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Mr Richard Bruton, T.D.
Minister for Education and Skills
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1.
D01 RC96

June, 2016

Department of Children & Youth Affairs input to the formulation of the Department of Education and Skills Statement of Strategy 2016-2018.

Dear Richard,

I refer to your correspondence of 23rd May 2016 requesting my Department's input to the next Strategy Statement of your Department and am grateful to avail of the opportunity.

Our respective Departments have significant areas of mutual interest across a range of topics that will hopefully support your strategic priorities, particularly in Early Years and in Tackling Disadvantage. Other topics of importance include school completion, educational welfare, research, children in care, the children detention school and the implementation of the Children First Act 2015. As we work towards implementation of the commitments in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* I will be requesting all Departments to ensure that relevant commitments are embedded within their strategic plans.

In the document herewith, I have set out a number suggestions for inclusion in your Department's Statement of Strategy 2016-18. I would be glad to provide any further information or clarification if required.

I look forward to effective collaboration and constructive engagement with your Department in pursuing the strategies and policies to give effect to our Programme for Government commitments and ongoing responsibilities.

Yours sincerely,

Katherine Zappone TD
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

ATTACHMENT-

Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020

I. Establishes a shared set of National Outcomes for children and young people to which all Government departments and agencies, statutory services and the voluntary and community sectors will work to ensure a coherent response for children and young people. These are:

1. Active and healthy with physical and mental wellbeing
2. Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development
3. Safe and protected from harm
4. Economic security and opportunity
5. Connected, respected and contributing to their world.

II. Identifies the range of commitments to children and young people that are in place across government and progresses these goals and outcomes using a structured, systematic and outcomes focused approach.

III. Emphasises an integrated and evidence informed approach to working across Government, on horizontal and vertical levels, which transfers to all sectors and settings working with children and young people.

This is of particular relevance for the five Departments identified as sponsors, including DES which has responsibility for National Outcome 2: 'Achieving full potential in learning and development'.

We suggest that as a follow-on from recent engagements between our respective Departments, this particular National Outcome would inform the objectives of your Statement of Strategy 2016-2018. A senior official of DES is a member of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Sponsor Group and will be in a position to inform in this regard.

We suggest that two particular supporting strategies developed by this Department under the National Policy Framework are also reflected in your Statement of Strategy: the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making, 2015 -2020* and the *National Youth Strategy 2015-2020*. DES has been involved in bilateral meetings with this Department in this regard.

We would also note that the implementation infrastructure for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* is the focus of interagency work for children and young people across Government. DES is represented on both the Sponsor's Group and the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium. We would ask that these structures be used where possible and appropriate for inputs regarding children and young people, along with the Advisory Council of Non-Governmental Stakeholders, rather than establishing parallel structures.

We suggest that *Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs)* are appropriately referenced in any commitment which would utilise locally based inter-agency structures. CYPSCs are county-level committees which bring together the main statutory, community, and voluntary providers of services to children and young people. They provide a forum for joint planning and co-ordination of activity; and for oversight of local policy and provision, to ensure that children, young people and their families receive optimum services. Their role is to enhance interagency co-operation and to realise the five national outcomes set out in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

Linked to Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures is the possibility for further development and collaboration between Departments as part of the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative (QCBI). **We suggest** that the QCBI should be referenced as providing your Department with an opportunity to harness and consolidate the existing and emerging learning from the significant investment to date in evidence informed prevention and early intervention programmes (the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme, Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative and the Area Based Childhood Programme (ABC)) and embedding and enhancing effective, evidence informed prevention and early intervention approaches in policy practice and provision.

We suggest that greater emphasis should be placed on the existing and emerging learning we have in relation to prevention and early intervention. The 13 ABC sites are implementing programmes and services, some of which are in cooperation with local schools. These programmes include issues of interest to DES such as literacy, numeracy and teacher development. An overview of evidence-based prevention and early intervention programmes and approaches, are summarised in the report "Ten Years of Learning", as follows:

<http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Report-10-Years-of-Learning.pdf>

A summary of evaluations of evidence based approaches relating to children's learning can be accessed as follows:

http://www.effectiveservices.org/downloads/Childrens_Learning_Briefing_Paper_feb_2013.pdf

Other reports on evidence-based evaluations for children and young people can be accessed via <http://www.pein.ie/research/>.

Child Safety and Protection

We suggest that your Statement of Strategy reference DES participation in the Children First Interdepartmental Implementation Group, which is led by this Department. The purpose of the Group is to promote the importance of Children First compliance across Government and to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted across Departments and sectors.

We suggest that you also refer to your current arrangements and plans in relation to compliance with relevant child protection guidance and legislation, including the Children First Act 2015; the National Vetting Bureau [Children & Vulnerable Adults] Act 2012; the Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012; and *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2011).

The Children First Act 2015 has a number of significant provisions of relevance to DES, as follows:

1. Provision for mandated persons to report child abuse over a defined threshold, to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency;
2. Requirement on providers of relevant services to children, to produce a Child Safeguarding Statement;
3. Provision to place the Children First Interdepartmental Implementation Group on a statutory footing.

