

SUBMISSION FROM INVERCLYDE COUNCIL

1. With reference to your letter of 8 July requesting written evidence on the general principles of the Autism (Scotland) Bill, the following submission is provided to assist the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee in its scrutiny of the Bill.
2. Education authorities have a duty to ensure that they provide adequate and efficient educational provision for any child or young person with additional support needs and this includes children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Inverclyde Council, in partnership with colleagues in the health service and third sector already provides strategic direction and support to meet the additional support needs of children and young people as defined in the Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Acts 2004 and 2009, which include those on the autistic spectrum. Therefore, whilst we are in support of the development and implementation of a national strategy for autism we do not consider that there is a need for separate legislation to address the needs of children and young people on the autistic spectrum; the additional support for learning (ASL) legislative framework already provides for their needs. In addition, in our opinion the Bill is at odds with the aims of Getting It Right for Every Child which is multi-agency and holistic in approach aimed at meeting the needs of **all** children and young people.
3. In our view, introducing legislation targeted at meeting the specific needs of an identified group such as those on the autistic spectrum is potentially discriminatory. It differentiates the needs of one group of individuals from other groups who also have additional support needs and is likely to have the following impact.
 - An increase in demand for identification and diagnosis. This would create additional pressures on services which already have long waiting lists. It is important that the committee is clear that the diagnosis of autism or being on the autistic spectrum is inexact both in technology and methodology and is based largely on reports of behaviour as well as behavioural observations.
 - Prioritisation of resources for those on the autistic spectrum at the expense of other groups of children and young people with additional support needs – leading to a less equitable distribution of supports and resources across councils.
4. The Scottish agenda for autism was well established ten years ago with the recommendations of the Autistic Spectrum Disorders Needs Assessment Report (2001), *Scottish Executive report on implementation and next steps*. The HMle's *Education for Pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorders Report* (2006) also produced a number of recommendations, as did the National

Autism Society's *Make school make sense* campaign report. There has also been a significant amount of work undertaken in the last nine years by the Autism National Reference Group.

5. In our opinion the assurances regarding planning and development of services for those with additional needs of those with autism are served by the above documents and provisions. The *Autism Toolbox for Scottish Schools* (2009) is designed to support education authorities in the delivery of services and planning for children and young people with ASD in Scotland and complements the guidance issued on health and social care services for people with ASD. In 2009 Inverclyde Council education services made use of these documents to complete an inter-disciplinary audit of need to support our strategic planning for ASD.
6. In our view the evaluation and inspection frameworks such as HMIE, and the Care Commission can include appropriate levels of scrutiny regarding how well the needs of children and young people with additional support needs on the autistic spectrum are met. Such quality assurance processes would be in a position to assess local councils' strategic planning and delivery of services.
7. We would recommend that the implementation of a national strategy for autism linked to, for example, HMIE and/or Care Commission frameworks would be an effective means of delivering efficient and equitable services to those identified as being on the autism spectrum.

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