
Policy briefing



The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures

Introduction

Launched on 11 December 2007 by Rt Hon Ed Balls MP, Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families, *The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures*¹ 'aims to make England the best place in the world for children to grow up' (DCSF, 2007). *The Children's Plan* sets out government's plans for the next ten years based on five underlying principles:

- Parents bring up children, not government, so government needs to do more to support parents and families
- All children have potential to succeed and should go as far as their talents can take them
- Childhood should be enjoyed, as well as being preparation for adult life
- Services need to be shaped by and responsive to children, young people and families, not designed around professional boundaries
- It is always better to prevent failure than tackle a crisis later

Potential issues for the Voluntary Youth Sector

NCVYS welcomes *The Children's Plan*, in particular the emphasis on integrated working and the role of positive activities, including the development of places to go and things to do, in the lives of children and young people. The proposed cross government working to support councils and the third sector to work with local communities to provide better physical environments is a positive move to develop links between Local Authorities (LAs), the VCS and communities. NCVYS is also encouraged by the recognition that LAs need to work with the VCS to ensure that every child gets the best possible start in life. However this will rely on central government commitments being cascading down through LAs and successful implementation at a local level.

¹ The Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007) available via:
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan/?pid=childrens_plan

Children’s Trusts are highlighted in the plan as a means of driving collaboration forward. NCVYS welcomes the recognition that the VCS should be fully represented in Children’s Trusts. This presence should fully represent the diversity of the VCS and include faith based groups and organisations representing minority groups such as black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transsexual (LGBT) organisations. As described in Chapter 7, NCVYS fully supports the involvement of the VCS in the commissioning function and the development of a new programme, with input from the VCS, to improve commissioning practice.

Schools are prioritised throughout the plan but NCVYS would like to have seen recognition of the vital links between schools and the VCS, especially in relation to extended schools. VCS support and capacity is a vital resource that should be utilised to provide services for children and young people out of school hours. VCS organisations can support children and young people in unique and creative ways which will further their development and learning.

NCVYS awaits the publication of the *Staying Safe Action Plan* and, as highlighted in the NCVYS response to *Staying Safe*², promotes the valuable role that the VCS can play in safeguarding children and young people. NCVYS has developed Keeping it Safe, a good practice guide and Sound Systems³, a peer accreditation scheme aimed at voluntary youth organisations. Keeping it Safe has received endorsements from DCSF, the NSPCC and other key stakeholders and is a good example of how the VCS can lead the way in safeguarding work. NCVYS will also maintain dialogue with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) and the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) to ensure that the VCS is fully engaged and represented in continued developments in these areas.

Report summary:

Chapter 1: Happy and healthy

Parents are central to *The Children’s Plan* and there are several measures to support every parent to do the best for their child, including £34 million over the next three years to provide two expert parenting advisers in every LA and create a new Parents Panel to advise government on policies affecting parents. There will be more support for families who need more intensive help with the investment of £90 million capital over three years to improve facilities for disabled children to take short breaks and the extension of the Family Fund up to the age of 18.

£225 million will be invested in safe places to play over the next three years, creating more playgrounds and adventure playgrounds in disadvantaged areas. A play strategy will also be published by summer 2008.

² NCVYS Response to *Staying Safe* (NCVYS, 2007) available via:
<http://www.ncvys.org.uk/index.php?page=273>

³ Further information about Keeping it Safe and Sound Systems is available via:
<http://www.ncvys.org.uk/index.php?page=262>

There is a focus on children’s health and DCSF and the Department of Health are to publish a Child Health Strategy in spring 2008. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) will also be reviewed.

The plan lays out ambitious targets to halve child poverty by 2010 and to eradicate it by 2020. A new joint DCSF and Department for Work and Pension’s (DWP) Child Poverty

Unit will be created to coordinate cross government work in tackling child poverty. Poor housing is also targeted with another action plan being published in 2008.

Chapter 2: Safe and sound

Safeguarding children and young people is prioritised within the plan tackling issues such as the internet, home safety equipment and bullying. Working in partnership with key national and local organisations government will publish the *Staying Safe Action Plan* in early 2008 and ensure that schools and LAs take the proportionate approach to health and safety to allow children to take risks while staying safe.

