

10 October 2019

Colleagues,

This is an open letter to managers, headteachers and practitioners in children's services, from senior leaders responsible for standards and practice in health, social work, social care and education. We come together to reaffirm our commitment to Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC). We want Scotland's children to grow up loved, safe and respected, so that they can reach their full potential.

GIRFEC is special and world leading, in being a long lasting multi-disciplinary strategy for enhancing the wellbeing of a nation's children. It has the support of successive Government administrations, both in local and national Government, and of professional bodies across the range of disciplines, as reflected in the signatories to this letter.

Most of the time, most children get all of the support they need from their family, with help from universal health and education services. But many children and families look for advice or extra support at some time. The GIRFEC approach should make that easy to access, ensuring a prompt and proportionate response to meeting needs.

You will be aware that the Deputy First Minister has recently agreed the recommendations of the GIRFEC Practice Development Panel, which had been established to develop an authoritative Code of Practice for information sharing. The Panel concluded that while it was possible to produce a code of practice that properly reflects the relevant legal requirements, the detail that such a code would require means it would not be user friendly in practice and would not be helpful. Moreover, the Panel indicated that the likely unintended consequence would be to stifle the consideration and process of necessary and proportionate information sharing, which would lead to reduced opportunities to offer support to children and families.

On behalf of the Government, Mr Swinney endorsed the Panel's conclusion that practical guidance can best support and sustain the GIRFEC approach under existing legislation. Accordingly, while parts of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 will not now come into force, the Government remains fully committed to Getting it right for every child, and this support should be available to all children and families.

This was made clear in the letter of 19 September from Michael Chalmers, Director for Children & Families, where he stated that "our primary consideration going forward is to support practitioners to confidently handle information in a way that respects the rights of the individual and ensures that children, young people, and families get access to the right support at the right time in line with the GIRFEC approach."

We welcome that assurance. GIRFEC means that more children and families are getting earlier support, that fewer children require compulsory measures, and also that better co-ordinated planning and support is in place for those who need it.

As the DFM acknowledged, most Community Planning Partnerships have already embedded many elements of the GIRFEC practice model, and are using the wellbeing indicators, My World Triangle, single planning process, lead professional and named person roles, and other tools to provide easy access and support for families.

We need to ensure that consistent good practice is sustained across all of our agencies. The implementation of GIRFEC is dependent on professionals working in partnership with children and families, and with each other. There is a responsibility on all partners, managers, headteachers and practitioners to ensure that this is in place.

The refresh of the practice guidance has commenced, and consultation with professional groups will follow in coming months. This refresh will incorporate current best practice and the work and findings of the Practice Development Panel. It will reaffirm GIRFEC as a rights-based strategy. Effective, early intervention should be based on a consensual approach, and easy access to advice and further support. This means good engagement with children and families about any concerns, and it involves families and practitioners working together to address those concerns.

Practitioners should be assured that if they have a genuine concern about a child's wellbeing, provided it is lawful and proportionate in the individual circumstances, they can share necessary information to support children and families to get the right help, from the right service at the right time.

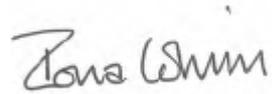
Of course, where there is reasonable concern that a child may be at risk of harm, we all have a responsibility to act to make sure that they are safe and protected, and relevant information can be shared without consent, provided it is proportionate, necessary and lawful to do so. In such circumstances, practitioners should follow local inter-agency child protection guidance.

We believe in Getting it right for every child, because it works. GIRFEC has succeeded, where similar strategies elsewhere have not, because it has been built from the bottom-up. It has been developed and delivered by practitioners who want to make a difference in the lives of children and families, and who understand the value and importance of partnership working.

As professional and senior policy leads in Government and across the sector, we are fully committed to the delivery and continued development of GIRFEC and the national practice model. We look forward to engaging with stakeholders in the policy and guidance refresh, to make sure that we are Getting it right for every child for many years to come.



Catherine Calderwood, Chief Medical Officer, Scottish Government



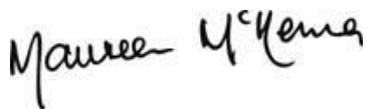
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