlining funding for 2005-8 in the light of the July 2004 spending review.

The bill and green paper: www.dfes.gov.uk/everychildmatters. Pupil participation guidance: Working Together: giving children and young people a say, DfES ref number: DfES 0134 2004 (<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk>). Discussion papers: Children's services: some key organisational issues (the Education Network: www.ten.info); Every Child Matters: inspecting services for children and young people (www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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The Children Bill

The bill gives local authorities a specific duty to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children. It allows for the collection of data on their attainments, and those of other children in need.

What are the structural changes?

- More Sure Start children's centres in the 20 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods. These combine education, family support, employment advice, childcare and health services, reaching 650,000 children by March 2006.
- The Government is funding the development of 240 full-service schools by 2006 to the tune of £52.2 million over three years, each to offer a specific set of services: childcare, study support, lifelong learning, health and social care, parenting support, sports and arts facilities and access to IT. Sixty pilot schools are now being funded. Ministers want clusters of schools to work around such schools, and, eventually, that all schools become extended, providing at least some of these services.
- Better information sharing between agencies, including education, with a legal obligation to co-operate.
- A lead "case worker" for children seeing multiple agencies. For many children, this will be someone in school.
- On-the-spot service delivery. Professionals will be encouraged to work in multi-disciplinary teams based in and around schools and children's centres. These teams will respond quickly to the concerns of teachers, childcare workers and others.

- The creation of directors of children's services and a lead council member for children in all local authorities, responsible for education and social services. There will be no requirement to merge education and social services departments, although some authorities already have, and many will. In Wales, the Assembly will require the nomination of a lead director for children and young people's services. He or she will oversee partnership planning, but accountability will not be changed.
- Children's trusts will be responsible for children's centres and schools; multidisciplinary teams; setting up a common assessment framework; information sharing; joint training; and safeguarding children. They are expected to co-operate with other services, such as adult mental health specialists. As part of this arrangement, education and social services will be able to pool funds for joint projects or overlapping work. Ministers want children's trusts with independent chairs, usually based within local authorities (see case study), to



integrate and co-ordinate these services, but there is no legislation on this.

- A minister for children, young people and families; Margaret Hodge is already in place.
- An integrated inspection framework for children's services led by Ofsted and reporting on local authority areas. Services will be judged separately, and by how well they work together. Inspections will "track children's journeys through the system".
- A children's commissioner will draw on children's views and make sure they are fed into policy-making. He or she will investigate individual cases where the issues have wider relevance, if asked to by the secretary of state, but will have no independent powers to instigate investigations as do the children's commissioners already in place in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Local authorities will be required to establish a safeguarding children board, normally chaired by the director of children's services or an independent chair. It will include local authorities; NHS bodies; the police, probation and

prison services; Connexions; and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service.

What will all this mean for schools?

It's still hard to tell, and will certainly vary from place to place. The National College for School Leadership is setting up a scheme to promote collaboration between schools and their communities. It says a pilot programme will be ready by autumn this year.

The Government insists that the changes will not increase teachers' workloads, but should free them to teach. Staff in existing extended schools, such as Hayward secondary in Bolton (Friday magazine, March 12), support this claim, saying they can call on a range of specialists as and when they need to, including an on-site police officer, bilingual community liaison workers, and a mental health nurse.

The changes could reduce the power of league tables by emphasising the wider educational role of schools. There will be a sharper focus on the achievements of pupils experiencing difficulties. One primary head puts it this way: rather than

asking herself if she is delivering what is required, she will have to ask instead if she is meeting the needs of the children.

Heads will have to learn to work in partnership with people from other services, rather than to exercise "command and control". Some trailblazers are finding that having a staff member responsible for co-ordinating services works well. The DfES is also looking at how assessment for learning should relate to the identification and assessment of special needs, and how it could help with decisions about what other specialist support children need. The new policies could also mean new career paths for those working with children, including alternative school-based jobs for teachers, such as family liaison. The expansion of Sure Start nursery provision and daycare will mean large numbers of qualified early years teachers and managers will be needed.

Where will everyone fit?

In her address to the 2004 annual conference of the National Association of Head Teachers,

president Rona Tutt said extended schools would vary "from those with spare accommodation to house crèches, parents' groups and the University of the Third Age, to the ones where the leadership team share an office with the school secretary, and the staff take it in turns to sit down in the staffroom."

How will joint working work?

The Government is providing £100,000 for each authority to develop information sharing systems. One of the biggest barriers to the bill's implementation is the clash between children's right to confidentiality and the need to share information about children. For health professionals, confidentiality is a central tenet of their professional code. Some social workers, for instance, have been shocked by the way children with special needs are openly discussed in staffrooms. Schools and agencies will also be expected to work more closely with the voluntary and community sector, in such areas as childcare and parental support.

Fifteen "pioneer" authorities have been given

£10 million to try out different information sharing models. Hertfordshire already has joint teams of social workers, educational psychologists and education welfare officers, using a shared database.

There is to be common training for all professionals working with children. Modules are likely to include: child development, parents and family life, managing transitions, child protection, and listening to and involving children and young people.

Who will be the lead professional?

This will vary. It could be a teacher, a special needs co-ordinator, the educational welfare officer or a mentor. The DfES says it will depend on the needs of the child and family. "The lead professional for one child might be a social worker, for another it might be a youth worker, for a third it might be the head of year at their school," says a spokeswoman. Delegates at the NAHT conference insisted that the Government ensure that headteachers are in charge of extended schools.

What training will take place?

More than 4 million people in England work with children or support those who do. This includes almost 2.5 million paid staff. In addition to the joint modules, all teachers will have training on substance misuse and should also learn to identify children needing mental health help and how to support those with mild problems.

The Teacher Training Agency will become the main body for developing the skills of school support staff, as well as of teachers. A children's workforce unit, based at the DfES, will work alongside the TTA, and will develop a pay and training strategy for non-education staff. It will work with employers, staff and government departments to establish a Sector Skills Council (SSC) for children and young people's services which will look at ways of developing collaborative approaches. The SSC will set standards for qualification — effectively shaping further education courses — and advise government on training needs. Workforce reforms should also enable people to move across different professions.

Training will also be needed for: more speech and language therapists, including paraprofessionals; 180,000 childcare workers to enable 1.15 million new childcare places by 2006; nursery teachers for increased provision for three and four-year-olds and for children's centres.