Chapter 3: Excellence and equality

This chapter focuses on individual progress to achieve world class standards to close the gap in educational achievement for disadvantaged children supported by a system based on their ‘stage not age’. There are plans to create better links between parents and schools, especially secondary schools, and £30 million will be spent over the next three years to provide more family learning to help parents and carers develop skills and learn with their children in schools. This chapter also focuses on the provision of childcare, the Every Child a Writer programme and the introduction of new performance indicators for pupils. There will be a root and branch review of the primary curriculum and government will spend £18 million over the next three years to improve quality of teaching for children with special educational needs.

Chapter 4: Leadership and collaboration

Government want to introduce system reform to achieve world class standards and close the gap in educational achievement for disadvantaged children. This will include driving up the quality and capacity of those working in the children’s workforce by the following strategies:

- £17 million over the next three years in the early years workforce;
- making teaching a Masters level profession
- ensure new recruits spend at least one year in training
- establish a Transition to Teaching programme to attract more people with science, technology and engineering backgrounds into teaching
- extend the Future Leaders programme which focuses on urban school
- every secondary school to have specialist, trust or academy status and every school to have a business or university partner

- make governing bodies more effective
- expectation on LAs to work more effectively and swiftly on preventing schools from failing and reverse failure quickly when it happens

The plan also focuses on ideas to develop standards of behaviour within schools and support for those children who are excluded or disengaged from education. £26.5 million will be invested over the next three years on piloting new forms of alternative provision to traditional schooling. Ambitious targets are set for school buildings; all new school buildings to be zero carbon by 2016.

Chapter 5: Staying on

Ensure that young people are participating and achieving their potential to 18 and beyond and are capable of prospering in a high skills economy. This focuses on 14-19 reform which will include:

- legislation to raise the participation age to 17 from 2013 and 18 from 2015;
- develop three new Diplomas in science, humanities and languages to increase the options for young people;
- create a new independent regulator of qualifications with a consultation launched before the end of 2007;
- transfer funding for 16-19 learning from the Learning and Skills Council to LAs (consultation early 2008); and
- allocate £31.5 million over the next three years on a new programme to re-engage 16 year olds who are not currently in education

Chapter 6: On the right track

This chapter considers how to keep children and young people on the path to success and recognises the role of positive activities and experiences in achieving this. Investment will be made in the following areas in addition to the funding released from unclaimed assets:

- £160 million over the next two years to improve the quality and range of things to do and places to go for young people;
- develop an entitlement for all young people to participate in positive activities including piloting a new offer to take part in cultural activities in and out of schools; and
- £20 million over the next three years to use Acceptable Behaviour Contracts and support for young people to improve their behaviour

A youth alcohol action plan will be published in spring 2008 to coincide with the new *Drugs Strategy* and government will review best practice in effective sex and relationships education and how it is delivered in schools.

A Youth Crime Action Plan is to be published which will contain measures such as:

- joint allocation with the Home Office of £66 million over the next three years to target those most at risk;
- piloting a restorative approach to youth offenders; and
- publish a Green Paper in 2008 looking at what happens when young offenders leave custody and how to improve education they receive whilst in custody

Chapter 7: Making it happen

The needs of children and families will provide a basis for the delivery of system-wide reforms. Integrated working will be promoted and the Every Child Matters ambitions built upon:

- expect every school to be uncompromising in its ambitions for achievement, sitting at the heart of the community it serves;
- set high expectations for Children’s Trusts to:
 - delivery measurable improvements for all children and young people
 - by 2010 have consistent, high quality arrangements to provide identification and early intervention for all children and young people who need additional help
- monitor the difference Children’s Trusts are making and examine whether their arrangements need to be strengthened to improve outcomes, including by further legislation;
- early 2008 - publish a Children’s Workforce Action Plan

Goals for 2020:

- enhance children and young people’s wellbeing;
- every child ready for success in schools;
- every child ready for secondary school;
- every young person with the skills for adult life and further study;
- parents satisfied with the information and support they receive;
- all young people participating in positive activities;
- employers to be satisfied by young people’s readiness to work;
- child health improved and obesity reduced to 2000 levels;
- child poverty halved by 2010 and eradicated by 2020; and
- significantly reduce the number of young offenders receiving a conviction, reprimand, or final warning for a recordable offence for the first time, with a goal to be set in the Youth Crime Action Plan.

DCSF will report on progress in delivering *The Children’s Plan* in a year’s time.

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