We suggest that while the provisions at 1 and 2 have yet to be commenced, it would be expected that your Statement of Strategy would recognise the obligations which will arise and describe plans for implementation.

We suggest that your Statement of Strategy might address the implications of the Louise O'Keeffe judgement, and the arrangements in place in the Education sector to keep children and young people safe while availing of education services.

Early Years

We welcome the fact that '*Prioritising Early Years*' is one of the eight priority areas identified for your Statement of Strategy. **We suggest** that actions under this area include a commitment to engage with this Department in relation to the development of our Early Years Strategy.

DES and this Department collaborate closely in relation to Early Years Care and Education (children aged 0-6 years). The co-located arrangement, whereby staff from the Early Years Policy Unit of DES are based here, operates successfully. The recently introduced education focused inspections of early years services by DES Early Years Inspectors, which is funded by this Department, is an example of the strong collaborative working.

DES has responsibility for two main functions in Early Years Care and Education. It has responsibility for the implementation of Aistear and Síolta and for the Workforce Development Plan for the Early Childhood Care and Education sector. Both roles are extremely important and the Early Years Strategy, to be published by this Department in 2016, may provide an opportunity to set out an updated vision for these. This Department is committed to working closely with DES in this regard. In terms of good governance, there would be benefit in an agreement between both Departments, making explicit each other's roles; how each will operate; and how collaboration can best work to deliver outcomes. A strong and clear statement on this work would be welcomed by the sector.

We suggest that your Statement of Strategy should include the commitment to work with this Department to support and expand quality afterschool care for school-aged children, given the reference in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

We also note that 'Special Needs Education' is a priority area. In this regard, we are very appreciative of the positive collaboration with DES in relation to the development and implementation of the new Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) for supporting children with a disability to participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme.

We suggest an acknowledgement of this ongoing commitment to collaboration on AIM within your Statement of Strategy.

Educational Welfare

This Department works with DES in relation to Education Welfare Service matters. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has responsibility for Education Welfare Services, including the Home School Community Liaison and the School Completion Programme. Retaining children and young people in formal education is a priority for both Departments and there is commitment to regularly monitor the effectiveness of measures in place to achieve this outcome.

The publication of a new School Completion Strategy, the new Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, and the commitment to increase the mandatory schooling age to 17 with the aim of further improving school completion rates, will require strong engagement between this Department and DES. The finalisation of the DEIS Review and follow-through on recommendations will be of significant interest to this Department. DCYA will also work

closely with DES in relation to the greater use of Home School Community Liaison as referenced by Minister Bruton in his statement of 13 June 2016.

Alternative Care

We suggest that your Department consider formalising at national level the interaction with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, with a view to maximising the efficiency of services provided to care-leavers and to assist DES in coming to conclusions, in relation to matters of mutual interest, e.g. grants for access to third level institutions.

You also may wish to consider the particular vulnerabilities and potential challenges facing young people leaving care, and tailor communication strategies and distribution of information pertaining to all relevant supports accordingly. This Department would be happy to assist in this regard.

The Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015, places an obligation on Tusla to provide aftercare planning for a defined cohort of children in the care of the State.

We suggest in this regard that details as to how DES would propose to support this cohort of young people and associated planning would be particularly welcome.

Research and Evaluation

Developing an evidence base for policies and/or programmes that secures better outcomes for children and families, is a shared objective of both this Department and DES. To advance this, both Departments have worked closely on several important initiatives/projects. This Department has funded and overseen Growing Up in Ireland since 2006. DES has worked in close partnership in the development of the study, through representation on the Study's Governance Groups to ensure its policy relevance.

For Phase 2 of the Study 2015-2019, there will be three additional waves of data collection -- one wave of data collection of the infant cohort (at 9 years) and two waves of data collection of the child cohort (at 17 and 20 years). There will also be a smaller data collection focusing on early school engagement, at age 7 years. These data collections will capture valuable information at key stages of school transitions and will provide a significant data source for research and policy development purposes for DES.

DES has committed to implementing a number of actions under the National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives (2011-2016). This Strategy aims to provide direction and guidance for the production and dissemination of good quality information on children's lives. This Department welcomes the progress DES has made in implementing these actions, with particular reference to the publication of a number of reports relating to retention and

early school leaving, continued participation in national and international assessment programmes, and, in particular, the development of the Primary Online Database.

Such initiatives/projects and the opportunities that they provide to build capacity for evidence-informed policy making, are important to the achievement of both Departments' goals.

Children Detention Schools

The education of children who are in the Children Detention Schools (Oberstown) was the subject an Education Strategy up to 2015. We understand that DES will follow this with the development of a new Education Strategy 2016-2019, in line with Goal 3 of the previous DES Statement of Strategy 2015-2017, which states - *"We will provide additional, targeted supports to tackle educational disadvantage in the school system and support learners from migrant communities and other minority groups"*.

We suggest that your Statement of Strategy reflect this ongoing commitment to the Children Detention Schools.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs
June 2016