

## **Prescribing the Minimum Annual Number of Learning Hours**

### **Response from Barnardo's Scotland: June 2023**

#### **About Barnardo's Scotland**

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity operating in Scotland since 1892. Barnardo's Scotland works with more than 16,300 children, young people and families in over 100 services. We deliver a wide range of services which includes providing family support and early intervention, supporting children, young people and families through fostering and adoption services, helping children affected by sexual abuse and exploitation, helping young people entering employment, education and training, and supporting young people and families affected by drug and alcohol use.

We use information and experience from our services across Scotland, and from the children and young people we work with, to seek positive change in policy and practice based on what matters to the people who use our services and what we see working in communities. We work collaboratively across all sectors and political parties to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

#### **Should the Scottish Government set in law the minimum learning hours pupils in Scotland should receive?**

Yes/No/**Not Sure**

Barnardo's Scotland works in over 400 schools across Scotland, providing a range of services to support children and their families and help them to better engage with their educational environment.

However, anecdotal evidence from Barnardo's Scotland staff suggests that children being absent from school or only attending on a part-time basis is an issue which pre-dates the Covid-19 pandemic, and that issues arising since the impact of school closures during lockdown has only intensified these issues.

Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a child's right to an education which promotes the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential<sup>1</sup>. Where children are persistently absent from school, or where they are in attendance for only a short period, these obligations become increasingly difficult to fulfil. Providing a statutory requirement for children to have a minimum annual number of annual learning hours may contribute to improved outcomes in this regard.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, November 1989.

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/unicef-convention-rights-child-uncrc.pdf>

At Barnardo's Scotland, the impact we have on the lives of pupils and their families cannot always be translated directly or overnight into measurable education attainment, and there is often not enough recognition of the 'soft' impacts of support that can provide a positive impact over the longer term.

While learning hours are a valuable part of child development, it must be recognised that schools play a much broader remit than education alone. A significant amount of valuable holistic support is provided throughout the school day to children across the country, some of whom may be difficult to reach within community-based settings. The term 'learning hours' perhaps overlooks the value of additional functions provided within schools in lieu of a more academically focused model.

Instead, we propose that the term 'school engagement hours' may be more appropriate.

Additionally, it can be more challenging to capture softer outcomes like a reduced number of children sitting outside the Headteacher's office day to day, more children remaining in school for full days, children moving from just attending to engaging meaningfully in learning, developing and sustaining friendships, managing transitions, arriving on time and feeling 'ready to learn' as a result of support around morning routines and management of anxiety.

We previously submitted evidence on attainment and Barnardo's work to the Education, Children and Young People Committee in 2022 which collated evidence from our services. Within that submission, evidence included direct feedback from frontline school staff. One Headteacher told us: "if someone said to me 'but he's still not meeting his benchmarks, I'd say 'but he's in class.'"<sup>2</sup> Solely being in attendance within an educational environment does not mean that children are properly equipped to learn and thrive there.

We would like to see better mechanisms to recognise progress on issues like preventing 'informal' exclusions and increasing capacity to manage peer relationships across the school day.

Overall, young people must first be equipped with resources to fulfil their social, emotional, and developmental needs before they can be expected to fully engage and thrive within a learning environment.

**Do you agree that the minimum annual learning hours should be 950 hours for primary schools?**

Yes/No/**Not Sure**

We refer back to our answer to question 1.

**Do you agree that the minimum annual learning hours should be 1045 hours for secondary schools?**

Yes/No/**Not Sure**

We refer back to our answer to question 1.

**Do you agree with the suggested definition of learning hours set out at paragraph 2.1 above?**

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<sup>2</sup> Education, Children and Young People Committee Inquiry into the Scottish Attainment Challenge Written Evidence from Barnardo's Scotland, February 2022.

<https://cms.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-02/Barnardo%27s%20Scotland%20written%20evidence%20-%20attainment%20challenge%20-%20final.pdf>

## Yes/No/**Not Sure**

*2.1 Learning hours are the period of teaching that learners receive within the school day. In most cases, they do not include lunch and other break times or extra-curricular activities or provision such as breakfast clubs that may take place around the core school day. It has been accepted practice for at least the last 40 years that around 25 hours per week (or 950 hours per academic year) of teaching time is made available in most local authority run primary schools; and 27.5 hours per week (or 1045 hours per academic year) in most local authority run secondary schools.*

The primary objective of schools may be to provide children with an education; however, their remit extends far beyond this in practice. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with rapidly increasing numbers of children experiencing social isolation, they have played a crucial role in identifying areas of need and promoting recovery. Through our work in schools during this period, Barnardo's found that for children:

1. Being in school supported social engagement.
2. Being in school made it easier to identify problem areas.
3. But time spent in school had to be meaningful and engaging.

Observations from one of our Team Managers further supported this "There is an increased requirement to support children transition back into the structures of education and all associated areas to meet attainment, including social interactions and emotional wellbeing."<sup>3</sup>

Schools provide a valuable opportunity to support children and families in a holistic manner, however the term 'learning hours' perhaps overlooks the value of additional functions provided within schools in lieu of a more academically focused model.

### **Apart from the exemptions outlined in this paper are there any other circumstances where a variation to the number of learning hours provided may be needed?**

N/A

### **Are there any further views you wish to share regarding this proposal?**

N/A

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<sup>3</sup> A 'New Normal' Snapshot Report on the Needs of Children and Young People Since Full-Time Return to Education in August 2021, November 2021.

[https://cms.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-12/22890\\_MHWPB%20Survey%20Report.pdf](https://cms.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-12/22890_MHWPB%20Survey%20Report.pdf)